

# Power and Diversity

1990–2022

In November 1992, 17 new Black lawmakers won election to Congress for the first time. A handful of other African-American legislators had either retired or lost their seats during the 1992 election, but as the 103rd Congress (1993-1995) opened, 40 Black Members took the oath of office—the highest number in history and up from 27 in the previous term. It was a transformative moment in the history of African-American political representation. During the Congressional Black Caucus’s (CBC) swearing-in ceremony two months later in January, Kweisi Mfume of Maryland, the incoming chair of the caucus, declared that the new Members and the rising influence their arrival foretold was nothing less than the realization of a prediction made more than 90 years earlier. In 1901, Representative George Henry White of North Carolina, the last Black Member to serve for nearly 30 years as Jim Crow segregation descended on the South, told the House that while the end of his tenure represented “perhaps the negroes’ temporary farewell to the American Congress... Phoenix-like he will rise up someday and come again.” Mfume told the crowd at the ceremony that White “was prophetic and uttered better than he perhaps knew.” “We are in fact the phoenix that he spoke of,” Mfume continued, “rising from those ashes and soaring free and unfettered in the clear blue skies of the 103rd Congress.”<sup>1</sup>

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One month before his passing in 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Representative John Lewis of Georgia visits the Black Lives Matter Plaza in Washington, DC.

Photograph by Gary D. Williams Jr.



As the first Black Representative to serve North Carolina in nearly a century, Eva M. Clayton advanced the interests of her rural district and raised awareness of the inequalities that affected African Americans nationwide.

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Of the 17 new Black members, 13 had been elected from recently created majority-Black districts. Eight of the thirteen—James E. Clyburn of South Carolina; Robert C. “Bobby” Scott of Virginia; Eva M. Clayton and Melvin L. Watt of North Carolina; Corrine Brown, Carrie P. Meek, and Alcee L. Hastings of Florida; and Earl F. Hilliard of Alabama—were elected from states that had not sent a Black Member to Congress since the end of the nineteenth century, when Jim Crow ended Black representation in electoral politics in the South.<sup>2</sup>

The November 1992 elections dramatically altered the composition of Black representation in Congress and boosted the political influence of the CBC. With but a few exceptions, the overwhelming number of Black Members elected before 1992 had come from urban districts in the North and West. But the 1992 class featured not only a majority of Members from the South, it included Members like Eva Clayton of North Carolina and Sanford D. Bishop Jr. of Georgia, who represented rural, farming constituencies. This era also saw a growth in the number of Black Members elected from districts that were primarily suburban, a trend that highlighted the decision by an increasing number of Black Americans to move to suburban

neighborhoods. Albert Russell Wynn, for example, was elected in 1992 from a majority-Black Maryland district created out of suburban communities bordering eastern Washington, DC.

Six Black women won election to Congress for the first time in November 1992, more than doubling the number of Black women lawmakers. In a watershed moment, Carol Moseley Braun from Illinois became the first Black woman ever elected to the Senate, increasing the total number of Black women in Congress to 10. Before 1990, only five Black women had ever served on Capitol Hill.

The period covered in this section also saw the return of Black Republicans to the House and Senate. Before 1990, only three Black Republicans had been elected to Congress in the twentieth century: Representative Oscar De Priest of Illinois served from 1929 to 1935; Senator Edward W. Brooke of Massachusetts served from 1967 to 1979; and Delegate Melvin H. Evans of the U.S. Virgin Islands served from 1979 to 1981. In 1991, Gary A. Franks of Connecticut became the first Black Republican Representative in 55 years. Since Franks’s election, another seven Black Republicans have been elected to the House and one, Tim Scott of South Carolina, was elected to both the House and later the Senate, the first and only Black lawmaker to serve in both chambers.

Two prominent themes have emerged over the 32-year period of Black representation in Congress between 1990 and 2022: the increase in real, meaningful congressional power and influence for Black Members, individually, and for the CBC, collectively; and the rise in geographic, ideological, and political diversity among Black lawmakers on Capitol Hill.

For Mfume, the arrival of new and more Black legislators in 1992 meant the CBC had “been given a great opportunity to effectuate meaningful change in the House.” But for many Black Members, especially those elected in 1992 and afterwards, the substance of “meaningful change” and the process by which Black Members would effect this change were different from those of many, though not all, of their predecessors. With much smaller numbers in the previous generation, Black Members often pushed for legislation that brought attention to persistent problems of inequality facing Black Americans. In their role as what the CBC called “the conscience of Congress,” these Members often took an oppositional stance to Democratic leadership. By 1993, the 38 Black Democrats in the House not only pushed for policies they believed could help Black

Americans, but they often did so as an influential bloc within the House Democratic Caucus. The members of the CBC aimed to help shape and pass House Democrats' top priorities as insiders rather than as outsiders. Albert Wynn voiced this changing perspective when he said: "I didn't come here to be anybody's conscience. I came here to negotiate."<sup>3</sup>

As with previous generations, African-American Members at times questioned the larger agenda of the Democratic Party and disagreed on exactly which policies best served Black Americans. By the early 1990s, the Democratic Party was transitioning away from supporting some New Deal and Great Society policies that called for government intervention and the expansion of federally funded social safety net programs. Elected in 1992, President William J. Clinton was at the vanguard of a new movement in the Democratic Party that prioritized deregulation of financial markets, the expansion of free trade, tough-on-crime policies, and a reduction in federally funded social services. Black Members were, at times, divided on whether to support these new policies—and whether to support the Democratic President in favor of them—given that they broke with decades of policy preferences shared by generations of Black lawmakers.

Although Black Members remained confident that they could influence the Democratic Party, the CBC encountered increasingly challenging terrain in a changing Congress. The growth in the number of Black Americans in Congress came about in a new era of partisan parity in Congress. In November 1994, the Republican Party won the majority in the House of Representatives for the first time in 40 years. In the following 28 years, Republicans held the majority for 20 years, while Democrats twice recaptured control. Given that most Black Members were Democrats, serving in the House minority checked their influence and legislative power.

As more Black Members won election to Congress, often from safe districts, they composed an ever-greater proportion of the membership of the Democratic Caucus. This afforded Black Members the chance to rise in party leadership in committees and within the caucus. The progress Black lawmakers made in attaining Democratic leadership positions, combined with the increasing influence of Black Democratic voters, especially in the South, helped pave the way for the election of a CBC member, Illinois Senator Barack Obama, as the first African-American President of the United States.

## PRECONGRESSIONAL EXPERIENCES

More than 25 years after the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Black leaders who got their start as activists during the 1960s were still being elected to Congress. Indeed, several of the Members sent to Washington in the 1990s had direct experiences participating in the civil rights and Black Power movements of the 1960s and early 1970s. James Clyburn participated in sit-in demonstrations and spent time in jail for protesting in the early 1960s. As a law student, future Washington, DC, Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton worked with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in Mississippi. Bobby L. Rush of Illinois became involved in protests with SNCC in Chicago in the 1960s before going on to help form the Illinois chapter of the Black Panther Party. Following the murder of Fred Hampton by Chicago police, Rush became the head of the Illinois chapter.<sup>4</sup>

The successes in representation brought about by Black activists during the civil rights movement extended beyond Congress to include the state legislatures. For instance, from 1970 to 1992, the number of African Americans serving in



In July 1996, members of the Congressional Black Caucus in the 104th Congress (1995–1997) pose on the House steps.

Image courtesy of the U.S. House of Representatives Photography Office

state legislatures rose from 168 to 463—an increase of 176 percent. The growth occurred fastest in the South—the area of the country with the largest number of Black residents and where voting rights legislation and court decisions provided greater access to the ballot. Across the South, Black lawmakers held 32 state legislative seats in 1970. By 1992, they held 226—a gain of 606 percent. Forty-seven of the 110 Black Members of Congress who have been elected since 1990 served as state legislators before serving on Capitol Hill.<sup>5</sup>

Many Members profiled in this era were political trailblazers. In 1972, for instance, Eddie Bernice Johnson became one of the first two Black women to win election to the Texas state house of representatives. In 1978, Diane E. Watson, who was only the second Black woman to win a seat on the Los Angeles board of education, became the first Black woman elected to the California state senate. In 1982, Carrie Meek became the first Black woman elected to the Florida state senate. And in 1992, Gwen Moore was the first

Black woman elected to the Wisconsin state senate. Several held leadership positions in state legislatures. Maxine Waters was the first woman to be majority whip in the California state assembly; Bonnie Watson Coleman was the majority leader of the New Jersey state assembly; Steven A. Horsford was majority leader in the Nevada state senate; and Karen Bass was speaker of the California house of representatives.

Serving in a state legislature was just one avenue to higher office. Experience in local and municipal office also typified this post-1991 cohort of Black Members of Congress. Twenty-four served on city councils; eight were elected county council members or commissioners; eight served as mayors; seven served as local, municipal, or federal judges; and others held other elected positions, such as school board member, recorder of deeds, and justice of the peace. Alcee Hastings, who unsuccessfully ran to be the first Black U.S. Senator from Florida in 1970, became the first Black federal judge appointed in Florida in 1979. And in 1991, Emanuel Cleaver II became the first Black mayor of Kansas City, Missouri. A few Members previously held high level executive positions in state governments. For example, Anthony G. Brown was lieutenant governor of Maryland, Kamala D. Harris was the California attorney general, and Lisa Blunt Rochester was the secretary of labor in Delaware.

Several other individuals held prominent federal positions before winning their first congressional election, including Eleanor Holmes Norton, who was chair of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in the 1970s, and Diane Watson, who was U.S. Ambassador to the Federated States of Micronesia from 1999 through 2000.

Black women helped bring about many of the legal and cultural changes associated with the women's rights movement in America. They also joined women from other communities in running for and winning office in unprecedented numbers. Over time, African-American women have accounted for an increasing percentage of Black legislators in state capitals and in Washington, DC. In 1970, there were only 15 Black women state legislators—accounting for less than 10 percent of all African-American state lawmakers. By 1992, the number of Black women state legislators had increased to 131, or roughly 28 percent of all Black lawmakers at the state level. By early 2021, that number increased to 355, about 49 percent of all Black lawmakers in state legislatures. In 1971, only one Black woman—Shirley Chisholm of New York—served on Capitol Hill, among a total of 14 African Americans in Congress. In the 104th Congress (1995–1997), the number



With a background in health care and health policy, Eddie Bernice Johnson of Texas served in the Texas state legislature before embarking on a more than two-decade career in the House of Representatives.

Image courtesy of the Member

of African-American women in the House surpassed 10. By the middle of the 117th Congress (2021–2023), there were 28 African-American women serving in Congress, making up roughly 46 percent of all Black Members—the highest total in American history. Maxine Waters and Eleanor Holmes Norton, who were first elected in 1990, are the longest-serving Black women in congressional history, each having served for more than 31 years.<sup>6</sup>

As their numbers have grown, Black women have assumed greater prominence in the CBC. As of 2022, Black women compose almost half of the CBC membership, and since the 2000s, many have chaired the caucus. From 1979 to 1997 only two women chaired the CBC—Cardiss Collins of Illinois during the 96th Congress (1979–1981) and Maxine Waters during the 105th Congress (1997–1999). During the twenty-first century, however, Eddie Bernice Johnson (107th Congress, 2001–2003), Carolyn C. Kilpatrick of Michigan (110th Congress, 2007–2009), Barbara Lee of California (111th Congress, 2009–2011), Marcia L. Fudge of Ohio (113th Congress, 2013–2015), Karen Bass (116th Congress, 2019–2021), and Joyce Beatty of Ohio (117th Congress, 2021–2023) have all chaired the CBC.<sup>7</sup>

## REDISTRICTING

Much of what Congress did to address voting rights during this era came in response to decisions rendered by the courts. In *Mobile v. Bolden* (1980), for instance, the Supreme Court ruled that the decision by the city of Mobile, Alabama, to employ an at-large city commission did not violate Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act or African Americans' Fourteenth Amendment rights because, though the outcomes indicated that the system favored White candidates, discriminatory intent could not be proven. Following the Court's ruling, Black Members of Congress set out to amend Section 2 and supported the inclusion of language in the 1982 Voting Rights Act that allowed plaintiffs to prove a discriminatory effect rather than intentional discrimination in voting cases. Four years later, the Supreme Court in *Thornburg v. Gingles* (1986) devised a new standard that plaintiffs could use to claim discrimination in districting. During the redistricting process every 10 years, state legislators and the U.S. Department of Justice were required to consider if a politically cohesive racial or ethnic minority group lived in a geographically compact area and whether White voters of the same area tended to vote as a bloc to "usually defeat the minority's preferred candidate." The Court's interpretation

of the 1982 Voting Rights Act's amendments to Section 2 thus created the legal basis for the creation of majority-Black congressional districts throughout the South.<sup>8</sup>

The 1982 amendment to Section 2 and the *Thornburg* decision marked a significant shift in how officials drew congressional districts. Previously, legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 had focused on providing minority voters equal access and opportunity. But starting in 1982, the emphasis had shifted to prohibiting electoral arrangements that had the intent or the effect of diluting minority votes. The new legal environment, combined with the growing number of African-American state legislators involved in election oversight and the redistricting process—by one account, 17 percent of all Black state legislators in 1992 served on such committees, significantly boosted Black electoral prospects in the early 1990s.<sup>9</sup>

In the South, the creation of majority-Black districts—which also tended to be overwhelmingly Democratic—mostly ensured the election of Black lawmakers from states where decades of discrimination had prevented their election at every level of government. The South had always been reliably Democratic, but beginning in the 1960s the region's White voters began a decades-long transformation of switching allegiance to the Republican Party. By the midterm elections in 1994, during William J. Clinton's presidency, the gradual changes to the South's politics revealed a new electoral landscape that would come to define the region in which state legislatures created majority-Black seats to elect Democrats, making the other districts safer for White Republicans.<sup>10</sup>

Race-based redistricting in the early 1990s dramatically increased the number of Black Americans in the House and presented new political opportunities for the CBC. "I think the Congressional Black Caucus has moved to a whole other level," Ronald V. Dellums of California observed in the wake of the victories in November 1992. "We can win. We've gone beyond just being 'the conscience of the House.'" But it also produced a tide of lawsuits by voters whose former districts were transformed by the process. In 1993, the Court rendered a judgment in *Shaw v. Reno* that reinstated a suit by five White North Carolinians who charged that one of the state's new congressional districts—a majority-Black district represented by Representative Melvin Watt that connected a series of communities situated along the I-85 highway corridor—violated their Fourteenth Amendment rights to equal protection under the law



The Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) meets with President William J. Clinton at the White House in July 1993. Though the CBC agreed with Clinton on many issues, the group sometimes criticized the Democratic President for his appointments and for his willingness to compromise on efforts to reduce the federal budget deficit by curtailing entitlement programs.

Image courtesy of the William J. Clinton Library/National Archives and Records Administration

by diluting their votes. In a 5 to 4 decision, the Court questioned the constitutionality of drawing congressional districts with “bizarre” shapes. While the decision did not overturn a district court ruling that rejected the suit, it returned the matter to the lower courts with a new standard for scrutiny to prove that the district was warranted.<sup>11</sup>

*Shaw v. Reno* spawned redistricting challenges in several states, with the potential to affect the boundaries of roughly a dozen U.S. congressional districts represented by African-American lawmakers. On June 29, 1995, the Supreme Court struck down Georgia’s congressional district map in *Miller v. Johnson*, a case brought by plaintiffs in a district represented by Representative Cynthia A. McKinney that stretched from Atlanta to the Georgia coast—some 260 miles away. The judgment called into question the creation of any district in which race was the “predominant factor.” Writing for the majority, Justice Anthony M. Kennedy explained, “just as the state may not, absent extraordinary justification, segregate citizens on the basis of race in its public parks, buses, golf courses, beaches, and schools,” the government also “may not separate its citizens into different voting districts on the basis of race.” The decision reconfigured McKinney’s district, as well as that of another Black Member from Georgia, making both majority-White districts with large African-American voting populations. Over the course of the next several years, lawsuits successfully challenged the boundaries of African-American-held seats in Florida, Texas, Virginia, and South Carolina.<sup>12</sup>

The challenge to majority-minority districting was perhaps most acute for Cleo Fields of Louisiana, who spent much of his time in Congress defending his seat in the courts. In 1996, a federal district court that relied on the *Shaw v. Reno* and *Miller v. Johnson* decisions found Fields’s congressional district to be the product of an unconstitutional racial gerrymander. The state legislature subsequently redrew the district without a Black majority, and placed Fields’s Baton Rouge residence in the district of a popular White Republican incumbent. Fields declined to run again.<sup>13</sup>

Most members of the CBC at the time supported the creation of majority-minority districts and opposed the Supreme Court’s rulings in the mid-1990s. Earl Hilliard, an Alabama Representative who won his seat in a newly created majority-minority district, explained on the House Floor that “our High Court is straying from our Nation’s democratic principles, the principles of fair play and equal representation.” Cynthia McKinney argued, “Black-majority districts create opportunities for African-Americans, particularly those in the South, to choose someone who will represent *their* interest.” The CBC also submitted amicus briefs for several Supreme Court cases in defense of majority-minority districts.<sup>14</sup>

On occasion, Black Members opposed efforts made by other Democrats in the House to improve their party’s electoral chances by redistricting, especially if the changes threatened the seat of a Black lawmaker. In 2014, Marcia Fudge, the chair of the CBC, wrote a letter to the chair of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) opposing the Democratic Party’s lawsuit in Florida that would have potentially increased the number of seats Democrats could win but would have redrawn Corrine Brown’s northern Florida-based district in the process. “We are extremely disturbed by the DCCC’s efforts to dismantle CBC districts in states that have historically proven to be difficult to elect minority members,” Fudge wrote.<sup>15</sup>

Still, a few Black Members opposed the creation of majority-minority districts. John Lewis of Georgia expressed the concern that majority-Black districts could “ensnare blacks in separate enclaves, the exact opposite of what the civil rights movement intended.” By the 2000 redistricting cycle, other Black Members, including Major R. Owens of New York, expressed concern about the Republican advantages from packing Black voters in one district. “Democrats have to be on their toes,” Owens explained. “They understand it better now than they did 10 years ago

that Republicans are going to deliberately pack minorities and move them out of swing districts and guarantee the possibility of electing Republicans by having a more concentrated [electorate].”<sup>16</sup>

Republican Gary Franks, elected in an overwhelmingly White district, strongly opposed majority-minority redistricting. He argued that majority-minority districts were unjust because they gave “some Americans a manufactured advantage over other Americans.” Franks, while still a member of the CBC, angered his CBC colleagues when he testified in federal court against a Georgia-based majority-minority district. The Connecticut Representative also introduced legislation in the 104th Congress (1995–1997) to ban what he called “the intentional creation of legislative districts based on race, color, [and] language minority status of voters within such districts.”<sup>17</sup>

Despite the Supreme Court’s rulings requiring several majority-Black districts to be redrawn, nearly every Black Member whose district had been reconfigured midway through the decade emerged unscathed. Often, as in the cases in North Carolina and Georgia, majority-Black districts became majority-White following a lawsuit. But given the power of incumbency, the fact that these districts still contained large Black populations, and the success of Black Members in creating multiracial coalitions, Black lawmakers

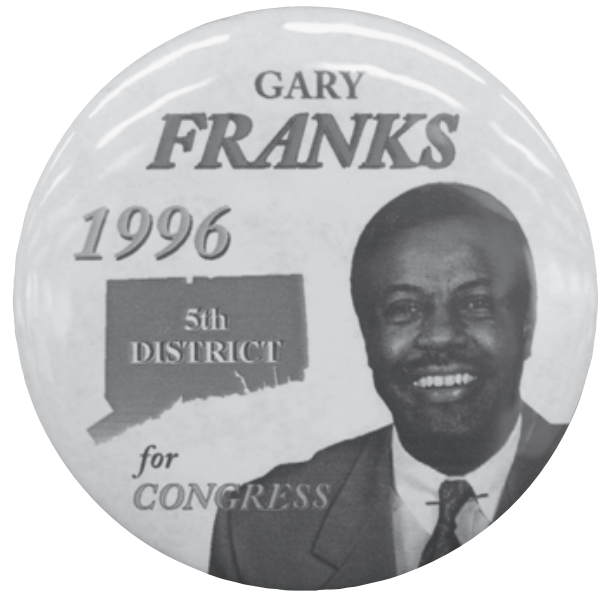
continued to win re-election. The number of African Americans in Congress leveled off by the mid-1990s and hovered in the high 30s and low 40s for eight election cycles from 1992 through 2006. In many cases, reapportionment and redistricting plans in the South drawn in 2000 and 2010 strengthened both Black incumbent Democrats and White Republicans. These efforts have also been subject to repeated court challenges in which plaintiffs claim the districts amount to unconstitutional racial gerrymanders.<sup>18</sup>

The debate over the necessity and political utility of creating majority-minority districts has shifted over time. As late as 2015, 88 percent of Black Representatives had been elected from majority-minority districts. Black Republicans such as Franks and J.C. Watts Jr. of Oklahoma, as well as a small number of Black Democrats, were part of the small percentage of Black Members who had represented majority-White constituencies. In November 2018, however, eight of the nine new Black Members elected to the House of Representatives won in districts with significant non-Hispanic White majorities. Overall, by 2021, Black Members represented districts with smaller Black populations than in the past. As Black candidates found electoral success with more diverse constituencies, Black politicians and activists outside Congress became more supportive of creating districts that maximized Black political



A college football star and gifted public speaker, Representative J.C. Watts Jr. of Oklahoma became the first African American to join Republican leadership as the House Republican Conference chair.

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The first Black Republican Representative to serve in the House in nearly six decades, Gary A. Franks was also the first African American elected from Connecticut.

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power across districts, even if it made some current districts less demographically cohesive. By 2021 there was, according to a journalist, something “closer to a consensus that minority voters deserve to wield influence in more seats.”<sup>19</sup>

While the boundaries of congressional districts framed the struggle for access to the House, African Americans seeking election to the Senate faced an obstinate, seemingly insuperable barrier. In 1966, Senator Edward Brooke became the first African American elected to the Senate since Reconstruction—and the first to be elected by popular vote. After Brooke’s unsuccessful re-election bid in 1978, no Black American served in the Senate until the election of Carol Moseley Braun in 1992. She became just the fourth African American ever to serve in the Senate and the first to be elected as a Democrat.<sup>20</sup>

Lingering racial prejudices, difficulty in securing funding, and the relative weakness of Black voting blocs in statewide elections cumulatively discouraged many

qualified candidates from seeking a Senate seat. The major parties nominated only nine African Americans as Senate candidates in the twentieth century, and these included Brooke and Moseley Braun. Reflecting on his career as the longest-serving African American in the chamber’s history, Senator Brooke noted that when he came to Washington in 1967, Margaret Chase Smith of Maine, a former House Member, was the lone woman. But by 2018, 23 women, including one Black woman, served in the Senate—many of whom had served in the House. Black Representatives have not been able to follow a similar path to the Senate through the House. To date, only one African-American Representative has been elected to the Senate—Tim Scott—though several have attempted to make this transition, including Alan Wheat of Kansas, Denise L. Majette of Georgia, and Harold E. Ford Jr. of Tennessee. According to Brooke, the lack of Black representation in the Senate remained “a blight on the American electorate that should be removed.”<sup>21</sup>

Since 2000, the number of Black Senators has increased at a glacial pace. In 2004, Barack Obama—a theretofore little-known Illinois state senator—won election to a seat held by retiring incumbent Peter G. Fitzgerald, who had defeated Senator Moseley Braun in her 1998 re-election bid. Throughout his time in office, he was the only Black Senator—as were his four African-American predecessors. Only in 2013, when William “Mo” Cowan of Massachusetts was appointed to the Senate and joined Senator Tim Scott, did that body include two African-American Members at the same time; Cowan resigned a few months later, but Senator Cory A. Booker of New Jersey won a special election in October 2013. At the start of the 115th Congress, the Senate reached another milestone when Kamala D. Harris of California brought the total number of concurrently serving African-American Senators to three for the first time. In January 2021, Raphael Warnock of Georgia became the 11th African American in history to serve in the Senate. That same month Harris resigned to become Vice President of the United States, and the Senate remained at three Black Senators.

## ADJUSTING TO NEW CONGRESSIONAL POLITICS

In 1992, with the election of the second Democratic President during the CBC’s history, William J. Clinton, political commentators believed the group would be able to advance a broad legislative agenda. Yet, the CBC was



Carol Moseley Braun of Illinois testifies during Senate confirmation hearings on her concurrent appointment in 1999 as U.S. Ambassador to New Zealand and Samoa. Elected in 1992, Moseley Braun was the first Black woman to serve in the Senate.

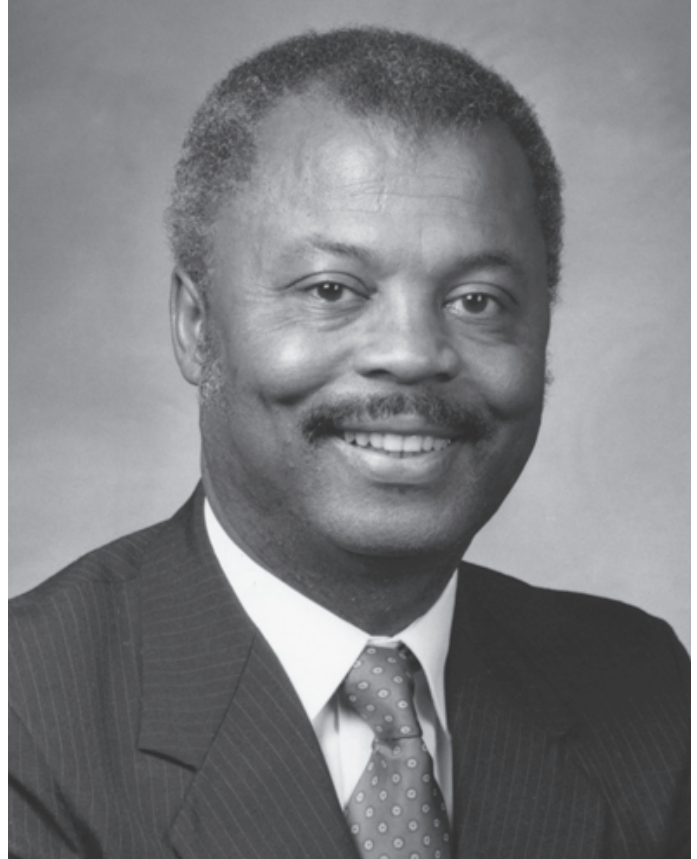
Image courtesy of the U.S. Senate Historical Office

often at odds with the Clinton administration, much as the caucus found itself at odds with President James Earl “Jimmy” Carter 16 years prior. The key difference was that in 1993, the CBC was much more powerful than it was in 1977 when there were only 16 caucus members during Carter’s first year. “It will make a tremendous difference,” Donald M. Payne of New Jersey said in late 1992 of the potential influence of the soon-to-be enlarged caucus. “With additional members, the Congressional Black Caucus will be more effective. We will hold the balance on some crucial votes, just like the conservative Southern Democrats who sided with Republicans in the early years of the Reagan administration,” he added. With more members, the CBC hoped to persuade the Clinton administration to support its preferred policies.<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps nowhere was the new power of the CBC more apparent than in the Clinton administration’s changing policy towards Haiti. In September 1991, a military coup removed Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide from power. Aristide, a former Catholic priest and reformer, had been elected in 1990 after several years of political disorder following the end of the François “Papa Doc” Duvalier regime, a father-and-son dictatorship that ruled the island for almost 30 years, until 1986. Aristide moved to Washington, DC, where he began lobbying for the U.S. government to aid his return to power. Black Members of Congress quickly became some of Aristide’s most important advocates.<sup>23</sup>

Following the coup that toppled the Aristide government, thousands of Haitians fled the country with the hope of receiving political refugee status in the United States. The George H.W. Bush administration intercepted Haitian refugees along the 700 miles of water between the island and Florida and repatriated them before they reached American shores. Clinton was critical of the policy during his 1992 presidential campaign but continued it after he took office. Many in the CBC criticized Clinton and called for humane treatment of refugees and the restoration of Aristide to power.<sup>24</sup>

The CBC had long denounced Democratic and Republican Presidents alike for what Shirley Chisholm called the government’s “tragic and blatantly discriminatory treatment” of Haitian refugees. In March 1994, the CBC increased its pressure on the Clinton administration. All 40 members, including Senator Carol Moseley Braun and Representative Gary Franks, signed a letter to Clinton laying out a series of steps the administration should take to improve its refugee policies. The letter called for the



As Congressional Black Caucus chair during the 104th Congress (1995–1997), Donald M. Payne of New Jersey earned a reputation for his low-key and thoughtful leadership style.

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resignation of Lawrence A. Pezzullo, the administration’s special envoy to Haiti and someone the CBC saw as insufficiently tough on the coup leaders. The CBC also sought sanctions against the Haitian leaders who backed the coup, harsher trade restrictions against Haiti’s government, and an end to the practice of intercepting Haitian refugees at sea. All House members of the CBC cosponsored legislation putting into effect the recommendations it made to the Clinton administration.<sup>25</sup>

Due largely to the pressure from the CBC, Clinton replaced Pezzullo with William H. Gray III, the former Pennsylvania Representative and, at the time of his retirement in 1991, the Majority Whip. For Kweisi Mfume, Gray’s appointment signaled to the CBC that the Clinton administration was listening. “This was just like having one of us in the position,” Mfume said about Gray’s appointment. The Clinton administration also brought its policies toward Haiti and Haitian refugees into alignment with the legislation introduced by the CBC in March.



An ordained minister, New York Representative Floyd H. Flake served on the Banking and Financial Services Committee where he supported urban economic development.

Image courtesy of the U.S. House of Representatives Photography Office

Eventually, in late September 1994, President Clinton ordered troops to the Caribbean island, and Haiti's military rulers agreed to allow Aristide to resume power.<sup>26</sup>

Despite the unity the CBC showed during the debate over Haiti, the caucus often featured a range of different policy preferences, particularly when opposing a Democratic President's priorities.<sup>27</sup>

Divisions among Black Democrats over the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), for example, revealed how Black Members attempted to maneuver within a changing Democratic Party and how new ways of thinking about the relationship between government policy and the economy shaped debate within the CBC. The CBC opposed the trade agreement that eliminated restrictions on trade and investment between the United States, Mexico, and Canada. Black Members argued that the trade deal would cause factories, an important employer of working-class Black Americans, to leave the United States for Mexico in search of lower labor costs. The CBC was not alone in its opposition; a majority of House Democrats opposed it,

including Majority Leader Richard Andrew Gephardt of Missouri. Nevertheless, eight Black Members in the House and Carol Moseley Braun in the Senate voted in favor of the bill, which went into effect in 1994.<sup>28</sup>

The influx of Members from rural and suburban districts brought new ideas and outlooks to the caucus, which in turn challenged the CBC's traditional domestic focus on urban issues. New Members won committee assignments that matched the interests of their southern and rural districts. For example, four Members elected in November 1992—Eva Clayton, Sanford Bishop, Earl Hilliard, and Cynthia McKinney—all from southern states, joined the Agriculture Committee in the 103rd Congress. In 2021, David Scott of Georgia, who has served on the committee since his first term in the 108th Congress (2003–2005), became the first African American to chair the Agriculture Committee. For Clayton, a seat on the Agriculture Committee allowed her to serve a diverse mix of people in her largely rural district. "I had the big poultry, I had peanut farmers, I had tobacco farmers, and I had small farmers and the black farmers. And I represented a lot of poor folks. So the issues intertwined for me," she explained.<sup>29</sup>

In 1995, Republicans won control of Congress and their first House majority in 40 years, stalling the CBC's legislative momentum and hard-fought institutional gains. The institutional structure of the House, which favors the majority, relegated all Democratic Representatives, regardless of race, to a secondary role. One of the first tasks of the new Republican majority was to end House funding for legislative service organizations, which included interest caucuses, including the CBC. With limited resources, the CBC relied more heavily on the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation and outside sources of funding. Despite the challenges, many members of the caucus promised to continue and redouble their mission. "The Congressional Black Caucus has got to yell louder and scream or be steamrollered," asserted Representative McKinney.<sup>30</sup>

Amid the party-control change, some Black Democrats sought ways to work with the new Republican majority on certain issues. On several occasions Representative Floyd H. Flake, a minister representing a largely middle-class Black constituency in Queens, New York, supported Republican efforts to direct tax breaks and private school vouchers to address poverty and low educational outcomes. For Flake, who ran a private school through his church, school vouchers represented a "choice" for parents, especially low-income parents in cities, to get their children out of

public schools that “in certain communities are failing our children,” he said. Most Black Democratic Members opposed both school vouchers and Flake’s efforts to work with Republicans to pass legislation. Opponents of private school vouchers argued that funding them took money, resources, and students away from public schools, further damaging the public education system. Nor was Flake alone in working across the aisle. Harold Ford Jr. and Artur Davis of Alabama also occasionally voted with the GOP on social and cultural issues such as a constitutional amendment prohibiting same-sex marriage.<sup>31</sup>

The change in party control in the House—largely the result of southern White Democrats being replaced by an insurgent Republican Party in the South—meant that Black Members now represented a larger percentage of the Democratic Caucus. The relative electoral safety of their districts helped Black legislators accrue seniority and move into Democratic leadership roles.<sup>32</sup>

The trajectory of Black Republicans in the Congress was different. In the last 40 years, a small but significant cohort of Black Republican Members joined the House after many decades of near-exclusive Democratic Party affiliation among elected African Americans. Nine Black Republican Members have been elected to the House since 1978, eight of them since 1990.<sup>33</sup>

There have been several notable trailblazers among them. During his brief tenure in the House in the 96th Congress (1979–1981), Delegate Melvin Evans of the Virgin Islands made history by becoming the first Republican member of the CBC. Gary Franks, elected in 1990, was the first African-American Republican Representative elected to the House since 1929. In 2013, Tim Scott became the first African American from the South to serve in the Senate since 1881. In 2014, Mia B. Love of Utah became the first African-American Republican woman elected to Congress.

For the most part, the Black Republicans discussed in this section held policy preferences in line with the majority of the Republican Conference: favoring a smaller federal government, increasing defense funding, and opposing abortion. On occasion, Black Members opposed important Republican initiatives. For example, Will Hurd of Texas voted in 2014 to repeal the Affordable Care Act but then voted against the GOP’s alternative health care bill in 2017. There were also occasions when Black Republicans openly disagreed with each other over issues directly related to racial inequality. Gary Franks, for example, was adamantly opposed to affirmative action and introduced legislation in

1995 to end its use in the federal government. J.C. Watts also opposed affirmative action but he did not support Franks’s efforts. “[T]his country has not reached a level playing field. You can’t get rid of affirmative action until you have something to replace it,” Watts said, dissenting from Franks’s legislation.<sup>34</sup>

Since the 1970s, Black Republicans have formed a variety of relationships with the CBC. Senator Edward Brooke was never a formal member of the caucus, but he did meet with the organization and seek out its members’ advice and assistance on occasion. Melvin Evans was a CBC member and advocated CBC policies in his committee work. In the 1990s, Franks chose to join the CBC, while his colleague Watts did not. Later, Mia Love and Allen West of Florida chose to become CBC members, whereas Will Hurd and Tim Scott declined to join the caucus. West saw his membership in the CBC as a chance to give Black Republicans “a voice in the Congressional Black Caucus.”<sup>35</sup>

Although the CBC had for much of its history sought to keep its ranks open to both Democrats and Republicans, the election of Gary Franks saw the caucus struggle to accept Black Members of all political beliefs. Initially, the caucus welcomed Franks as a full member. By the 103rd Congress, however, several Members called for his removal. Some members argued that a Republican should not be involved in the caucus’s discussion of policy and strategy, while others were upset with Franks’s stances on civil rights and voting rights issues. By the summer of 1993, the tension had reached a point that the CBC voted to allow Franks to attend only the beginning of meetings, traditionally when lunch was served. Soon, the CBC backed away from excluding Franks, but the relationship never improved. Franks eventually opted to skip CBC meetings, though he refused to resign from the caucus. Mia Love had a more amicable relationship with the caucus. Love criticized the CBC while campaigning for office, but as the only Republican Member in the CBC during her tenure, she grew to appreciate the caucus and defended it, arguing that “if my leadership asked me to go after a member of the Congressional Black Caucus, I won’t do it.”<sup>36</sup>

## LEGISLATIVE INTERESTS

Even as the number of Black Republicans in Congress continued to grow, most Black lawmakers in this period were Democrats. Because of the CBC’s increased membership, the presence of senior Black Members on important committees, and the move into party leadership



The first Black Republican woman in Congress, Mia B. Love of Utah speaks against the medical device tax in a speech on the House Floor on July 24, 2018.

Debate on H.R. 184, July 24, 2018, House Live, Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives, <https://live.house.gov>

positions by James Clyburn and others, Black lawmakers in the Democratic Party wielded more influence over legislation than they had in previous generations. Black Members often found common cause on an array of legislative items from criminal justice to voting rights to reforming the health care system. Yet, the diversity within the CBC meant that Black Members also often disagreed over political strategies and policy solutions.

## Criminal Justice

Since the late 1960s, Congress has regularly debated anti-crime legislation. From the 1960s through the early 1990s violent crime rates rose across the country, before entering a multidecade decline. Fighting crime, particularly violent crime and drug use, became a common campaign platform. Lawmakers, both Republicans and Democrats, at the local, state, and federal levels, found electoral success in both passing more and harsher penalties for crimes and in funding police departments and the expansion of the prison system. In Congress, Black Members offered numerous policies meant to combat crime. Charles B. Rangel of New York, for instance, was a vocal proponent of expanded policing to fight the War on Drugs, while John Conyers Jr. of Michigan spent years as chair of the Judiciary Committee's Subcommittees on Crime and Criminal Justice, challenging continued racial inequities in the criminal justice system. Amid debate over the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, Black

Members sought to control crime in less punitive ways. But the debates over the legislation also revealed areas where Black Members of Congress disagreed.<sup>37</sup>

With the support of President Clinton, then Senator Joseph R. Biden Jr. of Delaware, who chaired the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, and Texas Representative Jack Bascom Brooks, the chair of the House Judiciary Committee, introduced similar crime bills in September 1993. The Senate passed a \$22 billion measure that included additional penalties for a variety of crimes and created new categories of offenders. Senator Carol Moseley Braun successfully added an amendment to the Senate bill that allowed for children older than 13 to be prosecuted as adults for certain federal crimes involving firearms.<sup>38</sup>

The House had a more difficult time finding a majority for an omnibus crime bill. From the beginning, Black Members were some of the loudest critics of the legislation, particularly the bill's new sentencing guidelines and expansion of the death penalty. African Americans, especially low-income and working-class Black Americans living in cities hit hard by deindustrialization and White flight, had already been disproportionately affected by both the increase in crime and America's earlier punitive responses. For Black Members such as first-term Representative Bobby Scott, the focus on punishment and imprisonment only increased the high rates of incarceration that already afflicted Black communities. "In some inner cities, the incarceration rate approaches 3,000 [per 100,000 people] at an average cost of \$25,000 a year... . It seems absolutely insane to take initiatives to increase the incarceration rate," Scott explained.<sup>39</sup>

For its part, the CBC backed a bill introduced by Craig A. Washington of Texas, known as the Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Reform Act. According to its authors, the bill focused on measures that got "at the root of the problem before the tragedy of crime and violence occurs." Among the policies included in the legislation were grants for community policing, night-time sports leagues (intended to keep kids busy and supervised), funding for incarceration programs that sought to keep families intact if a parent became incarcerated, prison drug treatment programs, and alternative sentencing options that did not automatically result in prison time. The authors of the bill recognized that the funding provided could not stop crime on its own. Successful crime prevention, the authors wrote, needed additional resources for social programs like drug treatment, Head Start, and the Special Supplemental Nutrition

Program for Women, Infants, and Children. The bill was emblematic of the CBC's continued call for government assistance to neglected communities over punishment.<sup>40</sup>

The CBC bill also sought to directly confront racism in the criminal justice system. "Reform of the criminal justice system is necessary to restore the credibility and respect that have been undermined by racism, excessive and disproportionate prison sentences, abusive police practice and civil forfeiture practices," the bill's authors explained. The legislation included instructions to the U.S. Attorney General to investigate and punish police officers and police departments for wrongdoing, a proposal to create a commission to study the "impact of criminal justice policy on [people of color] and criticism that the criminal justice system functions in a racially disparate manner," and a provision to restore voting rights in federal elections to certain former offenders. In addition, the bill included the Racial Justice Act, which empowered death row inmates to use statistics showing racial disparities in death penalty cases to challenge their capital sentences, as well as the Crack-Cocaine Equitable Sentencing Act, which would have ended a federal law that punished crack cocaine possession more harshly than powder cocaine possession and that had fueled racial disparities in drug sentencing.<sup>41</sup>

Washington's bill never made it out of committee, but the CBC's emphasis on preventive measures and social spending helped shape the final House bill, which included \$5 billion more in federal funding than the Senate bill for "community crime prevention" initiatives, including grants for summer and after-school youth activities, funds for job training and substance abuse programs, grants for community development, the creation of courts for drug crimes, and the use of alternative punishments, such as boot camps and weekend incarceration. The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, which passed the House on April 21, also included more traditional anti-crime measures, such as funding to hire and train more police, grants for states to construct prisons, tougher sentencing requirements, and new federal offenses punishable by death.<sup>42</sup>

Throughout the debate, the CBC was particularly adamant that the final bill contain the Racial Justice Act (RJA). John Conyers first proposed the legislation in 1988, aiming to overturn the 1987 Supreme Court decision in *McCleskey v. Kemp*. That ruling held that a defendant proving "discriminatory effect" in death penalty cases through statistical analysis alone was not enough to prove a violation

of their constitutional rights. The defendant also had to prove discriminatory intent by officials involved in the case. Conyers's bill would have allowed those convicted in capital cases to base an appeal on statistics showing racial disparity in how courts applied the death penalty. The House Judiciary Committee included a similar bill sponsored by California Representative William Donlon "Don" Edwards in the crime bill it sent to the floor in 1994. On April 21, the House passed the omnibus bill with the RJA.<sup>43</sup>

Senate Republicans, however, opposed the RJA and threatened to filibuster any bill including the provision. When the conference committee stripped the RJA from the larger bill, Representative Kweisi Mfume, the chair of the CBC, suggested that enough members of the caucus opposed the exclusion of the RJA from the compromised conference legislation to prevent passage of the bill in the House. The conferees and the Clinton administration agreed to exclude the RJA as a compromise to keep the omnibus bill's assault weapon ban, which was unpopular among pro-gun rights Democrats and Republicans alike.<sup>44</sup>

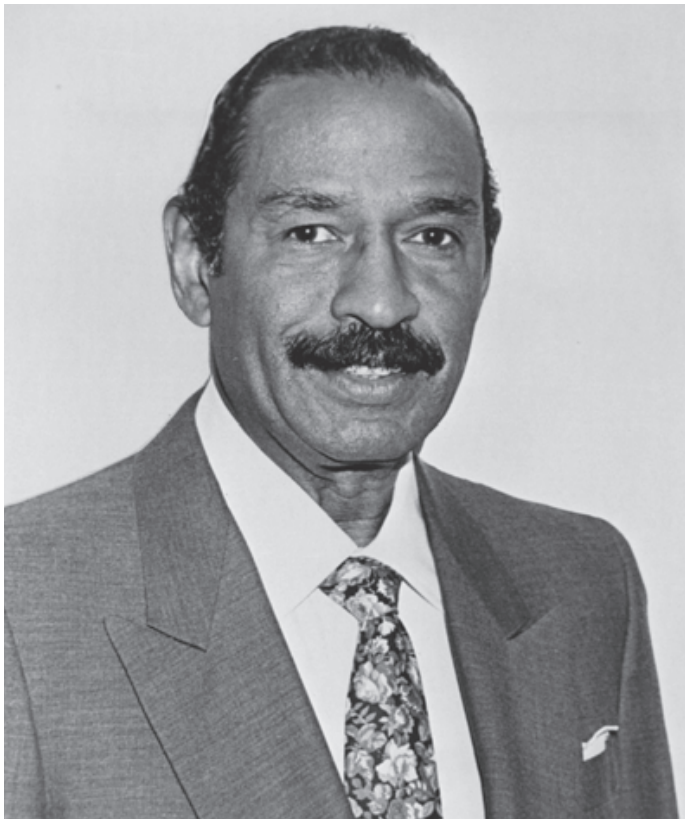
On August 11, 1994, Democratic House leadership and the Clinton administration experienced a stunning rebuke: 58 Democrats joined 167 Republicans to oppose a rules package that would have brought the legislation up for a vote without the RJA. Most of the Democrats who changed their vote from April opposed the assault weapon ban. But among the 58 Democrats were 10 Black Members



An independent-minded politician, Craig A. Washington of Texas called for an emphasis on crime prevention in the 1994 crime bill.

Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

who opposed the conference bill because of the removal of the RJA. Ten days later, after Democrats agreed to cut \$3 billion in funding mostly for social services and preventative measures, including job training for young people in high-crime areas, the conference version of the Violent Crime Control and Enforcement Act passed the House. A large majority of CBC members voted in favor of the final bill—a measure pushed by a Democratic administration and backed by Democratic leadership in Congress—albeit some with more reservations than others. Black lawmakers voted for the bill for several reasons: some supported anti-crime measures and more punitive responses from the beginning; some decided provisions like the federal assault weapons ban and the Violence Against Women Act outweighed the law's punitive measures; and still others said their Black constituents back home demanded a crime bill. Twelve Black Members voted no on the final bill, but six of them, including Charles Rangel and John Lewis, in a show of support for the Democratic Party, had earlier voted in favor of the rules package, moving the conference bill to debate.<sup>45</sup>



The first African American to earn a spot on and eventually chair the Judiciary Committee, Michigan Representative John Conyers Jr.'s House career spanned more than 50 years.

Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

## Sentencing Disparities

Among the bills added to Craig Washington's Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Reform Act was the Crack-Cocaine Equitable Sentencing Act. Sponsored by Charles Rangel, the legislation sought to remove sentencing laws that required equal mandatory prison time for the distribution of five grams of crack cocaine or 500 grams of powder cocaine. Sentencing disparity had received little mention during the debate over the 1994 omnibus crime bill. But in later years, several Black Members in Congress made ending the extreme disparity in sentencing between convictions for crack and powder cocaine possession a major priority, pointing out that the disproportionate guidelines resulted in racial inequality in drug sentencing and incarceration rates.<sup>46</sup>

Rangel was an unlikely leader in the fight against sentencing disparities. The New York Representative was chair of the Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control until it disbanded at the end of the 102nd Congress (1991–1993), and had been a leading advocate for the 1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Act that originally amended the Controlled Substances Act to include the disparity between sentences for possession of crack and powder cocaine. Representing a district hard hit by heroin and then crack, and from a state where political forces had already produced some of the toughest narcotics penalties in the so-called Rockefeller Drug Laws, Rangel had made fighting the drug trade a top priority during his congressional career. But by the late 1980s, Rangel had begun to challenge drug-related prison policies.<sup>47</sup>

In October 1993, as both chambers of Congress worked on the crime bill, Rangel proposed the Crack-Cocaine Equitable Sentencing Act to end the disparity. He sponsored similar legislation in the 104th and 105th Congresses. By the mid-1990s, several members of the CBC had become vocal opponents of the continued sentencing disparity, as well.

Black lawmakers kept the issue alive in the coming decades. In 2007, when Democrats regained control of the House, John Conyers, who had joined the Judiciary Committee in his first term in 1965 and had spent his career in Congress pushing for alternatives to America's criminal justice policies, became the committee's chair. Another Black lawmaker, Bobby Scott, became chair of the Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security. Conyers and Scott, along with Judiciary Committee colleagues Maxine Waters and Sheila Jackson Lee of Texas used their influential posts to pass

sentencing reform legislation. In the 110th and 111th Congresses (2007–2011), several bills in both the House and Senate were introduced to end the cocaine sentencing disparity, and in 2010, the Fair Sentencing Act became law. The new law reduced the sentencing disparity from 100:1 to 18:1 and ended the mandatory five-year prison sentence for possession of crack cocaine. In 2021, Hakeem S. Jeffries of New York introduced legislation to eliminate the remaining disparity in sentencing; the House passed the bill in September 2021.<sup>48</sup>

## Law Enforcement Reform

Confronting police brutality had long been a concern of Black Members of Congress. Following the 1950 police shooting of John Derrick, a 24-year-old Black man and Army veteran, Adam Clayton Powell Jr. of New York pressured the FBI to investigate acts of brutality perpetrated by the New York Police Department. “If a lynch mob can be investigated in Georgia, the murder of a Negro by two police officers in New York should be investigated,” Powell declared, making plain the national scope of extrajudicial killings of Black Americans, while also indicting the forces of the state for their role in the violence. Although the civil rights revolution delivered formal legal equality in the 1960s, police brutality remained a pressing civil rights concern for Black legislators. By the 1990s, Black Members of Congress frequently spoke out against acts of police brutality. In 1991, the CBC met with the Justice Department to persuade them to investigate the Los Angeles Police Department after the police beating of Rodney King was caught on tape and aired across the country.<sup>49</sup>

Their efforts to address inequities in policing remained stalled for many years when, in August 2014, a police officer killed Michael Brown, an 18-year-old Black man, in Ferguson, Missouri. The shooting and the ensuing decision by a grand jury not to indict the police officer who shot Brown set off a wave of protests in the St. Louis region and across the country. Pushed by activists, reform of the criminal justice system—from police departments, to the courts, to prisons—surged to the forefront of the legislative agendas for Black Members of Congress. In January 2015, nine CBC members visited Ferguson to honor Martin Luther King Jr. and to support the community. At a church ceremony honoring King, CBC chair G.K. Butterfield of North Carolina lamented, “Black America continues to be victim of decades of discrimination and neglect by those in power,” and Butterfield promised “that the issue



In 2018, John Lewis reflects on the crossing of the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, in 1965.

Image courtesy of House Creative Services

of Criminal Justice Reform is the centerpiece of the CBC agenda. Empowering black communities to make political change is our agenda.” One activist who participated in the demonstrations in Ferguson, Cori Bush of Missouri, won election to Congress in November 2020. Bush championed in Congress the demands for criminal justice reform she and her allies made in Ferguson.<sup>50</sup>

In the years after Ferguson and subsequent protests over the deaths of other Black men and women at the hands of police, Black Members of Congress frequently proposed reform legislation, though the bills rarely advanced far. Missouri Representative William Lacy Clay Jr., whose district included Ferguson, introduced legislation that would have limited the ability of law enforcement agencies to receive military equipment from the federal government. In 2015, Senator Tim Scott introduced the Walter Scott Notification Act of 2015, named in honor of a Black man (unrelated to Senator Scott) who was murdered by a police officer in North Charleston, South Carolina. That legislation would have made the distribution of certain federal funds for policing contingent on states reporting shootings by police officers. Other Members introduced legislation that would have funded body cameras for police officers, made federal funding contingent on de-escalation training for police, and prohibited the use of certain police restraint techniques, including the chokehold.<sup>51</sup>

While the legislation languished, the problem persisted. In May 2020, Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin killed George Floyd, a Black man, during an arrest. The murder was witnessed by a large crowd, and video of the incident quickly spread through social media sites. Outrage

over Floyd's death led to nationwide protests against police brutality and racism. In the House, Karen Bass, chair of the CBC, took the lead in writing legislation to reform policing in America. The George Floyd Justice in Policing Act of 2020 removed barriers to effective prosecution of police misconduct in federal courts, limited the use of lethal police practices, funded a registry to track police misconduct, created new standards for law enforcement accreditation, and expanded the Department of Justice's role in investigating and punishing cases of racial profiling by police officers at all levels of government. On the House Floor, Bass explained that the legislation "establishes a bold, transformative vision of policing in America." She placed the legislation and the protest movement that compelled House Democrats to act within the long history of African American activism. "Black communities have been, sadly, marching for over 100 years against police abuse and for the police to protect and serve our communities like they do elsewhere," Bass said. The bill passed the House in June 2020.<sup>52</sup>

In the Senate, Democrat Cory Booker and Republican Tim Scott led negotiations over police reform legislation on the north side of the Capitol. While Booker supported the House-passed bill, Scott introduced the JUSTICE Act, a Republican-supported criminal justice bill. The JUSTICE



With his fist raised in the air, a man peacefully protests. During the summer of 2020, protesters marched in Washington, DC, and around the country in support of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress, photograph by Tracy Meehleib

Act funded initiatives for better and more complete reporting on policing practices, funding for more police body cameras, and grants for training on de-escalation. Despite bipartisan agreement on the need for legislation, Senate negotiators failed to find a compromise between their police reform packages on substantial issues such as police department transparency and accountability.<sup>53</sup>

In 2022, Black legislators achieved a long-sought victory in the fight to protect Black Americans and acknowledge historic injustice when President Joseph R. Biden Jr. signed into a law the Emmett Till Antilynching Act. More than 120 years earlier, during an era in which thousands of Black Americans were brutally murdered by lynch mobs, George Henry White of North Carolina had proposed the first federal antilynching law. Since then, Members of Congress had periodically sought to pass federal antilynching legislation. Often such bills were filibustered in the Senate. But in 2019, the Senate passed the Justice for Victims of Lynching Act, which had been introduced by Senators Kamala Harris, Tim Scott, and Cory Booker. That same year, Bobby Rush sponsored the Emmett Till Antilynching Act, which differed slightly from the Senate version; Rush's bill passed the House but did not receive a vote in the Senate. Rush named the bill in honor of a 14-year-old Chicago boy who in 1955 was kidnapped and murdered by White men in Mississippi for allegedly whistling at a White woman in a store. Till's murder, his mother's decision to give him an open-casket funeral to show the world the harm done to her son, and the acquittal of his murderers shocked the country and helped build support for the civil rights movement. Rush once again introduced his antilynching legislation in the 117th Congress. It passed both chambers and was signed into law by President Biden in March 2022. The legislation made lynching a federal hate crime and increased prison time for hate crimes that resulted in serious bodily injury or death.<sup>54</sup>

## Voting Rights

In 2006, Congress extended the Voting Rights Act for 25 years. In the Judiciary Committee, CBC chair Melvin Watt, a member of the Subcommittee on the Constitution, and Judiciary ranking member John Conyers worked closely with committee chair Frank James Sensenbrenner Jr. of Wisconsin to structure a voting rights extension that could win support from both Democrats and Republicans. In the process, the committee let certain sections of the law expire while focusing on others. "The continued pervasiveness of

racially polarized voting in the jurisdictions covered by the [Voting Rights Act's] expiring provisions," Watt argued, "demonstrates that racial and language minorities remain politically vulnerable, warranting continued protection" by the law.<sup>55</sup>

Even though Republican leadership backed the extension, several Republicans opposed it, claiming that the districts that were required to meet the preclearance standards of Section 5 were being punished for voter repression that occurred in the past. They also objected to the bilingual voter assistance provisions of the law. As a compromise with the bill's most fervent opponents, House Republican leadership allowed four amendments to reach the floor that might kill the measure, but all of the amendments were rejected, and the law preserved the preclearance provision in Section 5 and mandated the printing of bilingual ballots.<sup>56</sup>

Despite the 2006 extension, opponents of the Voting Rights Act continued to challenge parts of the law in the courts. In *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013), the Supreme Court ruled that the coverage formula in Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act, which determined which jurisdictions would be subjected to federal preclearance, was unconstitutional. In a 5 to 4 decision, the court judged the Voting Rights Act's coverage formula to be outdated, "based on decades-old data and eradicated practices," it said, and allowed the formerly covered states to change their voting practices without Justice Department approval.<sup>57</sup>

With the end of the preclearance requirement, state legislatures, especially in the South, rolled out new laws, such as new voter identification requirements, that many Black Members of Congress worried would make it more difficult to register and vote. For some, the new laws threatened the gains made during the civil rights movement and intervening years. "This decision," CBC chair Marcia Fudge declared, "is not only a setback to voting rights; it's a setback to our country and to our democracy." As Sheila Jackson Lee explained, "Without Section 5, Congress recognized that many of the advances of the past decades could be wiped out overnight with new schemes and devices." In 2015, Terri A. Sewell, who grew up in Selma, Alabama—the site of a brutal attack by police on voting rights activists, including future Representative John Lewis—introduced legislation that revised the preclearance coverage formula in order to pass judicial review and once again allow for the Department of Justice to require certain state and local governments to seek approval before making



Representative John Lewis and his House Democratic colleagues launch a campaign to gain bipartisan support to restore key provisions of the Voting Rights Act. In 2015, advocates of H.R. 2867 failed to get the legislation discharged from the Judiciary Committee.

Image courtesy of the U.S. House of Representatives Photography Office

any changes to voting laws. Sewell's legislation passed the House in 2019, after the Democrats regained the majority, and again in 2021, when the bill was renamed the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, in honor of the voting rights activist and longtime Representative from Georgia who passed away in 2020.<sup>58</sup>

## Challenging Inequality

Black Members profiled in this section continued to confront the persistent and specific problems of economic inequality faced by Black Americans. Despite significant gains in the half century since the passage of the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act, in 2020 the Joint Economic Committee made clear that "these very visible signs of improvement mask deep inequities." Black Members, though increasingly diverse in political ideologies, party goals, and constituent pressures, continued to work to reduce these inequalities.<sup>59</sup>

Many Black Members in this period remained vocal opponents of efforts to cut back the federal social safety net. In the 1990s, the CBC resisted the call by Republicans and the Clinton administration to, in the words of the President, "end welfare as we know it." In the 104th Congress, the new Republican majority in both chambers pushed for massive reforms to the nation's welfare system. Clinton agreed to sign the bill into law, emphasizing the reduction in federal spending that would accompany the bill's passage. The Personal Responsibility and Work



From his seat on the Oversight and Government Reform Committee, Maryland Representative Elijah E. Cummings sought to provide support for mortgage holders during the foreclosure crisis in 2008. In 2019, Cummings became chair of the committee.

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Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 tied eligibility for assistance to work requirements, placed restrictions on aid to immigrants, and gave states control over the distribution of funds. All but three Black Members of Congress voted against the legislation. Black lawmakers argued that welfare recipients had long been demonized by generations of politicians as unworthy of public support. They rejected a bill that, in their view, shamed and punished families and children for being poor without making sufficient effort to correct and ameliorate the conditions that caused millions to live in poverty. Eva Clayton voiced the opinion of many of her colleagues when she argued the bill was “short on reform, weak on work, and tough on our children.”<sup>60</sup>

During the financial crisis and Great Recession, which began in late 2007 and continued through 2009, Black Members played a prominent role advocating for policies to support Americans who had lost jobs and those whose homes had gone into foreclosure. Aiming to prevent the total collapse of the banking industry, the

George W. Bush administration and congressional leaders, with Democratic majorities in both chambers, passed legislation to buy up toxic mortgage securities and bank stocks to stabilize the financial services industry. Across the political spectrum, the plan to first help banks rather than the millions of people who struggled to pay their mortgages proved controversial. Initially, a majority of the CBC, including the chair, Carolyn Kilpatrick, voted against the Emergency Stabilization Act of 2008. Elijah E. Cummings of Maryland explained his dissatisfaction with the legislation: “Any measure we adopt must include strict oversight and safeguards against giving blank checks to corporate executives whose poor judgment has led us down this road, and that provides substantial relief to millions of Americans who continue to suffer under the overbearing burden of our current economic state.” Amendments to the legislation, and a worsening financial picture in the weeks after the initial vote, led most Black Members to support the legislation, which provided \$700 billion in relief for financial companies.<sup>61</sup>

After Barack Obama became President in January 2009, he worked with the Democratic Congress to pass a stimulus plan designed to lift the economy out of the recession. Black lawmakers helped shape the legislation, working to ensure that their communities were not left out of the massive national relief effort. Ways and Means Chair Charles Rangel played a key role crafting and passing the bill that became the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. Working with Rangel, James Clyburn successfully included his 10-20-30 program in the final bill. The 10-20-30 program ensured that at least 10 percent of the stimulus funding went to areas where 20 percent of the population had lived in “persistent poverty” for 30 years.<sup>62</sup>

Financial regulation was another aspect of the recovery program in which Black lawmakers worked to aid Black Americans. Disappointed in the lack of federal aid for minority-owned businesses and minority home owners, the 10 Black Members of the Financial Services Committee, led by Maxine Waters, boycotted a committee session in order to delay a vote on a financial regulatory bill. “Since last September,” Waters explained, “we have continuously voted for bailouts and reform for the very institutions that created this devastation without properly protecting the African American and minority communities or small businesses. That stops today.” Waters and the other CBC members on the committee successfully placed several provisions in the legislation that would become the Dodd–Frank Wall Street

Reform and Consumer Protection Act, including \$3 billion for homeowners facing the threat of foreclosure, an extra \$1 billion in funding for communities to buy and renovate abandoned buildings, and the creation of an “Office of Minority and Women Inclusion” at several federal agencies overseeing financial regulations, including the U.S. Department of Treasury.<sup>63</sup>

In addition to managing the nation’s economic recovery, the Obama administration and congressional Democrats sought ways to overhaul the American health care system. Rangel, as chair of the Ways and Means Committee, which had jurisdiction over taxes and Medicare, worked alongside George Miller of California, chair of the Committee on Education and Labor, and Henry Arnold Waxman of California, chair of the Energy and Commerce Committee, to shepherd the administration’s health care bill through the House. As the chief tax writer, Rangel was adamant that the new legislation would not include a tax on employer-provided health benefits, which could have threatened the continued use of employer-provided plans by millions of workers—many of which were hard won by labor unions, a core Democratic constituency. Rangel also ensured that the public option, a federally funded health care insurance available to all, which the CBC strongly backed, made it through the committee. In November 2009, the House passed a health care bill that included a public option, but the provision was dropped amid Senate opposition. President Obama signed the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act into law on March 23, 2010. All but one Black Democrat, Artur Davis, voted for the final legislation.<sup>64</sup>

Debate over health care reform gave the Congressional Black Caucus, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, and the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus—which together are known as the Congressional Tri-Caucus—an opportunity to advocate for legislation that addressed racial and ethnic inequities in health services and the health care industry. In 2009, Virgin Islands Delegate Donna M. Christensen, a physician who helped represent the CBC during the health care debate, sponsored the Health Equity and Accountability Act. The bill established federal programs to increase the racial, ethnic, and language diversity of the health care workforce; fund language services for non-English speakers; and created federal programs to collect data in an effort to remove disparities in health care. Through the efforts of the Tri-Caucus, several provisions related to ending disparities in health care were included in the Affordable Care Act.<sup>65</sup>

## Honoring the History and Legacy of Black Americans

Black Members frequently sought to recognize and honor African-American history, icons of the civil rights movement, and other distinguished Black public figures. In 1973, the late Puerto Rican Major League Baseball player and humanitarian Roberto Clemente became the first Black man to win a Congressional Gold Medal—the highest honor Congress can bestow on the nation’s outstanding citizens. In 1977, singer Marian Anderson became the first Black woman to receive the Gold Medal. Nearly 30 years later, Representative Julia May Carson of Indiana played a central role in securing legislation to recognize Rosa Parks, whose act of civil disobedience—refusing to give up her seat on a segregated bus in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955—helped galvanize the modern civil rights movement. When Parks died in October 2005, Congress conferred an unprecedented honor on her by passing a resolution to have her body lie in honor in the Capitol Rotunda for two days to allow visitors to pay their respects—a distinction normally reserved for Presidents, military leaders, and other federal officials. Parks was the first woman ever accorded this honor. U.S. Capitol Police Officer Jacob J. Chestnut Jr. was the first African American in history to lie in honor; while on duty in July 1998, Officer Chestnut and Detective John M. Gibson were killed by a gunman in the Capitol.<sup>66</sup>



President Barack Obama meets with the Congressional Black Caucus in the White House on May 12, 2011. Featured in this image, from left to right: Melvin L. Watt of North Carolina, Sanford D. Bishop Jr. of Georgia, G.K. Butterfield of North Carolina, Emanuel Cleaver II of Missouri, President Barack Obama, Donna M. Christensen of the U.S. Virgin Islands, Yvette D. Clarke of New York, and André Carson of Indiana.

Image courtesy of the Barack Obama Presidential Library/National Archives and Records Administration



In February 2013, President Barack Obama unveiled the statue of civil rights icon Rosa Parks that is exhibited in National Statuary Hall. Eight years before the unveiling, Rosa Parks lay in honor in the Capitol Rotunda.

Image courtesy of House Creative Services

In the twenty-first century, African-American Members of Congress also worked to celebrate the contributions Black men and women made to congressional history. Portraits were commissioned of pioneering Representatives Joseph H. Rainey of South Carolina and Shirley Chisholm, as well as Senator Blanche K. Bruce of Mississippi. J.C. Watts introduced a successful resolution to create a task force to document the work of enslaved African Americans who built the Capitol, and with the opening of the Capitol Visitor Center (CVC) to the public in 2008, John Lewis sponsored a resolution to place a marker in the CVC to commemorate the same workers. Congress also dedicated the main space in the CVC, Emancipation Hall, in honor of the enslaved laborers.<sup>67</sup>

One of the most significant efforts to document and convey the African-American experience was the establishment of the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC). In 1986, Mickey Leland of Texas introduced a joint resolution that called for the planning of an “Afro-American museum and cultural center.” The resolution passed both chambers. Beginning in 1988, Representative John Lewis introduced legislation

in every Congress to create a museum dedicated to African-American history and culture. A 2001 law established a presidential commission to plan the construction and design of the museum. And two years later, Congress passed legislation establishing the NMAAHC within the Smithsonian Institution. The museum opened in 2016, just steps from the Washington Monument, a testament to Black lawmakers’ insistence on the centrality of the Black experience to American life.<sup>68</sup>

In June 2021, Congress passed and President Biden signed a new law establishing a holiday to commemorate the emancipation of enslaved peoples in the United States. Juneteenth was first celebrated by African Americans in Galveston, Texas, to celebrate June 19, 1865, the day U.S. General Gordon Granger issued General Order No. 3 announcing the emancipation of enslaved people throughout the state. What started as a holiday celebrated just in Texas spread to Black communities across the country. In 1996, Barbara-Rose Collins of Michigan successfully shepherded a joint resolution through the House recognizing Juneteenth and calling on Congress to celebrate “the end of slavery in the United States.” A year later, J.C. Watts introduced a similar resolution that also passed the House; a partner resolution passed the Senate that year. In the 2000s, Black Members, including Danny K. Davis of Illinois and then Senator Barack Obama introduced legislation to commemorate the holiday. In 2020, Sheila Jackson Lee, who for several years had sponsored bills recognizing the holiday, introduced legislation to make Juneteenth a national holiday. Jackson Lee proposed the same bill the following year, and a related bill sponsored by Senator Edward John Markey of Massachusetts became law. On the day of the bill’s passage in the House, Jackson Lee reminded her colleagues “that this has been a long journey. There have been mountains and valleys, but we stand here today, free to vote for the Juneteenth National Independence Day, a Federal holiday for America. Freedom is now.”<sup>69</sup>

## LEADERSHIP

Building off the successes of previous Black Members such as Shirley Chisholm, William Gray, and John Lewis, Black Members in this era ascended the leadership ranks of both parties.

The Republican Revolution, as the party’s rise to power in the House in 1995 was called, provided an opportunity for a small but significant cohort of Black Republicans

to achieve influence within the party, including J.C. Watts. A star quarterback for the University of Oklahoma football team, Watts was one of 54 Republicans to win a Democratic-held seat in the 1994 elections. Watts quickly became a rising star in the Republican Conference. In 1997, he gave the televised Republican response to President Clinton's State of the Union Address. A year later, Watts defeated future Speaker of the House John A. Boehner of Ohio to become Republican Conference chair in the 106th Congress (1999–2001), the fourth ranking position in the conference. As chair, Watts presided over weekly party meetings and served as a spokesperson for the conference. House Republicans re-elected Watts as conference chair in the 107th Congress, his last term in office.<sup>70</sup>

In November 2006, the Democratic Party won a majority in the House of Representatives for the first time since the 103rd Congress. The caucus unanimously elected James Clyburn as Majority Whip, the third-ranking position in the Democratic Caucus. Clyburn, who had become chair of the Democratic Caucus in the previous Congress, was only the second Black Member to rise to Majority Whip, after William Gray, who served in the position from 1989 until his retirement in late 1991. Clyburn viewed his election as part of the long struggle by American Americans to be accepted in positions of authority, particularly political authority. "I basically have one goal in life, and that is to destroy every myth I possibly can about black people." He promised "to do this job in such a way to change attitudes, so it won't take another 20 years for another black person to be in leadership." Three other Black Members worked with Clyburn in the Whip's Office: John Lewis, who served as a chief deputy whip and then senior chief deputy whip beginning in the 102nd Congress; Maxine Waters, who began her tenure as chief deputy whip in the 106th Congress; and G.K. Butterfield, who became a chief deputy whip in the 110th Congress.<sup>71</sup>

Black Members also rose to chair several important committees in the 110th Congress. Charles Rangel became chair of Ways and Means. John Conyers, who had served as chair of the Committee on Government Operations in the 102nd and 103rd Congresses, led the Judiciary Committee. The 110th Congress also saw the first Black women rise to top committee posts. Stephanie Tubbs Jones of Ohio became chair of the Ethics Committee, and Juanita Millender-McDonald of California became chair of the Committee on House Administration. In addition, Bennie G. Thompson of Mississippi became chair of the Homeland

Security Committee. By the summer of 2022, there were 58 Black Members in the House and three Black Members in the Senate, many of whom had acquired years of seniority on some of the House's most prominent committees. In the 117th Congress, Black Members chaired six standing committees, one select committee, and 27 subcommittees.

As the number of Black Members rose in the 1990s and 2000s, so did the number of Black congressional staffers. The House Office of Diversity and Inclusion, which the House created early in the 116th Congress, published data from a 2021 survey (in which roughly half of House staff participated) showing that Black Americans accounted for 15.2 percent of respondents—tracking above the percentage of the total U.S. population that identifies as African American (12.3 percent). But disparities in the workforce emerged when examining the inroads that people of color made among staff leadership positions. An independent study conducted in 2018 documented a significant lack of racial diversity among senior House staff—defined as chiefs of staff, legislative directors, and communications directors—in leadership offices, Member offices, and committees. For instance, African-American staffers



Juanita Millender-McDonald of California made history in 2007 by becoming one of the first African-American women to chair a standing committee in Congress.

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composed 6.7 percent of the House's senior staff roles, while Latinos and Latinas accounted for just 3.8 percent of senior House staff. For African Americans, that figure represented only half of their percentage of the total U.S. population. For Latinos and Latinas, the drop-off was even more severe: their proportion of senior staff accounted for less than a quarter of the 17.3 percent who identify as Latino and Latina among the total U.S. population.<sup>72</sup>

Despite the relative lack of diversity at the highest staff levels in the House, the period from 2007 to 2021 saw the service of several trailblazing aides and notable appointments among the institution's top officers. In 2007, Lorraine C. Miller became the first African American elected to serve as a House officer after she was appointed by Speaker Nancy Pelosi of California to serve as the Clerk of the House of Representatives. The Clerk plays a key role as the House's recordkeeper and assists with floor operations; Miller served in the post until January 2011. Miller, who was from Fort Worth, Texas, began her career as a teacher before working as a staff member for Speakers Jim Wright of Texas and Thomas S. Foley of Washington, Representative

John Lewis, then Democratic Leader Pelosi, and in the executive office of President Clinton. Miller also served as president of the Washington, DC, chapter of the NAACP. After her career in the House, Miller became a member of the board of directors of the national NAACP and its interim president and CEO in 2013 and 2014. Eight years later, in January 2019, Cheryl L. Johnson, a New Orleans, Louisiana, native, became the second African-American Clerk. Before being elected Clerk, Johnson had spent 20 years working for several House committees and a decade working for the Smithsonian Institution. During her tenure at the Smithsonian, Johnson worked as chief of staff to the director of the National Museum of African American History and Culture. In 2021, Major General William Joseph Walker, Commanding General of the District of Columbia Army and Air Force National Guard, became the first African American elected to serve as Sergeant at Arms of the House of Representatives.<sup>73</sup>

In the period covered in this section, the U.S. Senate also appointed African Americans to significant officer positions. In 2003, Reverend Barry Black became the first African American Chaplain of the U.S. Senate, a position he continues to hold. Black spent more than two decades in the U.S. Navy, rising to the rank of rear admiral, and retiring as the chief of chaplains of the U.S. Navy. On March 1, 2021, Sonceria Ann Berry was sworn in as the first African-American Secretary of the Senate, a position analogous to that of the Clerk of the House. Berry had served in Senate offices since 1979, when she came to Capitol Hill to work on the staff of Alabama Senator Howell Thomas Heflin.<sup>74</sup>

In November 2008, Senator Barack Obama, a member of the CBC, became the first African-American candidate to win election as President of the United States. On his victory night, Obama told a worldwide audience: "It's been a long time coming, but tonight, because of what we did on this day, in this election, at this defining moment, change has come to America." On Capitol Hill, Black lawmakers celebrated the historic nature of Obama's win. "This monumental victory represents a significant shift in our nation's politics and priorities," said CBC chair Carolyn Kilpatrick. "It signals that we have made great strides in breaking down racial and cultural barriers that have historically paralyzed the full participation of all Americans," she added.<sup>75</sup>

For many in the CBC, Obama's election meant that America had a President who knew firsthand the CBC's agenda. "We won't get preferential treatment because we



In 2019, Cheryl L. Johnson became the second African-American woman elected as Clerk of the House of Representatives.

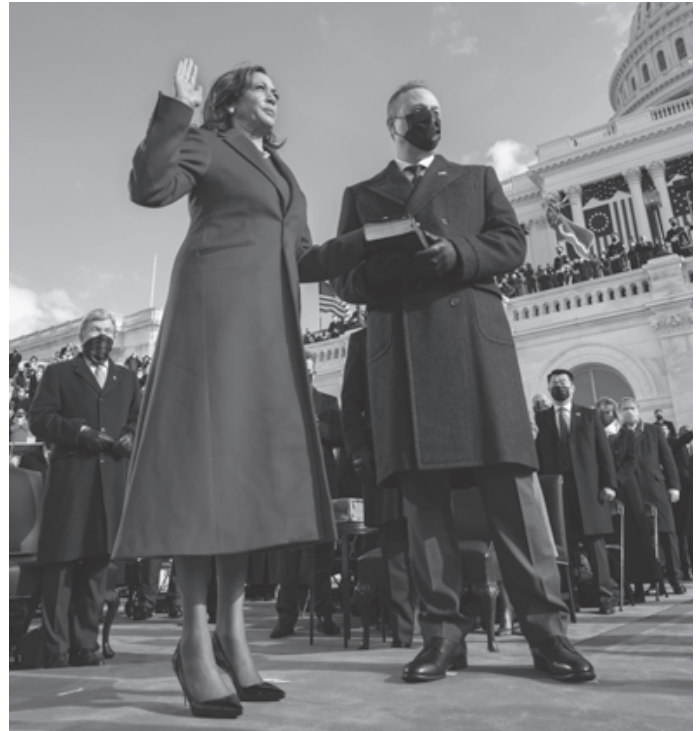
Image courtesy of the Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives

are black,” Charles Rangel said, “but he will know who we are and what the struggle is and why our legislative agenda is there.” Yet, other Black Members recognized that the demands of representing the whole country might limit Obama’s ability to support many of the CBC’s policy goals.<sup>76</sup>

The CBC occasionally expressed frustration with the Obama administration. In late 2009, for example, as lawmakers worked on responses to the Great Recession, some CBC members were critical of the Obama administration’s refusal to support policies and programs specifically designed to support people of color. CBC members were critical of the President’s willingness to consider cuts to Medicaid and Medicare, his Afghanistan War policies, and the lack of diversity in some of his Cabinet selections. Emanuel Cleaver, the chair of the CBC during the 112th Congress (2011–2013), explained that the CBC’s occasional conflict with the Obama administration was in keeping with the CBC’s tradition of holding presidential administrations accountable, regardless of party. “There has not been one president where they have been sworn in and we have said, ‘Problem solved.’”<sup>77</sup>

Two years into President Obama’s tenure, Republicans regained the majority in the House. Although they no longer controlled the legislative agenda on Capitol Hill, most Black Members had won re-election in 2010 and further solidified their influence within the Democratic Caucus. The return of the Democratic Party to the House majority in January 2019 enabled more Black lawmakers to join congressional leadership. James Clyburn returned to his position as Majority Whip, and Hakeem Jeffries, a third-term Representative, was elected chair of the House Democratic Caucus, the fourth-ranking position in the caucus. Barbara Lee of California became co-chair of the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee, which makes committee assignments and helps set the party’s agenda.

Twelve years after the election of Barack Obama, another Senator, Kamala Harris, the daughter of immigrants from India and Jamaica, broke new ground by becoming the first woman elected Vice President of the United States. During her acceptance speech on election night, Harris reflected on the struggle of the “[w]omen who fought and sacrificed so much for equality, liberty, and justice for all, including Black women, who are often, too often overlooked, but so often prove that they are the backbone of our democracy.” During her speech Vice President-elect Harris also recalled the words of the late John Lewis: “Democracy is not a state. It is an act.” To Harris, Lewis meant that “democracy is not



Kamala D. Harris takes the oath of office on January 20, 2021, and becomes the first woman and first African American to serve as Vice President of the United States. Standing next to Harris is her husband Douglas Emhoff.

Image courtesy of the White House, photograph by Chuck Kennedy

guaranteed. It is only as strong as our willingness to fight for it, to guard it and never take it for granted.”<sup>78</sup>

The men and women profiled in this edition of *Black Americans in Congress* understood that democracy was worth fighting for. Since 1870, Black lawmakers have dedicated their careers to securing the aspirations articulated in the Declaration of Independence and guaranteeing the rights established by the Constitution. For more than 150 years, Black Americans in Congress have worked, and continue to work, to make the promises of democracy—fair representation, equal protection, and political power—a reality for all Americans.

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# Barbara-Rose Collins

1939–2021

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1991–1997

Democrat from Michigan



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

A longtime community activist, Barbara-Rose Collins was elected to Congress in 1990 on a platform to bring federal dollars and aid to her underserved neighborhood in downtown Detroit. In the House, Collins, a single mother, focused on her lifelong effort to ensure that Black families and Black communities had the resources and opportunities they needed to thrive. “I look forward to the collapse of racism in America and the rise of real freedom and equality for all of Black America,” Collins told her colleagues on the House Floor. “The death of racism will allow young African-Americans to overcome obstacles and enjoy expanded opportunities.”<sup>1</sup>

The eldest of four children of Lamar Nathaniel and Lou Versa Jones Richardson, Barbara-Rose Collins was born Barbara Rose Richardson in Detroit, Michigan, on April 13, 1939. Her mother was a homemaker, and her father worked as an auto manufacturer and later as an independent contractor in home improvement. Collins graduated from Cass Technical High School in 1957 and attended Detroit’s Wayne State University, where she studied political science and anthropology. Collins left college to marry her classmate, Virgil Gary Collins, who later worked as a pharmaceutical salesman. They had three children, one

of whom died in infancy. The couple divorced in 1960, and, as a single mother, Collins had to work multiple jobs. She received public financial assistance until she was hired as a business manager in the physics department at Wayne State, a position she held for nine years. Collins subsequently became an assistant in the office of equal opportunity and neighborhood relations at Wayne State.<sup>2</sup>

In the late 1960s, Collins heard a speech by Black activist Stokely Carmichael at Detroit’s Shrine of the Black Madonna of the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church. Inspired by Carmichael’s Black Power philosophy and community activism, Collins purchased a house within a block of her childhood home and joined the Shrine Church, whose agenda focused on uplifting Black neighborhoods. In 1971, Collins was elected to Detroit’s region one school board, earning widespread recognition for her work on school safety and academic achievement. Encouraged by the Shrine Church pastor, Collins campaigned for a seat in the state legislature in 1974, hyphenating her name, Barbara-Rose, to distinguish herself from the other candidates. Victorious, she embarked on a six-year career in the state house. Collins chaired the constitutional revision and women’s rights committee, which produced *Women in*

*the Legislative Process*, the first published report to document the status of women in the Michigan state legislature.<sup>3</sup>

Bolstered by her work in Detroit's most underserved neighborhoods, Collins considered running for the U.S. House of Representatives in 1980 against embattled downtown Representative Charles C. Diggs Jr. Collins's mentor, Detroit Mayor Coleman A. Young, advised her to run for Detroit city council the following year instead, and she did successfully. Seven years later in the Democratic primary, she challenged incumbent U.S. Representative George W. Crockett Jr., who had succeeded Diggs. In a hard-fought campaign, Collins held Crockett to a narrow victory with less than 49 percent of the vote. Crockett chose not to run for re-election in 1990, and Collins declared her candidacy for the open seat. Collins's 1990 campaign focused on improving public safety and bringing federal money to Detroit, an underprivileged and segregated city with one of the highest crime rates in the nation. In 1989, Collins's son was convicted of armed robbery, and she concluded that his legal trouble stemmed from the absence of a strong male role model in his life. "I could teach a girl how to be a woman, but I could not teach a boy how to be a man," she later told the *Detroit Free Press*. Drawing from this experience, Collins promised to pursue legislation to support Black families, rallying under the banner "Save the Black Male." In a crowded field of eight candidates, Collins won the primary with 34 percent of the vote. Her victory was tantamount to election to Congress in the overwhelmingly Democratic district with a large Black majority. Collins sailed through the general election with 80 percent of the vote and was re-elected twice with even higher percentages.<sup>4</sup>

One of three Black women in her class of first-term lawmakers, Collins sought the influence and counsel of longtime Michigan Representative John David Dingell Jr., who helped her gain a seat on the Public Works and Transportation Committee (later Transportation and Infrastructure). She also received assignments to the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology and the Select Committee on Children, Youth, and Families. She later traded these two seats for a spot on the Government Operations Committee (renamed Government Reform and Oversight) and the Post Office and Civil Service Committee, where she chaired the Subcommittee on Postal Operations and Services in the 103rd Congress (1993–1995). A member of the Congressional Black

Caucus (CBC) and the Congressional Women's Caucus, Representative Collins was appointed a majority Whip at-large from 1993 until 1994.<sup>5</sup>

In the House, Collins focused on directing federal resources and programs to improve opportunities in underserved Black communities. In October 1992, Collins began encouraging farmers to donate excess food that would otherwise go to waste to urban food banks and shelters. Collins generally supported President William J. Clinton's economic and job stimulus initiatives, but she opposed the North American Free Trade Agreement, arguing that importing cheaper foreign products would threaten unionized manufacturing jobs in her district. During debate on an omnibus crime bill, Collins drew on her experience in Detroit to introduce the Community Safety and Empowerment Act of 1993 as an alternative bill. Her proposal would have created a federal council to provide grants for local projects to combat crime and promote health and education in disadvantaged communities. "Our urban communities must help themselves," Collins implored. "No government official or agency knows more about the problems confronting a community more than the people who live and work in that community." Though she voted to advance the omnibus crime bill to debate, she voted against the final version of the bill in 1994. "I cannot in good conscience vote for over 60 new death penalty provisions and throw people into a system that is riddled with discrimination," she said, referring to the bill's extension of the death penalty to several more federal crimes and a section that mandated life in prison for people convicted of three felonies. Collins argued that these provisions would disproportionately affect minority communities, declaring, "I think justice is dispensed differently for people of color, be they black or Hispanic."<sup>6</sup>

In 1994, Collins organized the Congressional Caucus on Children and Families to promote efforts supporting the millions of American families living in poverty. "The future of African American children is particularly tenuous," Collins wrote in June 1994. "My message to children throughout this country is very simple: You are valued, you are loved, and you must survive for the good of all humanity," she continued. Voicing support for the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993—which required employers to guarantee workers time off to care for loved ones—Collins declared, "If we pass this bill we have taken a step toward healing the ailing family in America."

Collins also called on federal officials to include housework, childcare, volunteer work, and time devoted to a family business as components of the gross national product. “If you raise the status of women,” she declared, “we would be more conscious of the family unit.” To champion the contributions Black men and women made to the country, Collins introduced two resolutions in 1994 designating two days that spring as “African-American Women Positive Role Model Day” and “African-American Men Positive Role Model Day.” Collins’s family advocacy also extended to her support for the Million Man March in Washington, DC, in October 1995, which drew attention to the social, economic, and political challenges faced by Black communities. Collins praised the march’s emphasis on family and community and provided water for those in attendance.<sup>7</sup>

With her focus on domestic issues, Representative Collins generally opposed increasing foreign aid. “Our cities are hurting,” she observed. “We must learn how to take care of America first.” But Collins was not averse to challenging what she saw as racial discrimination in foreign policy. In the wake of a military coup on the island nation of Haiti, Collins stood alongside five other CBC members to stage a sit-in at the White House in April 1994 to protest the government’s refusal to take in Haitian refugees. The protestors demanded a stronger embargo against Haiti and called on the Clinton administration to admit Haitian refugees. “What’s being done to Haitians is inhumane and immoral,” Collins said. “The fact of the matter is we welcome Hungarians with open arms, we welcome Vietnamese with open arms, we welcome Cubans with open arms, but when it comes to black Haitians, we tell them, ‘Stand back we don’t want you,’ the result being that hundreds are drowned at sea, children and women eaten by sharks.” All six Members were arrested, fined, and released.<sup>8</sup>

Collins was popular back home despite holding the third-worst attendance record for votes in the House in 1995, but when the U.S. Justice Department and the House Ethics Committee investigated her office for the alleged misuse of campaign and scholarship funds in 1996, she drew six challengers in the Democratic primary. Ultimately, Carolyn C. Kilpatrick defeated Collins for the Democratic nomination by a 20-point margin and went on to win the general election. In January 1997, the Ethics Committee determined that Collins had violated 11 House rules and federal laws but did not recommend disciplinary action because Collins had already left office.<sup>9</sup>

After Congress, Collins remained active in local politics. In 2001, she won a seat on the Detroit city council. Collins was re-elected to the council for a second term in 2005 and retired in 2009. She died in Detroit on November 4, 2021, of complications from COVID-19.<sup>10</sup>

## Notes

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# Gary A. Franks

1953–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1991–1997

Republican from Connecticut



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 1991, Gary A. Franks became the first ever Black Representative from Connecticut and the first Black Republican Representative since 1935. On Capitol Hill, Franks championed Republican issues, including welfare reform, opposition to affirmative action, and support for Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas. “The whole Republican philosophy is self-help,” Franks avowed. “I believe in less government. I believe that we don’t have to tax and spend constantly to maintain our society.” Franks’s party identification and political beliefs put him at odds with most of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), of which he was an active member. But Franks argued he was representing a vein of Black political thought rarely represented at the national level. “I see being a black *Republican* as unique,” Franks explained, “I don’t see being a black *conservative* as unique. I have a lot of views that many in the black community would agree with.”<sup>1</sup>

Gary Alvin Franks was born in Waterbury, Connecticut, on February 9, 1953. He was the youngest of six children of Jenary Petteway Franks, a dietary aide at a hospital, and Richard Franks, a mill worker who left school in the sixth grade. Education was valued in the Franks home; all the children attended college, and three earned doctoral

degrees. Gary Franks was an all-state basketball player at Sacred Heart High School in Waterbury. In 1975, he earned a bachelor’s degree from Yale University. After working as an industrial relations agent for three companies in Connecticut, Franks started his own real estate firm in Waterbury. Inspired by his friend, Representative John Rowland of Connecticut, Franks entered politics to bring what he called “new blood” to the Waterbury Republican Party. In 1985, he was elected to the Waterbury board of aldermen, where he served three terms until 1990. Franks ran unsuccessfully for state comptroller in 1986. Franks married Donna Williams in 1990. The couple raised three children: Azia, who was Donna Williams’s child from a previous relationship, Jessica, and Gary Jr.<sup>2</sup>

In 1990, Rowland, whose district encompassed a mix of working-class and wealthy towns in western and central Connecticut, including Gary Franks’s hometown of Waterbury, resigned his House seat to run for governor of Connecticut. Franks sought the Republican nomination and won the GOP endorsement by beating out five candidates at the district’s Republican convention in July 1990. In the general election, Franks faced former Democratic Representative and television anchor Anthony John “Toby”

Moffett Jr.; Moffett had been elected to Congress in 1974 to represent a neighboring Connecticut district and served four terms before losing bids for the U.S. Senate in 1982 and as Connecticut governor in 1986. Franks's campaign drew national attention. Though a Republican had held the district since Rowland upset the Democratic incumbent in 1984, the seat was considered vulnerable. Waterbury's blue collar southern suburbs had tilted Republican in recent elections. The district contained a small Black population (under five percent). Franks ran on a conservative platform, promising no new taxes, supporting a cut in the capital gains tax, and advocating a constitutional amendment outlawing the desecration of the American flag. He also attacked welfare and other aid programs for creating what he called a "spiral of government dependency." Franks won the election with 52 percent of the vote. As the first Black Republican Representative in five decades, Franks attracted a barrage of media attention, making him one of the most recognizable first-term Members.<sup>3</sup>

When Franks took his seat in January 1991, he received assignments on the Armed Services and Small Business Committees, as well as on the Select Committee on Aging. He also joined the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), which traditionally supported an active federal government and strong social safety net. Franks spoke regularly at CBC meetings during his first term, and he often disagreed with the caucus's other members, all of whom were Democrats. For example, during his campaign, Franks opposed the proposed Civil Rights Act of 1990, which the CBC almost universally supported. When Democrats revived the legislation as the first bill of the 102nd Congress, Franks opposed it as well. Franks claimed he disagreed with the language but not the spirit of the bill, saying, "I question whether some Democrats truly want a civil rights bill or if they want a political issue." Franks argued the 1991 bill would compel employers to introduce quotas in their hiring process, a common argument from the bill's opponents. Although Franks voted against the initial House bill in June 1991, he ultimately voted for a compromise version of the Civil Rights Act of 1991 sponsored by Republican Senator John Claggett Danforth of Missouri. The law strengthened prohibitions against employment discrimination that had been weakened by a series of Supreme Court decisions and provided monetary rewards for victims of sexual discrimination. The bill passed by large margins and President George H.W. Bush signed it into law in November 1991.<sup>4</sup>

Franks also attracted national attention as the only member of the CBC to support the Supreme Court nomination of Clarence Thomas—an African-American judge who was named to replace Thurgood Marshall, the first Black Supreme Court Justice, when he retired. The CBC rejected Thomas's conservative record, particularly his opposition to affirmative action. By contrast, Franks defended him, calling the CBC's refusal to endorse Thomas "politics at its worst." Franks noted that Thomas's "approach to issues may be different from liberals, but his determination and concern for fairness and justice would be the same." The Senate confirmed him on October 15, 1991, by a nearly party-line vote of 52 to 48.<sup>5</sup>

In 1992, Franks faced a difficult re-election against Democratic probate judge James Lawlor and Independent Lynn Taborsak, a former Democratic state representative. Both opponents criticized Franks for what they called a weak stance on federal plans to cancel the construction of Seawolf submarines in Groton, Connecticut. The project was important to the state's economy and, as Connecticut's sole member on the Armed Services Committee, Franks received mail from constituents about the rumored closing of the military base in Groton. Concerned voters claimed he was often unavailable for comment on the subject. Franks dismissed the attacks as a liberal smear campaign spawned by fear that he would lure African-American voters to the Republican Party. On Election Day, Franks won with a 44 percent plurality after Lawlor and Taborsak split the remaining votes. Two years later, in 1994, Connecticut state senator James H. Maloney ran a similar race against Franks, accusing him of being out of touch with his constituents. Franks remained focused on his support of businesses and welfare reform and pulled out another narrow victory, with 52 percent of the vote. In 1995, Franks served in the first Republican House majority in 40 years after the GOP routed Democrats in campaigns across the country.<sup>6</sup>

In his second term, Franks relinquished his seat on the Armed Services Committee for an assignment to the Committee on Energy and Commerce, a highly desirable panel that usually requires Members to give up all other committee assignments. He also returned as a member of the CBC, which added 14 Representatives after the 1992 elections, bringing the organization's membership to 40 and establishing it as a significant voting bloc. Franks had previously been linked to Republican President Bush. But when Democrat William J. Clinton defeated Bush in the

1992 presidential election, Franks lost influence within the caucus. Several members of the CBC objected to Franks's attendance at the caucus's Democratic policy strategy sessions, insisting that he was a mole for the Republicans.<sup>7</sup>

In 1993, an exasperated Franks publicly announced his intention to resign from the CBC, but he soon recanted, citing an influx of phone calls and mail from constituents imploring him not to resign. Although he continued to criticize some of the caucus's policies, Franks declared, "As long as I am a Member of Congress and black, I will continue to belong to the CBC." As tensions continued to rise, the CBC voted to exclude Franks from all but the first half-hour of CBC meetings—traditionally reserved for lunch—essentially preventing Franks from participating in any formal caucus debate. Faced with growing negative publicity, CBC chair Kweisi Mfume of Maryland eventually smoothed over the rift, announcing in August 1993 that Franks would be allowed full participation in all caucus activities and promised that, during his tenure as chair, the caucus would embrace "diversity and plurality." Franks nevertheless remained at odds with the majority of the caucus and eventually stopped attending meetings.<sup>8</sup>

Franks played a significant role in crafting the GOP's welfare reform package, which was launched in the fall of 1995. The plan set strict penalties for aid recipients who refused to look for work after having collected benefits for two years and made welfare difficult for immigrants to access. The plan also made it more burdensome for mothers who could not determine their children's paternity to receive benefits. Franks spoke candidly about his own relatives' experience accessing federal aid, and he praised the Republican plan because he said it would encourage economic independence. "Our welfare system continues to play the role of fish-delivery man for able-bodied people. Instead, we should help—and insist—that able-bodied people catch their own fish," Franks said. In 1995, Franks was appointed to the conference committee to resolve the differences between the House and Senate versions of the welfare reform bill. Franks successfully fought to retain his proposal to encourage providing a debit card for food stamps and other benefits. He also supported the House bill's version of the "family cap," which limited the amount of money per child families could receive and was included in the final conference report. President Clinton vetoed the bill on January 9, 1996, forcing Congress to start again with new legislation that dropped both provisions.<sup>9</sup>

Franks opposed affirmative action more zealously than many of his GOP colleagues, who had championed the issue in their campaign to recapture the congressional majority. At the time, federal policy provided special set-asides and preferences for women and people of color, which Franks argued were forms of discrimination. "I do not want my children to feel that they are inferior to white children," he declared. "I do not want someone to put their thumb on the scale in order for them to succeed." In 1995, Franks announced he was going to propose an amendment to an appropriations bill that would, in his words, "eliminate race- and gender-based set-aside programs for the awarding of Federal contracts." Although congressional Republicans supported Franks's opposition to set-asides many GOP House Members objected to the abrupt nature of the proposed change, preferring to first authorize an executive review of affirmative action policies. Franks's efforts ended when the Republican-controlled Rules Committee refused to allow his amendment to come to the floor for debate on an appropriations bill. "I question the sincerity of a number of Republicans on the issue," Franks said to reporters. "They love to get the political mileage out of it, but when it comes time to vote, they don't want to do it." Franks even questioned the sincerity of Speaker Newt Gingrich of Georgia, claiming Gingrich had promised his support for the amendment. Franks apologized to Gingrich, noting that he would follow the Speaker's lead on the issue.<sup>10</sup>

Although Franks supported much of Gingrich's extensive "Contract with America" reform package during both the 1994 campaign and the early stages of the 105th Congress (1997–1999), he criticized proposed budget cuts he claimed disproportionately affected women, people of color, children, and urban centers. "Mr. Speaker," Franks said on the House Floor, "I am for dismantling the Great Society programs and the Roosevelt New Deal, but I do not believe that the solution is merely to cut, cap, or pass the buck to the States." Franks later voted against the cuts, alongside only five other Republicans. Facing a tough re-election in 1996, however, Franks eagerly invited Gingrich to campaign with him in Connecticut and touted the Contract with America to voters.<sup>11</sup>

In the 1996 election, Democrat James H. Maloney returned for a rematch against Franks in a campaign that was largely a referendum on the implementation of the GOP's legislative agenda. On Election Day, Maloney defeated Franks 52 percent to 46 percent. Though the long

coattails from President Clinton's decisive re-election victory factored into Franks's defeat, he also attributed his loss to a lack of support from the Republican Party—noting that the GOP estimated he was well ahead in the polls just months before the election and had refused to raise funds for what seemed like a safe Republican seat.<sup>12</sup>

In 1998, Franks challenged incumbent Democratic Senator Christopher John Dodd, an 18-year veteran of the Senate whose father, Thomas, had preceded him in the chamber. Franks pulled in support from Republicans, including former Vice President J. Danforth Quayle, who stumped for him. Franks described himself as a “real conservative and a real Republican,” and campaigned on the national issues he had championed in Congress. He supported the creation of a modified flat income tax and the elimination of capital gains and inheritance taxes. Franks also endorsed a strong national defense, the preservation of Medicare and Social Security, and the death penalty. Ultimately, Dodd defeated Franks with 65 percent of the vote.<sup>13</sup>

Following his congressional career, Franks returned to his real estate business in Waterbury. He eventually moved to Florida where he ran a scrap metal recycling company in Fort Lauderdale. Franks also lectured at several universities—including Georgetown University in Washington, DC; Hampton University in Hampton, Virginia; and the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, Virginia—and wrote several books on the intersection of politics, faith, and the Black experience. He continues to speak on the issues of racial injustice and faith in politics.<sup>14</sup>

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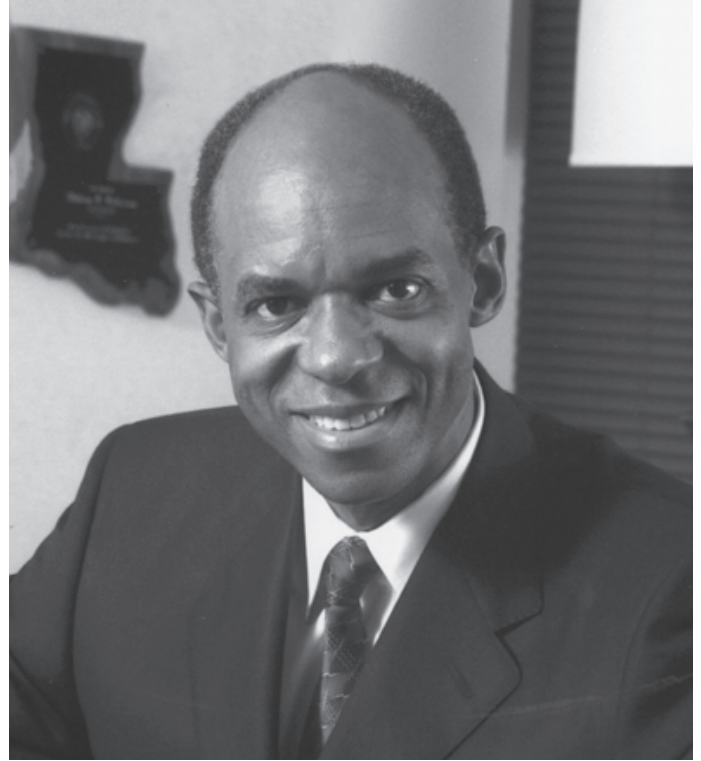
# William J. Jefferson

1947–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1991–2009

Democrat from Louisiana



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

When William J. Jefferson won election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1990 from a New Orleans-centered district, he became the first African American to represent Louisiana since Reconstruction. Jefferson, who had more than a decade of experience in the Louisiana state senate, specialized in economic matters and eventually earned a seat on the influential Ways and Means Committee. Jefferson, who grew up in poverty in rural Louisiana, ran for Congress to help people from a similar background succeed. “I don’t want to look back over my life,” he once told a reporter, “and say that I could have been in a position to help some other people have the chance that I had and my wife had.”<sup>1</sup>

William Jennings Jefferson was born on March 14, 1947, in Lake Providence, Louisiana, to Mose and Angeline Jefferson. Jefferson grew up in a family of 10 children in the far northeastern part of the state. Mose and Angeline owned a small farm, and his father also worked for the Army Corps of Engineers. William Jefferson often worked on other farms to help support the family. His mother, the president of the local Parent Teacher Association, emphasized education for all her children. In 1969, he graduated from Southern University, a historically Black university in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, with a bachelor’s degree. As an undergraduate,

Jefferson was a member of the Reserve Officer’s Training Corps. He later served as an officer in the U.S. Navy’s Judge Advocate General’s Corps. Three years later, on scholarship, he earned a law degree from Harvard Law School. After law school, he served for a year as a law clerk for U.S. District Court Judge Alvin B. Rubin in New Orleans. From 1973 to 1975, Jefferson served as a legislative assistant to Senator John Bennett Johnston Jr. of Louisiana. He also went into private practice, cofounding his own law firm. In 1996, Jefferson earned a master of laws in taxation from Georgetown University in Washington, DC. Jefferson married Dr. Andrea Green-Jefferson, and they raised five daughters: Jamila, Jalila, Jelani, Nailah, and Akilah.<sup>2</sup>

Jefferson entered politics in the late 1970s, when he defeated a White incumbent for a Louisiana senate seat that covered the affluent Uptown section of New Orleans. He served in Baton Rouge for 12 years, working on the finance committee and chairing the special budget stabilization committee, which was created to rein in state spending and develop more accurate revenue projections. He also chaired the influential governmental affairs committee, which had oversight of reapportionment. In 1982 and 1986, Jefferson was an unsuccessful candidate for mayor of New Orleans.<sup>3</sup>

In 1990, when 17-year House veteran Corinne Claiborne “Lindy” Boggs announced her retirement, Jefferson entered a crowded field to succeed her. The congressional district covered much of New Orleans proper, the Uptown neighborhood, Algiers on the west bank of the Mississippi River, and the sprawling Kenner suburbs on the city’s west side. In 1983, court-ordered redistricting made it the state’s first majority-Black district. Jefferson was one of four principal contenders in the October open primary, which included Marc H. Morial, son of former mayor Dutch Morial, who served from 1978 to 1986 as the city’s first African-American mayor; a state senator who had been endorsed by the governor; and a prominent city school board member. Jefferson finished first with 25 percent of the vote, with Morial trailing at 22 percent. In the spirited two-man November runoff, Jefferson prevailed with 53 percent of the vote. In his subsequent seven re-elections, Jefferson won handily with 73 percent of the vote or more.<sup>4</sup>

When Jefferson was sworn into the House in the 102nd Congress (1991–1993), he earned seats on the Education and Labor and the Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committees. In the following Congress, he relinquished those assignments for a coveted spot on the Ways and Means Committee. When the Republicans took control of the chamber for the 104th Congress (1995–1997) Jefferson lost his Ways and Means post and was transferred to the National Security Committee, the House Oversight Committee, and the Joint Committee on Printing. In the next Congress, Jefferson again won an assignment to the exclusive Ways and Means Committee, relinquishing his prior assignments. He remained on Ways and Means until June 2006, adding an assignment to the Budget Committee in the 109th Congress (2005–2007). In the 110th Congress (2007–2009), Jefferson was assigned to the Small Business Committee. Jefferson also was a member of the Congressional Black Caucus and served as the chair of the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation board of directors.<sup>5</sup>

In Congress, Jefferson specialized in trade and tax issues important to the port of New Orleans where shipping is a primary economic engine. Jefferson was a strong advocate of free trade and at times split from Democrats and sided with Republicans on trade issues. He voted for both the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1993 and the 2000 legislation that normalized trade relations with China. In 2001, Jefferson was one of three Democrats on the Ways and Means Committee who voted to give President

George W. Bush the ability to fast track trade agreements through Congress. Jefferson also advocated for trade opportunities in neglected markets such as the Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa. In March 1998, Jefferson was part of a delegation of lawmakers to travel with President William J. Clinton to six African countries promoting trade and democracy. Jefferson was one of the principal supporters of the African Growth and Opportunity Act. The legislation sought to improve and expand trade between the United States and sub-Saharan African countries by reducing tariffs and promoting reciprocal trade agreements. Defending the legislation, Jefferson told his colleagues: “We ought to treat Africa the way we treat the rest of the world. There is no reason to discriminate against that continent.” The African Growth and Opportunity Act was eventually combined with legislation creating new trade benefits for countries in the Caribbean Basin. President Clinton signed the bill into law in May 2000. Jefferson also served as co-chair of the Africa Trade and Investment Caucus.<sup>6</sup>

In the wake of the devastating Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, which flooded New Orleans and its surrounding environs in August and September 2005, Jefferson’s legislative attention focused on aiding the recovery effort in the Gulf region. In November 2005, Jefferson, from his position on the Ways and Means Committee, successfully shepherded the Gulf Opportunity Zone Public Finance Relief Act of 2005 through the House; the legislation provided a tax credit for Gulf states to fund bonds to help finance projects rebuilding the region. Jefferson’s tax credit was included in the Gulf Opportunity Zone Act of 2005 which President Bush signed in December 2005. Jefferson, a strong supporter of the Gulf Opportunity Zone Act, explained on the House Floor that the legislation would “provide the entrepreneurs of the gulf coast a sturdy set of tools with which to jump start our recovery.” Jefferson also pushed for reforms to the Small Business Administration (SBA) disaster loan program, which was criticized in the aftermath of the storm. The House also passed Jefferson’s Disadvantaged Business Disaster Eligibility Act that would have extended the deadline for minority-owned businesses in his district to rebuild under the SBA’s redevelopment program.<sup>7</sup>

In August 2005, the FBI raided Jefferson’s Washington, DC, home following a months-long investigation into a bribery scheme involving the Louisiana Representative and a technology company. Based on evidence uncovered at his home, the FBI later searched his congressional office—the

first time the FBI ever performed a search of a congressional office. In June 2006, after the FBI made public the findings of their investigation, Democrats stripped Jefferson of his seat on the Ways and Means Committee. Despite the FBI investigation, Jefferson was re-elected to a ninth term against Democrat Karen Carter, with 57 percent of the vote in November 2006. In June 2007, Jefferson was indicted in a federal court in Virginia on 16 charges including racketeering, money laundering, and bribery.<sup>8</sup>

In November 2008, Jefferson, who remained in the House while awaiting trial, lost re-election by a margin of 50 to 47 percent of the vote to Republican Anh “Joseph” Cao, the first Vietnamese American elected to Congress. Jefferson’s term expired at the conclusion of the 110th Congress on January 3, 2009. Later that year, a jury found Jefferson guilty on 11 counts including bribery and racketeering. He was sentenced to 13 years in prison. In 2017, Jefferson was released from prison after serving five years. A federal judge overturned seven of the remaining 10 counts against him following an unrelated Supreme Court decision regarding political corruption.<sup>9</sup>

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# Lucien E. Blackwell

1931–2003

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1991–1995

Democrat from Pennsylvania



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 1991, Lucien E. Blackwell, a popular, longtime member of the Philadelphia city council, won a special election to the U.S. House of Representatives to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Representative William H. Gray III. In the House, Blackwell, a former union president and resident of West Philadelphia with a “common man” reputation, focused on the needs of his primarily African-American and working-class constituents. “I started as a laborer shoveling iron ore, and thank God I did, because shoveling that iron ore and suffering and working hard, I learned to appreciate the plight of poor people,” he once reflected.<sup>1</sup>

Lucien Edward Blackwell was born on August 1, 1931, in Whitsett, Pennsylvania, one of eleven children raised by Thomas and Mary Blackwell. As a young child, Lucien Blackwell moved to a West Philadelphia neighborhood known as “the Bottom,” where his father opened a grocery store. Blackwell dropped out of West Philadelphia High School in 1950 to take a job as a dockworker on the Philadelphia waterfront. He briefly pursued a boxing career, winning an amateur title before being drafted into the Army to fight in the Korean War. During his military service, he was the middleweight boxing champion of his infantry division and was awarded a unit commendation and two

bronze stars. Blackwell returned to the docks after the war and worked his way up the ranks of the International Longshoreman’s Association, a labor union affiliated with the AFL-CIO, serving as president of its Philadelphia local from 1973 to 1991. Blackwell married his first wife, Gloria, at a young age, and they had six children before divorcing. In 1972, he married his second wife, Jannie, a schoolteacher. In 1991, Jannie Blackwell succeeded her husband on the Philadelphia city council and served in that position for nearly three decades.<sup>2</sup>

Blackwell’s work with the longshoreman’s union introduced him to politics. He described himself as a Democrat “from the top of my head to the bottom of my feet.” Blackwell served briefly in the Pennsylvania house of representatives from 1973 to 1975, when he won a seat on the Philadelphia city council. During his 16 years on the council—from 1975 to 1991—Blackwell earned the nickname “Lucien the Solution” for his attention to the needs of his constituents in West and South Philadelphia. He ran unsuccessfully for Philadelphia mayor as the Consumer Party candidate in 1979 to succeed the controversial and notorious incumbent Frank Rizzo, who was under federal investigation for fostering police brutality

and violence against the city's Black citizens. In 1986, Blackwell lost a bid for the Democratic city committee chairmanship to future Representative Robert A. Brady. Blackwell, who led two key Philadelphia political groups—the Black Elected Officials and the United Black Ward Leaders—also worked on Jesse Jackson's 1988 presidential campaign. In 1991, Blackwell made his second mayoral run, finishing second to eventual winner Edward Rendell in a hotly contested Democratic primary.<sup>3</sup>

In June 1991, Representative William Gray, the House Majority Whip and third-ranking Democrat, announced his intention to retire. Gray had represented his West Philadelphia district, which was 80 percent Black and had a long Democratic voting record, since 1979. Blackwell declared his intention to run for the vacant seat and quickly became the front-runner. It was widely speculated that a special election would be scheduled for November 5—the same day Philadelphia voters would select a new mayor and a new U.S. Senator. But Gray—one of Blackwell's political rivals—decided to postpone his resignation until September 11, just 55 days before November 5. According to Pennsylvania state law, special elections could take place no sooner than 60 days after a Member resigned. Gray's late departure threatened to delay the special election until early 1992, giving Blackwell's opponents more time to campaign. The election was initially scheduled for January 1992, but on October 1, the Pennsylvania commonwealth court ruled that the 60-day election law was flexible and allowed for the special election to be scheduled in November.<sup>4</sup>

During a whirlwind campaign, Democratic ward leaders selected Blackwell as the party's official nominee at an October meeting. Blackwell's closest rivals included the young, charismatic state senator Chaka Fattah, a Democrat who was running as a Consumer Party candidate; and the former head of the Pennsylvania welfare department, John F. White Jr., who was running as an Independent. Drawing upon the strength of the local Democratic Party machine and his rapport as councilman with the city's working class, Blackwell prevailed with 39 percent of the vote. Fattah and White each won 28 percent. Blackwell took his seat in the 102nd Congress (1991–1993) on November 13, 1991.<sup>5</sup>

Just five months later, Blackwell faced C. Delores Tucker, a Black woman and Democratic National Committee official who was formerly the secretary of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, in the Democratic primary for the 103rd Congress (1993–1995). Redistricting had cut the Black

majority in the district to 62 percent, forcing both candidates to court a bloc of wealthier White voters in the northwestern section of the city. Backed by national women's groups and civil rights leaders, Tucker accused Blackwell of being “a puppet” of the Philadelphia party bosses. Blackwell emphasized his traditional party and union support. Although Tucker did well in the district's new neighborhoods, Blackwell won the nomination with 54 percent of the vote. He went on to defeat Republican Larry Hollin with 77 percent in the general election.<sup>6</sup>

In the 102nd Congress, Blackwell received appointments to the Public Works Committee and the Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee. Blackwell also served as a member of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC). In the 103rd Congress, widespread Member turnover allowed him to make the largest jump in seniority of any returning lawmaker. In 1993, Blackwell traded his assignment on Merchant Marine and Fisheries for a coveted position on the Budget Committee, formerly chaired by his predecessor, Representative Bill Gray.<sup>7</sup>

As a member of the Budget Committee, Blackwell worked alongside congressional leaders and the William J. Clinton administration to lift the national economy out of a recession. He opposed an amendment to the Constitution requiring a balanced federal budget and worked to dispel the idea “that a balanced budget amendment is a magic wand. One quick wave over the document that represents the heart and soul of this Nation, and the budget will be balanced, the economy restored, and the recession shattered by this almighty amendment.” He asserted that reducing the deficit was necessary to improve the economy and recommended that Congress work to provide new jobs, create a system of fair trade, overhaul the country's tax laws, enact national health insurance legislation, and invest in American cities. Blackwell joined fellow Democrats in supporting the Clinton administration's economic initiatives, proposed in February 1993, which called for reduced federal spending and tax increases for the wealthy.<sup>8</sup>

Drawing on his union experience, Blackwell acted as an advocate for working Americans. He introduced a bill in the 102nd Congress to protect the credit ratings of employees who had lost their jobs because their employers relocated overseas. Blackwell backed the Clinton reform package guaranteeing all Americans basic health coverage, and he voted for the 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act. He also sponsored a bill to protect job applicants

from discrimination based on genetic factors, such as an employee's vulnerability to certain diseases. As the effects of the recession of the early 1990s continued and as his constituents struggled to find work, Blackwell favored extending the amount of time benefits were paid under the 1991 Emergency Unemployment Compensation Act. "The American worker is marching down the street asking for unemployment compensation because he has lost his job," Blackwell said to his colleagues. "I ask every Congressman who does not vote for unemployment compensation tonight, give up your wages, give up your employment, give up what you have earned here, and then tell me it is all right to live off of nothing." Blackwell strongly opposed the North American Free Trade Agreement out of concern that it would exacerbate unemployment rates around the country.<sup>9</sup>

In the May 1994 Democratic primary, Blackwell faced his former opponent Chaka Fattah. Blackwell received endorsements from Mayor Rendell and the local Democratic Party, but his party support was not unanimous—some ward leaders publicly supported Blackwell but backed Fattah in private. One ward leader observed, "Lu's in the fight of his life and Chaka's right on his heels." Though immensely popular among Black, working-class voters, Blackwell struggled to connect with residents in the wealthier and whiter northwestern section of the district. Like Blackwell, Fattah was a career politician, but the young community activist favored a policy-oriented approach to politics independent of the entrenched Democratic Party organization, which broadened his appeal among voters outside of West Philadelphia, where the party machine held the most influence. "No one could talk to poor people any better than Lucien Blackwell," Fattah said. "But that's not 'the district.'" Fattah knew the district inside and out. As a state senator, Fattah had helped draw the boundaries of the new seat during the 1992 redistricting process. Fattah ultimately defeated Blackwell with 58 percent of the vote; Blackwell took 42 percent. In his concession speech Blackwell said, "What I have to do now is take a look at Lucien Blackwell and see what God has in store for him. And I'll show you that God isn't through with me yet."<sup>10</sup>

After leaving Congress in 1995, Blackwell joined a Washington-based lobbying firm, which boasted the city of Philadelphia as one of its largest clients. Blackwell used his congressional connections, particularly through the CBC, to work on the Clinton administration's defense conversion

plan, which redirected Cold War-era defense spending to civilian sector technology grants, as well as welfare reform. He consulted for a Philadelphia debt collection company and served as a delegate to the 1996 Democratic National Convention. In 1997, Blackwell announced his candidacy in a special election to replace Philadelphia Representative Thomas Foglietta, who was appointed U.S. Ambassador to Italy, and whose district contained neighborhoods Blackwell had once represented in the House. Blackwell soon bowed out of the race, claiming he had "just decided it was time to go." On January 24, 2003, after returning home from a morning walk, Blackwell died of a heart attack. His funeral drew nearly 3,000 mourners. Blackwell was buried in Yeadon, Pennsylvania, just outside West Philadelphia.<sup>11</sup>

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## Eva M. Clayton

1934–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1992–2003

Democrat from North Carolina



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 1992, Eva M. Clayton won election to the U.S. House of Representatives to become the first African-American woman to represent North Carolina in Congress and the state's first Black Representative since 1901. From her post on the House Agriculture Committee, Clayton advanced the interests of her rural district in northeastern North Carolina and called attention to the economic inequalities that affected African Americans nationally. Years after leaving the House, Clayton reflected on why she entered public service. Politics, she explained, contained "the possibility that I could help, that I could serve, I could make a difference."<sup>1</sup>

Eva Clayton was born Eva McPherson in Savannah, Georgia, on September 16, 1934. She grew up in North Carolina and received a bachelor's degree in biology from Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte, North Carolina, in 1955. In 1962, she earned a master's degree in biology and general science from North Carolina Central University in Durham. She planned to become a doctor and travel to Africa to do missionary work. Shortly after receiving her undergraduate degree, Eva McPherson married Theaoseus T. Clayton, who became a prominent lawyer. They had four children—Theaoseus Jr., Martin, Reuben, and Joanne—

and while raising her family, Clayton turned her attention away from medicine and enrolled in law school, first at North Carolina Central University and then at University of North Carolina. Having to shoulder the responsibilities of both home life and classwork, however, Clayton reluctantly withdrew from law school after the birth of her fourth child. "I wasn't super enough to be a supermom," Clayton recalled years later. "I left to be a mom. My husband was supportive, but I felt enormously guilty. I think I would do it differently now. I think I would know how to demand more of my husband."<sup>2</sup>

During the 1960s, the civil rights movement motivated Clayton to become active in civic and political affairs. At one point, she picketed her husband's law office to protest his and his White law partner's ownership of a building that contained a segregated restaurant. In 1968, Eva Clayton was recruited by civil rights activist Vernon Jordan, head of the Voter Education Project, to run for Congress in a north-central North Carolina district. Clayton won 31 percent of the vote in the Democratic primary, but the incumbent, Lawrence H. Fountain, prevailed. "In 1968, the timing wasn't there," she later observed. Despite her loss, Clayton's campaign had mobilized volunteers and built a "kind of

community organization” that successfully increased Black voter registration and participation.<sup>3</sup>

In the early 1970s, Clayton worked for several public and private ventures, including the North Carolina health manpower development program at the University of North Carolina. At the time, Clayton and her husband were involved with Soul City, a planned community in rural North Carolina created by lawyer and civil rights activist Floyd McKissick with the intention of being “black owned and operated.” In 1974, Clayton cofounded and served as the executive director of Soul City Foundation, a nonprofit funded mostly through the grants provided by the federal government to offer meal programs, health fairs, and other opportunities to Soul City and the surrounding area. Two years later, she worked on the successful gubernatorial campaign of Jim Hunt, who later appointed Clayton the assistant secretary of the North Carolina department of natural resources and community development. Clayton served as assistant secretary from 1977 until 1981 and developed “a feel for the interrelationship between state and federal government.” After leaving state government, she founded an economic development consulting firm. In 1982, she won election to the Warren County board of commissioners, which she chaired until 1990. Over the next decade, Clayton helped steer more than \$550 million in investments into the county and successfully passed a bond issue for the construction of new schools.<sup>4</sup>

When Representative Walter Beaman Jones Sr. announced his retirement in 1992, Clayton entered the Democratic primary to fill his seat. In contrast with her 1968 campaign, Clayton faced a more favorable electorate and had developed a wealth of experience in state politics and local economic development. Recently redrawn by the state legislature, North Carolina’s First District was one of two new districts in the state with a Black majority. On the campaign trail, Clayton emphasized her career accomplishments and long-standing relationship with district residents. “I have a record, and I’ve demonstrated to you I care. ... I care about rural areas. I care about poverty. I care about you.”<sup>5</sup>

After Jones died in September 1992, his son Walter Beaman Jones Jr., who was considered the favorite in the Democratic primary, captured 38 percent to Clayton’s 31 percent. But because he fell two points shy of winning the nomination outright, the race moved to a runoff. Clayton consolidated the support of her other primary opponents

and won the nomination with 55 percent to Jones’s 45 percent. In the general election, Clayton ran on a platform of increased public investment and job training for rural areas in the district, which covered a large swath of eastern North Carolina including the towns of Goldsboro, Rocky Mount, and Greenville. She advocated slashing the defense budget to lower the federal deficit. “We went into the projects and knocked on doors and got people out” to vote, Clayton recalled.<sup>6</sup>

On November 3, 1992, she won the special election to fill the last two months of Walter Jones Sr.’s unexpired term in the 102nd Congress (1991–1993) and defeated Republican Ted Tyler for a full term in the 103rd Congress (1993–1995). Although Melvin L. Watt, another Black candidate running in North Carolina that year, also won on November 3, Clayton’s simultaneous election to the 102nd Congress meant that she became the first African-American Representative from North Carolina since George Henry White in 1901. Clayton defeated Tyler in her next three re-elections, taking 60 percent or more of the vote. In 1998, the third time she faced Tyler, state courts had redrawn the district by adding 165,000 new constituents and shrinking the African-American majority by 7 percent, effectively dividing the district between Black and White constituents. In 2000, the GOP ran Duane E. Kratzer Jr., who managed just 33 percent of the vote to Clayton’s 66 percent.<sup>7</sup>

Clayton claimed her seat in the 102nd Congress on November 5, 1992, but she did not receive committee assignments until the 103rd Congress convened in January 1993. She won spots on the Agriculture and Small Business Committees. Clayton eventually became the ranking Democrat on the Agriculture Committee’s Operations, Oversight, Nutrition, and Forestry Subcommittee. Clayton also became the first Democratic woman to serve as president of her class of freshman lawmakers. In 1995, she was appointed to the Democratic Advisory Committee to formulate party strategy. In the 105th Congress (1997–1999) she dropped her Small Business assignment for a seat on the prestigious Budget Committee. Clayton was also assigned to the Social Security Task Force.

Clayton was a staunch defender of the rural and agricultural interests of her district, which comprised 20 counties with numerous peanut and tobacco growers. Along with Missouri Republican Jo Ann Emerson, she revived the Rural Caucus and rallied more than 100 Members to pledge continued federal aid to farmers, new rural jobs,

and technology initiatives. In 1993 and 2000, respectively, Clayton voted against the North American Free Trade Agreement and Permanent Normal Trade Relations with China, insisting that both would adversely affect the agricultural industry and eliminate low-wage jobs from her district. “Must eastern North Carolina lose in order for the Research Triangle to win?” she asked, alluding to the state’s booming high-tech corridor to the west of her district. Although Clayton advocated smaller defense budgets, she remained supportive of naval contracts for projects at the nearby Newport News shipyards, which employed her constituents.<sup>8</sup>

From her seat on the Agriculture Committee, Clayton, unlike many of her Democratic colleagues, supported extending tobacco subsidies to farmers at a time when critics sought to cut back the program. “This is not about smoking,” Clayton said. “This is about discriminating against the poorest of the poor of that industry. . . . They really are attacking the small farmer.” She also fought successfully to preserve Section 515 of the U.S. Agriculture Department’s affordable housing program, which provided federal loans for multi-unit housing projects in rural areas.<sup>9</sup>

Clayton addressed food security and hunger as a member of the Agriculture Committee. She defended funding for food stamps and successfully fought to make documented immigrants eligible for the program. She traced her advocacy for food security to her mother. “Because of my age and also the segregation, we didn’t have a lunchroom [at school]. . . . But my mother became the president of the PTA, and she was insistent that there be a lunchroom. They made a lunchroom out of almost a school closet where they kept books, and she and one other person, they would rotate. Finally, the school began giving oranges and fruit, and that was the beginning of a lunchroom.”<sup>10</sup>

In 1999, Clayton’s district suffered a major natural disaster when rain from Hurricane Floyd caused rivers to swell, flooding some parts of eastern North Carolina under 14 feet of water. Clayton and other Members of the state delegation secured billions in relief aid. Clayton helped obtain \$1.5 million in federal money to reconstruct a dike along the Tar River in Princeville, one of the nation’s first towns chartered by free African Americans after the Civil War. She also joined a volunteer force of more than 500 people to help flood victims throughout eastern North Carolina.<sup>11</sup>

As she gained seniority and power in the House, Clayton became a prominent advocate for programs to help poor and

working-class African Americans. Throughout her career, she stressed the importance of job training. “The issue of equity in jobs and fairness of opportunities is paramount,” Clayton said. “Job opportunities combined with a fair wage are key to strengthening families and communities and increasing our quality of life.” As chair of the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, a nonprofit associated with the Congressional Black Caucus, Clayton worked with mortgage lenders to establish the “With Ownership, Wealth” (WOW) program. The WOW program sought to help African American homebuyers through financial education programs and assistance in down payments and closing costs. Clayton’s goal for WOW was to “help bridge the huge racial divide in homeownership rates.” In 1996, she also played a key part in fighting GOP efforts to cut summer job programs for young people. Declaring that she intended “to wake up” the House, Clayton said that the programs helped more than 615,000 job seekers in 650 cities and towns. “This is the first opportunity many of these young people have to get a job.”<sup>12</sup>

In the mid-1990s, amid a push on Capitol Hill to reform the nation’s welfare system, Clayton urged lawmakers to keep individuals and families at the forefront of their work. “The family cannot be a footnote that is added at the end of this reform, but should be an integral part of this legislation in its infancy,” she told the Ways and Means Committee in 1994. As welfare legislation advanced in the House, Clayton advocated for a raise in the minimum wage and for federal funding to help prevent teenage pregnancy. When the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act came to the floor in the 104th Congress (1995–1997), Clayton voted against it. In 1994, Clayton supported the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act believing “it had more positive features to fight crime in our communities than had troubling provisions,” she explained. Even as the Congressional Black Caucus pulled its support and criticized the bill, saying it lacked protections against racial discrimination, Clayton remained in favor of it.<sup>13</sup>

In November 2001, Clayton declined to seek renomination to a sixth term in the House. She had been successful in intense negotiations with state legislators to ensure that her predominantly African-American district was “protected” during reapportionment after the 2000 Census. “My heart is leading me somewhere else,” Clayton said. “I don’t know exactly where that is, but I do want to have another opportunity for public service before I really hang it up.” In the fall 2002 elections, Clayton was

succeeded by Frank W. Ballance Jr., a Black state legislator. After retiring in January 2003, Clayton became the assistant director-general of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, which focused on combatting global hunger from its headquarters in Rome, Italy. She remained in that position for three years before returning to her home in Littleton, North Carolina.<sup>14</sup>

## Manuscript Collection

**Johnson C. Smith University, Inez Moore Parker Archives, James B. Duke Memorial Library** (Charlotte, NC). *Papers*: ca. 1992–2002, 359 archival boxes. The papers of Eva M. Clayton contain floor statements, committee reports, speeches, correspondence, records of donations and events, and other materials that chronicle Clayton's time in the U.S. House of Representatives. The collection includes material related to issues central to her House career, including the U.S. Department of Agriculture's treatment of Black farmers, Hurricane Floyd's impact on North Carolina's agricultural community, the Congressional Black Caucus, and the Rural Caucus of North Carolina. Researchers must contact the library for access to the collection.

## Notes

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# Corrine Brown

1946–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1993–2017

Democrat from Florida



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 1992, Corrine Brown was part of the first group of African-American lawmakers to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives from Florida since 1876. During her congressional career, Brown worked to bring federal programs to her Jacksonville district using her seats on the Transportation and Infrastructure and the Veterans' Affairs Committees. She also pushed civil rights reforms both at home in Jacksonville and abroad. Brown believed her mission in the House went beyond her history-making election in 1992. "It means a lot more than the glamor of being elected," she once remarked. "Once you're elected it means getting things done. It means representing people that have not been part of the process."<sup>1</sup>

Corrine Brown was born in Jacksonville, Florida, on November 11, 1946. She grew up in the city's Northside neighborhood and graduated from Stanton High School. Brown earned a bachelor's degree in 1969 and a master's degree in 1971, both from Florida Agriculture and Mechanical University. In 1972, Brown graduated with an educational specialist degree from the University of Florida. She taught at the University of Florida and Edward Waters College before moving to Florida Community College in Jacksonville, where she taught and served as a guidance

counselor from 1977 to 1992. She also opened her own travel agency in Jacksonville. Brown raised her daughter, Shantrel, as a single mother.<sup>2</sup>

Brown was introduced to politics during her college years at Florida A&M University. There she met Gwen Cherry, the first African-American woman to serve in the state house of representatives. Cherry was Brown's close friend, college sorority sister, and political mentor. Brown was also inspired by campus politics. "The board of regents took two or three programs, the nursing school and law school, from FAMU," she recollected. "That told me we needed to be politically involved." Three years after Cherry died in a car accident, Brown won a seat in the Florida legislature and served for a decade.<sup>3</sup>

In 1992, Brown made the jump from state politics and ran for the U.S. House. No African-American candidate had won election to Congress from Florida since Representative Josiah T. Walls served during Reconstruction 115 years earlier. During the redistricting process in the lead up to the 1992 elections, Brown was one of several plaintiffs in a federal lawsuit that accused state legislators of diluting Black voters in majority-White districts. She testified in favor of a map that would create several Black-majority

districts. When the legislature failed to agree on a map, the court redrew the district lines. One of the new districts was just over 50 percent Black and resembled a horseshoe stretching from Jacksonville to Orlando and west through Gainesville and Ocala. Having won the lawsuit, Brown filed her candidacy to represent the northeastern Florida district, which included her hometown.<sup>4</sup>

Brown faced stiff competition in the Democratic primary. Her three challengers included Arnett Girardeau, a Black state senator with 16 years' experience; Orlando-based school guidance counselor Glennie Mills; and the only White candidate, talk show host Andy Johnson. Looking to the grassroots, Brown branched out from Jacksonville and crisscrossed the district. "I have really learned the back roads," she noted. Brown came in first in the primary election, but since no candidate took a majority in the first round of voting, Brown went to an October runoff where she defeated Johnson.<sup>5</sup>

In the general election, Brown faced Republican Don Weidner, general counsel for the Florida Physicians Association. Her campaign promised to direct federal resources to the district, fix the school system, bring jobs to the area, and protect Social Security and Medicare. On Election Day, Brown won by 18 percent of the vote. She made history that fall alongside Alcee L. Hastings and Carrie P. Meek as the first African-American lawmakers elected from Florida since Reconstruction. Although Florida changed her district borders four times, she generally won re-election with 55 percent or more of the vote.<sup>6</sup>

When Brown took her seat in the 103rd Congress (1993–1995), she received assignments to three committees: Government Operations; Veterans' Affairs; and Public Works and Transportation. In the 104th Congress (1995–1997), she stepped down from Government Operations. She retained her seats on Public Works and Transportation (later named Transportation and Infrastructure) and Veterans' Affairs for her entire career. Brown chaired Transportation's Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials during the 110th and 111th Congresses (2007–2011) and became ranking member of Veterans' Affairs in the 114th Congress (2015–2017).<sup>7</sup>

Not only was Brown one of the first Black women elected from Florida, she was also part of a wave of Black lawmakers elected in 1992 that increased the membership of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) from 26 to 40. Brown was elected the CBC's first vice chair in the 109th Congress

(2005–2007). The 1992 election cycle also saw huge growth in the number of women in Congress, and Brown was an active member of the Women's Caucus as well.<sup>8</sup>

Brown's main priority in Congress was to improve the economy in northern Florida by steering federal aid to her district. Using earmarks—the practice in which lawmakers fund specific projects and programs using large discretionary congressional spending bills—Brown led the effort to construct an \$86 million federal courthouse in Jacksonville. She testified before the Transportation and Appropriations Committees to secure federal dollars to repair the Fuller Warren Bridge in Jacksonville, where Interstate 95 crossed the St. John's River. She later directed money to a new mental health and rehabilitation center in Jacksonville and funded a biofuel conversion project. Brown attributed these successes to "hard work, persistence, and a thorough understanding of the appropriations process." When Congress imposed a moratorium on earmarks in the 112th Congress (2011–2013), Brown did not alter course. She vowed "to continue what I have been doing every single day since my first election in 1992, specifically bring home a fair share of the federal dollars."<sup>9</sup>

From her seat on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Brown fought to initiate Florida rail projects to meet the state's booming transportation needs. While working on the 1998 surface transportation bill, she helped orchestrate a nearly 60-percent increase in funding for federal transportation programs back home. Throughout her career, she frequently advocated for a robust Amtrak budget. During debate over a 2006 appropriations bill, Brown successfully incorporated an amendment that ensured funding for 18 Amtrak routes across the country. "If we do not fund Amtrak, we will leave 25 million people waiting for a train that is not coming," she said on the House Floor. As chair of the Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials, she worked with the full committee's chair, James Louis Oberstar of Minnesota, to craft the Rail Safety Improvement Act, which provided funding for computer-assisted train operation and placed limits on work hours for rail employees, among other safety improvements. It was signed into law in 2008. Brown also frequently defended the CSX Corporation, a railway freight company based in her district.<sup>10</sup>

Less than a month after the September 11, 2001 attacks, Brown introduced the Port and Maritime Security Act of 2001, which sought to improve security procedures

in the country's seaports. As the top Democrat on the Transportation Committee's Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Marine Transportation, she served on the conference committee for a similar bill, the Maritime Transportation Security Act, which became law in 2002.<sup>11</sup>

With a large military presence in her district, most notably the Jacksonville Naval Air Station, Brown regularly supported defense funding. Brown described the military as a place where working-class Americans could find opportunities unavailable elsewhere, and she wanted more resources for personnel training. As a member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, she was also attentive to the needs of women veterans and veteran's health care. Brown sponsored bills strengthening infant and maternal care, as well as legislation increasing access to breast cancer treatment. In 2011, her bill to grant a Congressional Gold Medal to the Montford Point Marines—the first African Americans to serve in the Marine Corps—was signed into law. She declared it to be “one of the proudest moments I have ever experienced in all my years of service.”<sup>12</sup>

At times, Brown addressed issues far outside her district. In 1993, shortly after arriving on Capitol Hill, she worked with other Florida and CBC Members to push the William J. Clinton administration to apply economic pressure on Haiti to restore its democratic government by re-installing deposed President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Brown saw military force in Haiti as an option of last resort, preferring to use foreign aid to encourage change. She urged U.S. officials to offer political asylum to thousands of Haitians who arrived in the United States looking for help. Brown also took up the cause of Liberians, pushing to extend temporary visa status for thousands who came to America after a civil war in Liberia during the early 1990s. “It seems as if we have two policies, one for people from Africa and Haiti and one for everybody else,” she said. “Our policy pertaining to immigration is very racist in nature.” In 2000, she gave an impassioned speech on the House Floor imploring Congress to budget more money to fight the global AIDS epidemic. “AIDS in Africa is a direct threat to our country, especially in today's interconnected world,” she observed.<sup>13</sup>

Brown had an outspoken legislative style. In 2004, Brown briefly lost her speaking privileges on the House Floor when she accused Republicans of executing a “coup d'état” and of stealing the contested 2000 presidential election results in Florida. The House had her words taken

down, a parliamentary procedure invoked when a Member has violated House decorum—in this case, accusing another Member of a crime. The House also voted to have her words stricken from the *Congressional Record*. Brown remained unapologetic about the incident. “If they're going to take down my words for telling the truth, that's OK,” she responded.<sup>14</sup>

Although Brown ran into ethical and legal trouble during her career, her constituents continued to return her to office, and she ran unopposed in 2006 and 2008. As she approached her primary election in 2016, however, she faced two challenges. A state court ordered Florida to redraw its districts after ruling that the existing borders purposefully segregated minority voters into a single district. Brown's new district stretched east to west along the Georgia border from Jacksonville to Tallahassee, and though it was 45 percent African-American, Brown lost much of her traditional constituency along the St. John's River. Secondly, in July 2016, a grand jury charged Brown and her chief of staff with 24 counts of mail and wire fraud, conspiracy, obstruction, and filing false tax returns. The charges stemmed from Brown's tie to a charity which provided scholarships to low-income students. The lawsuit alleged that Brown and several associates siphoned off money to pay for personal expenses.<sup>15</sup>

A few weeks after her indictment, Brown lost a three-way race in the Democratic primary. On May 11, 2017, Brown was convicted on 18 fraud and tax charges. She reported to Coleman Federal Correctional Institute in Sumter County, Florida, on January 29, 2018, to begin a five-year sentence. Two years later, Brown was released from prison after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. On May 7, 2021, a federal appeals court, citing a trial error, overturned her conviction and ordered a new trial.<sup>16</sup>

## Notes

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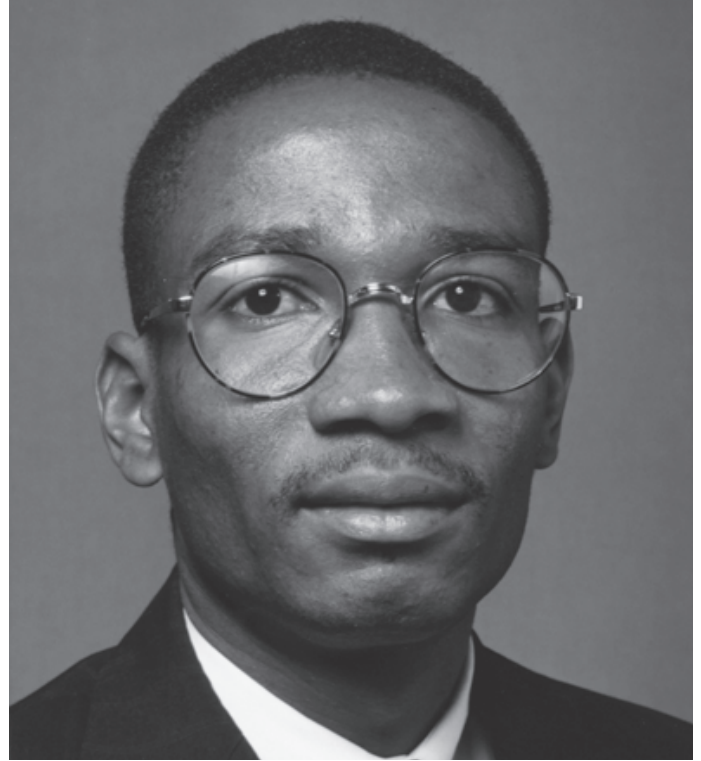
## Cleo Fields

1962–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1993–1997

Democrat from Louisiana



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

From an impoverished childhood, Cleo Fields rose to win a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives at age 29, serving as the youngest Member of the 103rd Congress (1993–1995). As the second Black Representative from Louisiana since Reconstruction, Fields worked to make banking lending practices equitable and advocated in favor of the state's efforts to draw majority-minority congressional districts. "The issue is not about whether I will serve in Congress, but it is about whether someone like me will have the opportunity to serve in Congress," he said.<sup>1</sup>

Cleo Fields was born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, on November 22, 1962, one of 10 children of Isidore, a dockworker, and Alice Fields, a maid. Isidore died in a car crash on his way home from working a double shift. After his father's death, the Fields household struggled to make ends meet. "I didn't know what poor was," Fields later recalled, "I thought mommas were supposed to put three patches in a pair of pants. In junior high school, it really hit me in the face. That's when I realized what my mother was going through." At one point, the family was evicted from a Baton Rouge apartment. Throughout his youth, Fields worked several jobs to aid his family, taking a shift at a fast-food restaurant and working at the Baton Rouge mayor's

office of youth opportunity to save money for college. After graduating from McKinley High School in Baton Rouge, Fields attended cross-town Southern University, earning a bachelor and law degree. Politics became his passion. During law school, he began circulating bumper stickers to classmates that read, "I'm waiting for Cleo Fields." Fields noted, "I didn't know which office I would run for, so I didn't want to be too specific."<sup>2</sup>

During his final year of law school in 1987, Fields ran a grassroots campaign for the Louisiana state senate. With the help of student volunteers and his family, Fields ousted an entrenched incumbent. Fields's victory made the 24-year-old the youngest state legislator elected in Louisiana history. In the state senate, Fields focused on environmental and economic opportunities, issues important to his constituents, especially people of color. He also emerged as a leader in the effort to combat illegal drugs. Fields married his high school sweetheart, Debra Horton. The couple had two sons: Cleo Brandon and Christopher.<sup>3</sup>

In 1990, Fields ran unsuccessfully against incumbent Republican Clyde Cecil Holloway for a U.S. House seat encompassing central Louisiana that included portions of the state capital, Baton Rouge. The district's population,

which was 38 percent Black, had voted for Democratic candidates in three of the past four presidential elections. Fields was runner-up in the open-party primary, unique to Louisiana at the time, in which candidates from all parties competed in the same race. On October 6, Holloway won with 56 percent of the vote to Fields's 30 percent.<sup>4</sup>

After Louisiana lost a seat in the House following the 1990 Census, Fields used his senate seat to help shape the state's redistricting plan, creating an oddly shaped congressional district that he would seek to represent in 1992. The new Fourth District hugged Louisiana's eastern and northern borders, jutting occasionally toward the central part of the state and forming a loose "Z" shape. It encompassed a large area, stretching east and west of Baton Rouge, north up the Mississippi River to the Arkansas border and west through Shreveport, taking in a wide mix of rural and urban communities. The state senate designed the district so that it would have a Black majority, and registered Democrats outnumbered Republicans 8 to 1. It was one of two Black-majority districts in the state; Representative William J. Jefferson represented the other, which covered greater New Orleans. In the open primary, Fields received 48 percent of the vote, making him the top vote-getter, but because he fell just short of the 50 percent he needed to win outright, he faced African-American state senator Charles "C.D." Jones in the Election Day runoff. Fields ran an energetic door-to-door campaign and defeated Jones handily with 74 percent of the vote. During the race, Fields emphasized three issues which would define his career: creating jobs, lowering the cost of health care, and reducing the federal deficit.<sup>5</sup>

Fields joined the 103rd Congress as its youngest Member, and at times he was mistaken for a staffer. He recalled his first opportunity to preside over the House: "The phones started to ring off the hook in the Parliamentarian's office, saying that a page was presiding over the House of Representatives." During his two terms in Congress, Fields was assigned to the Small Business Committee as well as the Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs (later renamed Banking and Financial Services) Committee. As a legislator, Fields largely aligned himself with the President William J. Clinton administration's objectives. He voted in favor of the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act, which mandated a five-day waiting period for handgun sales, and backed Clinton's 1993 deficit reduction plan. He broke with the Clinton

White House on two major issues, however. He opposed the North American Free Trade Agreement, out of concern that it would hurt businesses in his district, and he voted against the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 over its expanded use of capital punishment. "I cannot in my conscience vote for a crime bill that has 60 different death penalties," he declared, arguing that the policy could disproportionately affect African Americans.<sup>6</sup>

From his seat on the Banking Committee, Fields introduced two bills designed to regulate banks and other businesses that cash checks. The congressman learned that many of his low-income constituents faced difficulties when cashing checks, including government benefits. Check-bearers were turned away from banks where they did not have accounts and resorted to cashing checks at unregulated businesses that charged high fees. Fields's legislation sought to limit those fees and prohibit banks from refusing government checks. Neither bill got out of committee.<sup>7</sup>

During his time in the House, Fields defended the borders of his district against several lawsuits. In 1992, four residents of the Fourth District filed a lawsuit, arguing that by packing African Americans into two "super-majority" districts, Louisiana was diluting their political strength in the rest of the state. In December 1993, a federal three-judge panel invalidated Fields's district and required the state to conduct another redistricting. In April 1994, the state legislature redrew the district to resemble a wedge running between northwestern and central Louisiana. Fields's hometown of Baton Rouge remained within the district and the new borders still contained a majority-Black population (58 percent). Not satisfied, the same plaintiffs filed suit again. Only after the U.S. Supreme Court issued a stay in August did the 1994 election proceed with Fields running in the wedge-shaped district. Fields trounced his opponent, Republican Patricia Slocum, in the open primary with 70 percent of the vote. But the ongoing legal challenges required much of Fields's attention. "For four years, I had one foot in the House and one foot across the street in the Supreme Court," Fields later recalled. "I was under this dark cloud the whole time I was up there. I never knew if I would be there the next day." Fields blamed the political enemies he made during his years in the state senate for the relentless attacks on the boundaries of his district.<sup>8</sup>

Amid the redistricting battle, Fields ran for governor of Louisiana in 1995. Fields worked to mobilize Black voters, and in the crowded open-primary, Fields's campaign focused

on improving education and eliminating poverty. Fields won 19 percent of the vote, the top Democrat, and finished as the runner-up to Republican Mike Foster—whose family had a history of service in the state and who switched party affiliation just weeks before the primary election. Fields ended up losing the runoff—which was mostly divided on racial lines—taking 36 percent of the vote.<sup>9</sup>

On January 5, 1996, a U.S. District Court ruled that Fields's wedge-shaped district was unconstitutional because it was drawn with race as a primary factor. The court then drew a new map, which featured compact districts that ran largely along parish lines—Fields's district was redrawn into a rectangular shape that ran from Louisiana's northwest border south through Shreveport. Fields opposed the map because it eliminated his district's Black majority, leaving the state with only one majority-minority district. Fields also no longer lived in the new district; his Baton Rouge home ended up being drawn into a district represented by the veteran House Republican Richard Hugh Baker. Louisiana's attorney general appealed the District Court's ruling to the U.S. Supreme Court, but the state legislature—following the lead of the newly elected Governor Mike Foster—adopted the court's map in April 1996, despite Fields's plea to the statehouse. Fields chose not to run against Baker in 1996. "I don't want to leave the impression that I am bitter [about the apportionment battle]. I want people to know how honored I am," he told reporters, "I got 17 percent of the white vote [in the governor's race]. For a then-33-year-old candidate like me to get 17 percent of the cross-over vote, I think that says there's a bright future ahead."<sup>10</sup>

Though Fields debated running for an open U.S. Senate seat when Senator John Bennett Johnston Jr. retired, he ultimately decided to pass on the election, citing his earlier loss for governor. After leaving Congress, Fields was active in the 1996 presidential campaign, serving as a senior advisor on Clinton's re-election campaign. In 1997, he took an appointment with Vice President Albert Gore Jr. directing a federal program that awarded grants and economic incentives to impoverished communities, classified as "empowerment zones" and "enterprise communities," each receiving a different level of federal aid. Several of these zones were in Fields's former Louisiana district.<sup>11</sup>

Fields returned to the state senate in a special election in December 1997, serving simultaneously with his younger brother, Wilson. Fields began hosting a weekly radio program in Baton Rouge, called "Cleo Live," which drew

prominent Black politicians as guests. He also opened a law practice. "The more I get into my law practice, the less appealing returning to Congress becomes," Fields confessed. "It's been one of the most productive things I've done with my life." But he also conceded, "When I was in Congress, I thought it was the greatest job in the world." Fields served in Baton Rouge until term limits forced him out of office in 2008. Term limits in the Louisiana legislature only applied to consecutive terms and were not a lifetime limit. After a 12-year period as a private citizen, Fields again won election to his old state senate seat in 2019 for a term that began in 2020.<sup>12</sup>

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# Alcee L. Hastings

1936–2021

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1993–2021

Democrat from Florida



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 1993, Alcee L. Hastings, a civil rights attorney who served as the first Black federal judge in Florida history before being impeached and removed from the bench, became one of the first Black Members of Congress from Florida since Reconstruction. Hastings went on to serve 14 terms in Congress where he was regarded as an expert on foreign policy, serving on both the Foreign Affairs and Select Permanent Committee on Intelligence; he also held a seat on the powerful Rules Committee. Looking back at his full career, Hastings explained: “All of those are extraordinary types of circumstances that would cause lesser people to buckle. I did not and I have not.”<sup>1</sup>

Alcee Lamar Hastings was born in Altamonte Springs, Florida, at the time a small farming community north of Orlando, on September 5, 1936. Hastings was an only child. His parents, Julius C. and Mildred L. Hastings, were domestic workers who found work out of state for better wages. Hastings, who lived with his maternal grandmother, graduated from Crooms Academy in Sanford, Florida, in 1953. When Hastings was growing up, central Florida was thoroughly segregated. As a high school friend, and later law partner, remembered: “Both of us were bused in, to Crooms. It was the black school. Totally segregated.

Everything. The whole town.” Hastings attended historically Black universities for the entirety of his post-secondary education. In 1958, Hastings earned a bachelor’s degree in zoology and botany from Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, and later attended Howard University School of Law in Washington, DC. Hastings left Howard early and earned a law degree from Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University in Tallahassee, Florida. In 1964, he was admitted to the Florida bar, and he practiced as a civil rights and criminal defense attorney for the next 13 years. Hastings was married three times and had three children.<sup>2</sup>

Hastings became a lawyer at the height of the civil rights movement in Florida. He joined a practice in Fort Lauderdale and quickly became a prominent attorney and community leader in efforts to desegregate South Florida. Hastings and his partner successfully sued a local restaurant and hotel to end discriminatory practices. Working with the local NAACP, Hastings sued the Broward County school district to desegregate. In 1970, Hastings ran a largely symbolic campaign as the first African-American candidate for a U.S. Senate seat from Florida. As he explained to a reporter: “I want black children to know that this is their country and they have a right to run for any office

they choose, even the presidency.” Hastings experienced violent opposition to his campaign; someone shot at his house, leaving a bullet embedded in his mailbox next to his front door. Hastings made several other unsuccessful runs for office, before being appointed as a circuit court judge in Broward County, Florida, in 1977. In 1979, President James Earl “Jimmy” Carter appointed Hastings to a U.S. District Court seat in Miami, making him the first Black federal judge in Florida history.<sup>3</sup>

In 1981, Alcee Hastings’s promising judicial career came to an abrupt halt. Hastings was indicted by a federal grand jury for allegedly soliciting bribes in return for lessening the sentence in a case. A jury acquitted Hastings in 1983, but a lawyer who claimed he was working in tandem with the judge was sentenced to three years in prison. Soon after Hastings’s acquittal, two fellow federal judges, believing Hastings was guilty and that he had perjured himself, used a 1980 federal law to file an official complaint against Hastings. A special committee was formed and led by John Doar, a former U.S. Attorney famous for his work during the civil rights movement and with the House Judiciary Committee during the impeachment investigation of President Richard M. Nixon. The committee concluded there was substantial evidence of wrongdoing by Hastings and forwarded their findings to the Judicial Conference of the United States. The Judicial Conference, headed by Supreme Court Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist, sent the U.S. House of Representatives its conclusion that Hastings participated in potentially impeachable offenses.<sup>4</sup>

In the House, Michigan Representative John Conyers Jr., chair of the Subcommittee on Criminal Justice of the Committee on the Judiciary led Hastings’s impeachment investigation. Conyers, who spent his congressional career as an outspoken opponent of what he saw as a racist criminal justice system was initially skeptical of the charges against Hastings. But he eventually concluded Hastings was guilty. The House voted 413 to 3 to impeach Hastings on 17 counts. The Senate agreed and voted guilty on 8 of the 17 counts to remove Hastings from office. But, significantly for Hastings’s future, the Senate did not ban him from holding other federal offices. Throughout the trial, Hastings maintained his innocence. Defiant, on the Capitol steps after the Senate trial, Hastings announced he was going to run for governor of Florida.<sup>5</sup>

Hastings ran for Florida secretary of state instead and finished a distant second. In 1992, he ran for Congress after

court-ordered reapportionment in Florida—in compliance with the 1982 Voting Rights Amendments—created a majority-Black district covering large portions of Broward County including West Palm Beach and western Fort Lauderdale. In a close race in September 1992, Hastings placed second in a five-candidate primary behind Florida state representative Lois Frankel. In the ensuing runoff, Hastings defeated Frankel with 58 percent of the vote. The primary victory in the heavily Democratic district virtually assured Hastings a seat in the U.S. House; in November, he defeated Ed Fielding, a real estate salesman, with 58 percent of the vote. Along with newly elected Representatives Carrie P. Meek and Corrine Brown, Hastings became one of the first African Americans elected to the U.S. Congress from Florida since the Reconstruction era. In his subsequent elections, Hastings never won by less than 73 percent of the vote and occasionally ran unopposed.<sup>6</sup>

When Hastings entered the House in January 1993, he received assignments to three committees: Foreign Affairs; Merchant Marine and Fisheries; and Post Office and Civil Service. He served on Foreign Affairs through the 106th Congress (1999–2001). When the Republican majority disbanded both the Merchant Marine and Fisheries and Post Office and Civil Service Committees in the 104th Congress (1995–1997), he was reassigned to the Science Committee, where he served through the 105th Congress (1997–1999). In 1999, Hastings earned a seat on the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, where he eventually served as vice chair of the full committee and two of its subcommittees. He was a member of the Intelligence Committee from the beginning of the 106th Congress (1999–2001) through December 2007, and again in the 111th Congress (2009–2011). Members on the Intelligence Committee had a term limit; by stepping down before the end of the 110th Congress (2007–2009), Hastings was able to return to the committee later and serve another full two-year term.<sup>7</sup>

In 2001, Hastings was appointed to the Rules Committee to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Massachusetts Representative Joseph Moakley. He would stay on the committee for the rest of his career. The Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) was instrumental in winning Hastings the appointment; he was the first Black lawmaker on the committee since Alan Wheat retired in 1994. The Rules Committee has immense power in the House; it sets the

rules for debate and the number of amendments for every bill that reaches the floor. Hastings appreciated the opportunities provided on the panel. “People understand that term ‘power’ ... rather than working on the fringes of legislation, I will be responsible for being directly involved.” Hastings chaired the Rules Committee’s Subcommittee on Legislative and Budget Process during the 110th, 111th, 116th (2019–2021), and 117th (2021–2023) Congresses.<sup>8</sup>

In 2007, Hastings was in the running for chair of the Intelligence Committee after the Democrats regained the majority in the House. The appointment ultimately went to Texas Democrat Silvestre Reyes. The national press, and Hastings as well, believed his previous impeachment prevented the South Florida Representative from becoming chair. Hastings understood he could not outlive the impeachment, that despite his successful congressional career, it was, as he told a reporter, “part of my life. ... It will be in my obituary.”<sup>9</sup>

Hastings gained a reputation for speaking out in defense of Democratic policies on the Rules Committee. During debate over a health care bill in 2017, Hastings explained to a Republican committee member who asked to bring down the tone of the debate: “I’m not going to bring my tone down. I’m mad as hell about what you all are doing, and I don’t have to be nice to nobody when you’re being nasty to poor people.” Hastings’s willingness to speak his mind was viewed as a strength among his supporters. Theodore E. “Ted” Deutch, a fellow South Florida Democratic Representative, explained that Hastings was someone “who can stand up to a bull, who can represent people whose voices need to be heard, who’s unafraid to say what needs to be said.”<sup>10</sup>

Through his work on the Foreign Policy Committee and the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, Hastings became regarded as an expert on American foreign policy in the House. In 2004, he was elected chair of the Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe’s (OSCE) Parliamentary Assembly, an organization formed in the early 1990s to foster better communication between national parliaments. Then in 2007 he was selected as chair of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, better known as the U.S. Helsinki Commission, which was created by Congress because of the 1975 Helsinki Accords to monitor human and democratic rights and cooperation among the participants in the diplomatic agreement.<sup>11</sup>

One of the primary tasks of the OSCE’s Parliamentary Assembly was election monitoring to help ensure fair elections. As head of the OSCE, Hastings led teams to monitor the elections in, among other countries, Ukraine and Azerbaijan; in both elections, the OSCE highlighted evidence of fraud. The expansion and protection of fair democratic elections, abroad and at home, was one of Hastings’s primary interests in the House. Hastings introduced resolutions that successfully passed the House calling for fair elections in Gabon and Haiti. In 2001, he won a promise from the chair of the Appropriations Committee, Florida Republican Charles William “Bill” Young, to provide federal money for election reforms in the United States. Hastings initially sponsored a \$600 million amendment, but he withdrew it after he reached an agreement with Young. “It is essential that Congress provide states and local governments the necessary assistance needed to improve their antiquated systems,” Hastings said.<sup>12</sup>

Since his time as a judge, Hastings had an interest in Haiti and the rights of Haitian immigrants. There was a large Haitian and Haitian American population in his South Florida district. In his first term in Congress, Hastings supported the intervention by the American military after a coup deposed Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. In 1994, after President William J. Clinton had already sent troops to Haiti, Hastings helped write a substitute to a House Joint Resolution that supported the military intervention but called for the President to present to Congress a plan for the intervention. The substitute amendment passed the House. Hastings also introduced legislation to reform immigration policies to treat political refugees from Haiti in a similar manner to migrants with refugee status from other countries. The bill was not reported out of committee.<sup>13</sup>

On the Intelligence Committee, Representative Hastings prodded U.S. security agencies to recruit more widely, insisting that reforms to the intelligence community “should include diversity. There should be more women, more Arab-language speakers, more [foreign-]language speakers generally, more Asians, more Latinos, more blacks.” Hastings also lobbied for funding for “centers of academic excellence,” to recruit and train more women and racial minorities for intelligence work.<sup>14</sup>

As part of his foreign policy and intelligence work, Hastings, who opposed the Iraq War without support from the United Nations or a postwar plan, remained critical of

the threat to civil liberties he saw in some counter-terrorism legislation. During debate on a 2012 defense authorization bill, Hastings criticized the legislation, saying: “In one fell swoop we have set up a situation where American citizens could have their Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth amendment rights violated on mere suspicions. ... This legislation goes too far.”<sup>15</sup>

Allegations of ethical misconduct continued to follow Hastings throughout his congressional career. In 2010, a former employee accused Hastings of sexual harassment which Hastings denied. The House Ethics Committee found that the accusations did not “rise to level of a violation of House rules” and the U.S. Congress Office of Compliance eventually came to a financial settlement with the complainant. In 2019, the House Ethics Committee investigated Hastings following allegations that he had an improper relationship with an aide. The committee dropped the investigation in 2020.<sup>16</sup>

In early 2019, Hastings announced that he was diagnosed with stage 4 pancreatic cancer. He was re-elected to the 117th Congress but was too ill to attend his swearing-in in January 2021. Hastings died on April 6, 2021. At the time of his death, he was the dean of the Florida congressional delegation.<sup>17</sup>

## Manuscript Collection

**Broward County Library** (Ft. Lauderdale, FL). *Papers*: The Alcee L. Hastings Collection features digital photographs of his career and is available on the Broward County Library website. *Memorabilia*: The Alcee L. Hastings Collection contains certificates, plaques, and other ephemera. The collection is open for use.

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## Earl F. Hilliard

1942–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1993–2003

Democrat from Alabama



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 1993, Earl F. Hilliard became the first African-American lawmaker from Alabama to serve in Congress since 1877 when Jeremiah Haralson held an Alabama seat during Reconstruction. After a long career in the state legislature, Hilliard served in the U.S. House of Representatives for five terms where he prioritized the needs of his constituents, pushing legislation to advance the agricultural prospects of rural communities throughout Alabama's Black Belt as well as advocating for jobs in its nearby cities. "We have not had a voice in 117 years," Hilliard declared upon his first election. "I will be able to articulate the views and opinions of a group that hasn't had representation in a very long time."<sup>1</sup>

Earl Frederick Hilliard was born in Birmingham, Alabama, on April 9, 1942, to Iola Frazier and William Hilliard. Hilliard grew up in a segregated society and graduated from Western-Olin High School in Birmingham. He pursued higher education at three prominent historically Black colleges and universities. At Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, where Hilliard earned a bachelor's degree in 1964, Hilliard met Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The meeting had a powerful effect on him, and Hilliard vowed to become "one of King's foot soldiers in the war for racial equality." Three years later, in 1967, Hilliard received

a law degree from Howard University Law School in Washington, DC. In 1970, he received a master of business administration at Atlanta University in Georgia. Hilliard was admitted to the Alabama Bar and returned to his native Birmingham to practice law. He married Mary Franklin, and the couple had two children: Alesia and Earl Jr.<sup>2</sup>

Hilliard began his political career when he won a seat in the Alabama state house of representatives in 1974. In 1980, he was elected to the state senate. Hilliard's senate career focused on helping his low-income constituents in the Birmingham area. He also earned a reputation as a hard-fighting, tactical legislator. In 1991, Hilliard declared bankruptcy after a deal to sell a radio station he owned fell through. That experience, he said, gave him a new perspective that he believed benefited him as a legislator. "That bankruptcy gave me a chance to pay people back in an orderly manner," he noted. "I'm able to understand what it is not to be able to pay obligations."<sup>3</sup>

In 1992, when Alabama redrew its congressional districts following the 1990 Census, the state legislature created a single Black-majority district that stretched across west-central Alabama from the Mississippi border through Selma to Montgomery and included portions of Tuscaloosa and

Birmingham. Montgomery and Birmingham made up the bulk of the urban population, and the district also included rural communities in the state's "Black Belt," so-called for its dark, fertile soil. The district's three major cities—Selma, Montgomery, and Birmingham—had been focal points in the civil rights movement. Hilliard entered the race for the Democratic nomination for the new district and faced a crowded field of six candidates in his June 2 primary. The frontrunner was Hank Sanders of Selma, who, like Hilliard, served in the state senate. In an arduous campaign, Hilliard and Sanders squared off on issues including health care and job creation. On Election Day, Hilliard prevailed with 31 percent of the vote against Sanders's 24 percent. But because no candidate captured a majority, Hilliard and Sanders went to an August runoff election where Hilliard narrowly defeated Sanders with just over 50 percent of the vote. Because the district was overwhelmingly Democratic, winning the primary was tantamount to winning the general election. In that contest, Hilliard defeated Republican Kervin Jones, a Black Tuscaloosa farmer, with 70 percent of the vote. In his next four re-elections, Hilliard won at least 71 percent of the vote, running unopposed in 1998.<sup>4</sup>

In the House, Hilliard was initially assigned to the Agriculture and Small Business Committees. In 1996, he traded the Small Business post for a seat on the International Relations Committee. An active member of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), Hilliard was elected vice chair of the organization for the 105th Congress (1997–1999).<sup>5</sup>

One of Hilliard's priorities in Congress was to secure job opportunities in his district. He advocated for expanding the Alabama military installations used by the U.S. Army and NASA and closing American military bases in Germany and Japan so that more funding would be available for domestic military installations. He also worked to protect a Tuscaloosa-area airport that served his rural constituents after the airport's only carrier threatened to leave in 1995. "Tuscaloosa and the surrounding communities would suffer terribly without local air service, and this travel option will become increasingly important as industrial development continues in the area," he wrote to a colleague. Due in large part to Hilliard's efforts, the House and Senate Appropriations Committees diverted funding to maintain the Tuscaloosa airport as part of the Essential Air Service program which had been created to ensure airlines served rural regions of the country. Hilliard also was crucial in

convincing a Korean-based car manufacturer to open a plant outside Montgomery. Hilliard was a featured speaker at the plant's groundbreaking ceremony in April 2002.<sup>6</sup>

In 1993, Hilliard strongly opposed the North American Free Trade Agreement, which had been negotiated by the William J. Clinton administration to facilitate commerce between the United States, Mexico, and Canada, out of concern that it would eliminate working- and middle-class jobs from his district. "My constituents will not be around to reap the so-called long term benefits of this agreement," Hilliard warned. He also voted against a 1996 welfare reform bill that shifted much responsibility to fund and implement the country's safety net to the states. "Without the federal money there ... I expect for Alabama to do less for the needy," he predicted. Hilliard broke with Democrats on several other major legislative provisions. In 1994, he voted against the Clinton administration's crime bill because he opposed the assault weapons ban and the lack of adequate funding available for crime prevention and educational programs. Hilliard was one of only 12 Democrats to vote against a 2002 bipartisan campaign reform bill because he believed that the legislation's restrictions on "soft money" campaign contributions would disproportionately hurt low-income and rural communities. Soft money, which is not directed towards a specific candidate, was often used to help pay for voter registration and mobilization.<sup>7</sup>

From his seat on the Agriculture Committee, Hilliard worked to help the rural regions of his district by submitting legislation to establish a Southern Rural Development Commission, which he modeled on the Appalachian Regional Commission. The purpose of the commission was to dispense federal money to projects enhancing economic development, improving health care, and offering job training. The new commission would have covered agricultural regions of 10 southern states, but the measure died in committee. Hilliard also offered creative legislation proposing to add rabbit to the list of meats that were federally inspected. Hilliard hoped federal safety requirements would increase rabbit's popularity among consumers and believed his constituents could breed the animals for national markets.<sup>8</sup>

In 1996 and again in 2002, Hilliard helped shape the farm bill, a massive legislative package that set America's agriculture policy that was regularly updated and reauthorized. Hilliard amended the 2002 bill to provide \$25 million annually for a U.S. Agriculture Department program to provide educational

and technical assistance to minority farmers. “The number of black farmers who own their own land has dropped by over 90% since 1910, and we are still losing them rapidly. We need to help them stay on the land and be profitable,” Hilliard declared.<sup>9</sup>

On the International Relations Committee, Hilliard sought to diversify the U.S. State Department’s staff. During a committee markup, he inserted a provision into the 2003 foreign relations authorization bill to require the State Department to report to Congress its data on minority employment. Hilliard’s frequent foreign travel as a member of the committee garnered national attention. In August 1997, he made an unauthorized trip to Libya. The State Department had banned American travel to Libya and all business and financial transactions with the country following the decision to sanction Libya and declare it a terrorist state in 1986.<sup>10</sup>

During an investigation by the Ethics Committee into Hilliard’s travel, Hilliard revealed that an oil company headed by a wealthy Tunisian businessman had paid for the trip. Hilliard claimed he went to Libya to investigate how American money was being spent abroad and “develop channels for dialogue” with the Muslim world. “The majority of our foreign aid is spent in that Middle Eastern region between Egypt and other north African countries,” Hilliard explained. “[Libya] was a country I had not been to, and I had the opportunity to go this time and I went.” In a letter to his constituents, Hilliard noted that he did not use his American passport to enter the country and that he did not spend any money, which was later confirmed by the U.S. Treasury Department. In November 1997, the Ethics Committee dropped its investigation into Hilliard’s trip. In June 2001, the Ethics Committee issued a written rebuke over a separate incident in which Hilliard was accused of misappropriating campaign funds for his and his family’s personal use.<sup>11</sup>

In the 2000 Democratic primary, Hilliard faced Artur Davis, a former assistant district attorney who earned the endorsement of the mayor of Birmingham. Hilliard ultimately fended him off with 58 percent of the vote, but Davis returned two years later for a rematch. Davis accused Hilliard of doing little for the district in his decade in office. Moreover, redistricting had added more voters from counties that favored Davis and eliminated two counties that primarily favored Hilliard. Facing renewed criticism for his ethics issues, Hilliard defended his Libya trip and criticized Davis for

accepting large campaign donations from out-of-state pro-Israel groups. Hilliard narrowly edged out Davis in the June primary, 46 to 43 percent, but because neither candidate secured a majority, the race went to a runoff election. Davis ultimately defeated Hilliard in the June 25 runoff, taking 56 percent of the vote to Hilliard’s 44 percent.<sup>12</sup>

After leaving the House, Hilliard returned to his law firm in Birmingham. Although he did not seek elective office again, Hilliard remained active in local politics.<sup>13</sup>

## Manuscript Collection

**University of Alabama Libraries, Special Collection Repository** (Tuscaloosa, AL). *Papers*: 1977; 1995–1998, 0.4 linear feet. Correspondence, clippings, notes, and publications from the office of Representative Earl F. Hilliard from 1993 to 2003. The bulk of the collection covers the period between 1995 and 1998, and the materials primarily pertain to international affairs.

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## Cynthia A. McKinney

1955–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1993–2003; 2005–2007

Democrat from Georgia



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

Elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1992, Cynthia A. McKinney was the first African-American woman from Georgia to serve in Congress. From her seat on the Armed Services and International Relations Committees, McKinney worked to address human rights issues and was known for her unorthodox views on U.S. foreign policy. After a decade on Capitol Hill, McKinney lost re-election in 2002. Two years later, voters in her DeKalb County district returned her to the House for a single term, making her one of a handful of Congresswomen who served nonconsecutive terms.

Cynthia Ann McKinney was born on March 17, 1955, in Atlanta, Georgia, to Leola Christion McKinney, a nurse, and James Edward “Billy” McKinney, a police officer, civil rights activist, and longtime legislator in the Georgia state house of representatives. Her father joined the Atlanta police department in 1948 as one of its first African-American officers. Cynthia McKinney was inspired to enter politics after participating in demonstrations with her father. While protesting the conviction of Tommy Lee Hines, a Black man with an intellectual disability who had been charged with raping a White woman in Alabama, McKinney and other protestors were threatened by the

Ku Klux Klan. “That was probably my day of awakening,” McKinney recalled. “That day, I experienced hatred for the first time. I learned that there really are people who hate me without even knowing me. ... That was when I knew that politics was going to be something I would do.”<sup>1</sup>

McKinney graduated from St. Joseph High School and, in 1978, earned a bachelor’s degree in international relations from the University of Southern California. She later pursued graduate studies at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts. In 1984, she served as a diplomatic fellow at Spelman College in Atlanta. She then taught political science at Agnes Scott College in Decatur and at Clark Atlanta University. Cynthia McKinney married Coy Grandison, a Jamaican politician. The couple had a son, Coy Jr., before divorcing.<sup>2</sup>

In 1986, Billy McKinney registered his daughter as a candidate for the Georgia state house of representatives without her knowledge. McKinney lost that race to the incumbent but, without even campaigning, won 20 percent of the vote on name recognition alone. Two years later, in 1988, McKinney won election as an at-large state representative in the Georgia legislature, defeating Herb Mabry, who would later head the state AFL-CIO. The

McKinneys became the first father-daughter combination to serve concurrently in the same state legislature. McKinney's father expected her to be a close political ally, but he was soon confronted with his daughter's political independence. "He thought he was going to have another vote," she recalled, "but once I got there, we disagreed on everything. ... I was a chip off the old block, a maverick."<sup>3</sup>

During the late 1980s, McKinney and other Georgia legislators pressed the U.S. Justice Department to create more majority-Black congressional districts so that African-American voters would have more equitable representation. In 1992, the Georgia legislature created two additional majority-Black districts—Georgia previously had only one—and McKinney chose to run in the sprawling 260-mile-long district that included much of DeKalb County east of Atlanta to Augusta and extended southward to the coastal city of Savannah, encompassing or cutting through 22 counties, and both inner cities and rural communities.<sup>4</sup>

McKinney moved into the new district, and her father managed her campaign. In the five-way Democratic primary, McKinney used a strong grassroots network to place first, with 31 percent of the vote. In a runoff against second-place finisher George DeLoach—a funeral home director and the former mayor of Waynesboro, Georgia—McKinney won with 54 percent of the vote. In the heavily Democratic district, she defeated her Republican opponent with 73 percent of the vote. Reflecting on an election that propelled record numbers of women and African-American candidates into congressional office, McKinney said shortly afterward, "Now we have people in Congress who are like the rest of America. It's wonderful to have ordinary people making decisions about the lives of ordinary Americans. It brings a level of sensitivity that has not been there."<sup>5</sup>

When McKinney was sworn in to the 103rd Congress (1993–1995), she received assignments on the Committee on Agriculture and the Committee on Foreign Affairs, which was renamed International Relations the following Congress. In the 104th Congress (1995–1997) she won a spot on the Banking and Finance Committee, where she served two terms. In the 105th Congress (1997–1999) McKinney was assigned to the National Security Committee, which was renamed Armed Services the following Congress.

McKinney was part of a newly elected vanguard of Black Congresswomen, many from the South, who emerged from

state legislatures onto the national political scene. She arrived on Capitol Hill after years of cultivating an unapologetic legislative style in the Georgia state house. In January 1991, she delivered a blistering speech attacking the Gulf War and President George H.W. Bush: two-thirds of the legislators in the Georgia statehouse left the chamber after McKinney called the military action "the most inane use of American will that I have witnessed in a very long time." She added, "America must be willing to fight injustice and prejudice at home as effectively as America is ready to take up arms to fight 'naked aggression' in the international arena." In 1995, she infuriated House Republican leaders when she suggested that an independent counsel investigate Speaker Newt Gingrich of Georgia for violating the chamber's gift rules because he accepted free air time on cable television to broadcast a college course. In 2000, McKinney accused Vice President Albert Gore Jr. of having a "low Negro tolerance level" for not having more African-American agents on his security detail. She later claimed the remark was part of a draft press release not intended for public distribution, but she did push the William J. Clinton administration to investigate charges of discrimination in the Secret Service.<sup>6</sup>

In the House, McKinney advocated for poor and working-class Americans and spoke out on issues ranging from human rights abuses abroad to social inequities at home. She also opposed federal efforts to restrict access to abortions—particularly a long-standing measure known as the Hyde amendment that largely eliminated Medicaid coverage for abortions. In a debate on the House Floor, McKinney described the amendment as "nothing but a discriminatory policy against poor women, who happen to be disproportionately black."<sup>7</sup>

A court challenge shortly after McKinney's 1994 re-election placed her at the epicenter of a national debate over the constitutionality of majority-minority districts, created to preserve the electoral power of racial and ethnic minorities in keeping with the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Five White voters from the rural parts of her district—including her former opponent in the Democratic primary, George DeLoach—filed a suit claiming they had been disenfranchised because the state drew "an illegally gerrymandered district to benefit black voters," as one plaintiff noted. McKinney said she had made great efforts to reach out to her rural constituents but that her entreaties had been met with "resistance" or "silence." A

U.S. Supreme Court decision in 1995 invalidated Georgia's congressional district map as a "racial gerrymander" that violated the Fourteenth Amendment's guarantee of equal protection under the law. A panel of federal judges from three courts remapped Georgia's districts before the 1996 elections, and the Black population of McKinney's district dropped from 64 percent to about 33 percent. Although McKinney was forced to run in a majority-White district, the political network that figured heavily in her previous campaigns helped her prevail against Republican challenger John M. Mitnick, with 58 percent of the vote. McKinney subsequently won re-election twice by comfortable margins of about 60 percent. After reapportionment in 2002, African Americans made up more than 50 percent of the population in McKinney's district.<sup>8</sup>

On the International Relations Committee, where she eventually served as ranking member on the International Operations and Human Rights Subcommittee, McKinney tried to curb weapons sales to countries that violated human rights and subverted democracy. She sponsored several bills and amendments to this effect; in 1997, she partnered with California Representative Dana Rohrabacher to offer an amendment to the 1998 Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act. The amendment passed, but the bill was vetoed by President Clinton. Undeterred, McKinney continued to push for an arms transfer code of conduct without success. In 2000, she voted against granting full trade relations with China, citing Beijing's poor human rights record. McKinney frequently challenged American foreign policy during this period, including American intervention in Kosovo, long-standing U.S. sanctions against Iraq, and much of U.S. policy in the Middle East.<sup>9</sup>

Following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, McKinney made several statements that drew criticism from colleagues, the media, and constituents. First, when New York City Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani rejected a donation for the victims of the attacks from a wealthy Saudi prince who claimed the September 11 attacks were a response to U.S. policies in the Middle East, McKinney offered to accept the money instead to combat poverty in her district. Then, in a 2002 radio interview, McKinney suggested that officials in the George W. Bush administration had prior knowledge about the attacks but remained silent because they stood to gain financially from military spending on a new war in the region. Alluding to the still-contentious recount of votes in Florida during the

2000 presidential election, and the Supreme Court ruling that resulted in Bush's presidency, McKinney said, "an administration of questionable legitimacy has been given unprecedented power."<sup>10</sup>

In the 2002 Democratic primary, McKinney faced Denise L. Majette, an African-American former state judge who had never run for office. Majette's campaign tried to draw a stark contrast between her decade of work as a judge with McKinney's mounting list of controversial comments, with particular emphasis on her statements regarding the September 11 attacks. McKinney's support for an independent Palestine drew national attention to the race, as Majette received significant backing from individuals and organizations that supported the close relationship between the United States and Israel. Some of McKinney's Jewish constituents were so frustrated by her stance that they sought to be moved into the district of neighboring Representative John Lewis during the 2002 redistricting. Majette took advantage of the open primary, benefiting from a coordinated effort by Republicans to vote for her in favor of McKinney. Majette amassed a two-to-one fundraising advantage and prevailed by a 58 to 42 percent margin in the primary before winning the general election.<sup>11</sup>

Two years later, when Majette made an unsuccessful bid for the U.S. Senate, McKinney entered the race to reclaim her old congressional seat. She won the Democratic primary with 54 percent of the vote. McKinney took advantage of her name recognition and backing from the Congressional Black Caucus. Her understated campaign steered clear of extensive media coverage and, as in her earlier runs for Congress, relied on a vigorous grassroots effort and focused on local concerns, including the locations of landfills, while touting her opposition to the Bush administration's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. McKinney won the general election to the 109th Congress (2005–2007) with 64 percent of the vote against Republican Catherine Davis. McKinney regained her assignment on the Armed Services Committee and picked up a seat on the Budget Committee.<sup>12</sup>

Though McKinney primarily confined her legislative efforts to foreign policy, she also pursued a unique environmental agenda centered on the wildlife and public lands in her home state of Georgia. She introduced the National Forest Protection and Restoration Act three times between 1997 and 2001, which was designed to outlaw all logging and timber activities on federal public lands and allocate funding for the Environmental Protection

Agency to investigate alternatives to wood for paper and construction. In 2002, she introduced the Public Lands Forever Wild Act, which set limits on development and prioritized a return to “natural conditions” on public lands. She submitted the Arabia Mountain National Heritage Act four times during her final two nonconsecutive terms in office. This bill, which established the land surrounding and including Arabia Mountain near DeKalb County in Georgia as a national heritage site, was folded into the National Heritage Areas Act which became law in 2006.<sup>13</sup>

In late March 2006, McKinney allegedly hit a Capitol Hill police officer who stopped her at the entrance to one of the House office buildings and asked for identification. McKinney claimed she was a victim of racial profiling and, according to news accounts, described the police officer who stopped her as “racist.” A grand jury investigated the incident but declined to indict McKinney.<sup>14</sup>

A few months later, in July 2006, McKinney failed to win 50 percent of the vote in the Democratic primary against DeKalb County commissioner Henry C. “Hank” Johnson Jr., an African-American lawyer whose campaign message was “Replace McKinney” and who criticized the incumbent for her history of controversial statements. Johnson also suggested that McKinney’s foreign policy interests left her little time to tend to the interests of her home district. In the runoff, Johnson prevailed by a 59 to 41 percent margin, taking 60 percent of the vote in McKinney’s former stronghold in DeKalb County.<sup>15</sup>

After leaving the House in January 2007, McKinney remained active in national politics. In December 2007, she announced her candidacy as the Green Party nominee for the 2008 presidential election, making the ballot in 32 states. In 2012, McKinney intended to challenge Johnson to reclaim her seat in the House but failed to qualify for the ballot.<sup>16</sup>

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# Carrie P. Meek

1926–2021

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1993–2003

Democrat from Florida



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 1992, Carrie P. Meek won election to the U.S. House of Representatives becoming one of the first African-American lawmakers to represent Florida in Congress since Reconstruction. In her first term, Meek secured a coveted seat on the powerful House Appropriations Committee where she helped determine federal spending. Over the course of her 10 years in Congress, Meek focused on economic development and immigration issues important to her district. She also worked across the aisle on health care reform and to protect welfare amid efforts to overhaul federal aid programs during the mid-1990s. “I knew what it was like to be treated differently,” she said about growing up in segregated Florida. “I wanted to see things changed, and wanted to assist any movement to help with changing it.”<sup>1</sup>

Carrie Meek was born Carrie Pittman on April 29, 1926, in Tallahassee, Florida, the daughter of Willie and Carrie Pittman. Meek was the granddaughter of a woman who had been born enslaved. Meek’s parents were sharecroppers; her father later became a caretaker, and her mother was a laundry worker and then owned a boarding house. Nicknamed “Tot” by her siblings, Meek was the youngest of 12 children and lived with her family near the old Florida capitol. As a young girl, Meek participated in the

Girl Scouts. When the group delivered brownies to the state capitol, Meek was barred from entering because she was Black. She waited on the sidewalk while her White peers walked in the front door.<sup>2</sup>

Meek went to Florida A&M University in Tallahassee, a historically Black university, and starred in track and field. In 1946, she graduated with a bachelor’s degree in biology and physical education. At the time, Florida banned Black students from attending state graduate schools and arranged to pay full tuition if the students went to out-of-state schools. Meek enrolled at the University of Michigan. She graduated in 1948 with a master’s degree in public health and physical education.<sup>3</sup>

Afterward, Meek coached basketball and taught biology and physical education at Bethune Cookman University, a historically Black university in Daytona Beach. She later taught at Florida A&M. In 1961, as a single mother with two young children, Meek accepted a position at Miami-Dade Community College, where she spent the next three decades teaching and working in college administration.<sup>4</sup>

After the death of Gwen Cherry, the first Black woman to serve in the Florida legislature, in 1979, Meek decided to run for the open seat in the state house of representatives.

Meek credited her experience on the federal city-planning committee, the Model Cities Program, in the late 1960s and early 1970s for teaching her “how to be competitive, how to make decisions and how to interact with the grassroots people,” and preparing her for elective office. Although she did not receive the support of local Black leaders—who backed another candidate—Meek entered the crowded election and defeated 12 other candidates to win the seat. Her youngest child, Kendrick, recalled her creating campaign materials on a tight budget. Graphic design students from Miami Dade College drew signs “[with] waterproof markers, [writing] ‘Carrie Meek.’ And then we put a black and white picture [of her] in the middle of it and put a little cellophane over it. That was the sign.”<sup>5</sup>

Meek served in the state house from 1979 to 1983, chairing the education appropriations subcommittee. From 1983 to 1993, Meek served in the Florida senate. She was the first African-American woman elected to the state senate. A skilled lawmaker who was once called “the conscience of the Florida Senate,” Meek passed a minority business enterprise law and other legislation to promote literacy and help students stay in school.<sup>6</sup>

In 1992, Meek declared her candidacy for Congress when the incumbent, 10-term Democratic Representative William Lehman, decided to retire. Meek was 66 years old at the time, and one of her competitors turned her age into a campaign issue. But Meek, according to her son, saw it as an advantage. “He should continue to say that I’m too old,” she said, “because the folks that are going to get out and vote are going to be my age or around my age, and they’re told every day they’re too old. He’s doing nothing but helping us.” Meek captured the Democratic nomination for the newly reapportioned district, which ran through Miami’s northern suburbs in Dade County. In the majority-Black and largely Democratic district, she ran unopposed in the general election. Alongside Corrine Brown and Alcee L. Hastings, both of whom also won election to the House that November from Florida, Meek became one of the first three African-American lawmakers to serve in Congress from Florida since 1876.<sup>7</sup>

In her first term, Meek lobbied intensively for a seat on the Appropriations Committee, which set federal spending amounts. She met with Speaker Thomas S. Foley of Washington and, as her son remembers, said, “I just want to share with you that I’ve served in the appropriations committee in the [state] legislature. I would love to carry

out your agenda on Appropriations. . . . Hurricane Andrew just hit my district. They really need me to be on this committee to help rebuild. . . . But I am committed to the things that . . . you would like to see happen on the Appropriations Committee.” When she left the Speaker’s office, Foley told his aide, “Put her on Appropriations.” When Republicans took control of the House in 1994, Meek was reassigned to the Budget Committee and the Government Reform and Oversight Committee. In 1996, she returned to the Appropriations Committee and eventually served on two of its subcommittees: Treasury, Postal Service, and General Government; and VA, HUD, and Independent Agencies.<sup>8</sup>

Shortly after arriving on Capitol Hill, Meek sought federal disaster aid for her district which bore the brunt of Hurricane Andrew in August 1992. On Appropriations, Meek worked to expand federal programs to create jobs and provide opportunities for African-American entrepreneurs to open their own businesses. Meek also authored a measure to amend Social Security to cover household workers. On behalf of her district’s Haitian community, Meek sought to grant U.S. residency to more immigrants and refugees. And in 1999 alone, from her seat on the Appropriations Committee, Meek secured tens of millions in tax breaks for developers working in underserved neighborhoods in her district and millions of dollars more for public housing programs and other community services.<sup>9</sup>

In 1997, Meek sought to restore welfare benefits to disabled legal immigrants after the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act cut off their eligibility to collect Supplemental Security Income (SSI). “The new welfare reform law was supposed to ‘move people from welfare to work,’ but ending life-sustaining payments to legal immigrants who are aged, blind or disabled has nothing to do with that goal,” Meek said. In the Appropriations Committee, she introduced an amendment to continue SSI benefits for two years. A version of the amendment, introduced on the House Floor by Florida Congressman Lincoln Diaz-Balart and supported by Meek, passed into law in June and successfully extended the benefits. Meek also submitted a measure to allow welfare recipients in traditionally poor and undercounted neighborhoods to work temporarily for the U.S. Census Bureau without losing their benefits.<sup>10</sup>

Meek served in the minority party for all but her first term in Congress, and on certain national health issues,

she reached across the aisle to shape policy. She worked with Republicans to change warnings on cigarette labels to reflect the high rate of African-American deaths caused by smoking. And she teamed up with Republican Anne Meagher Northup of Kentucky to increase funding for research on lupus and to provide federal grants for college students with learning disabilities.<sup>11</sup>

Meek was not afraid to speak out against and challenge national officials. On January 18, 1995, Meek denounced Speaker Newt Gingrich of Georgia on the House Floor amid the controversy surrounding a \$4.5 million advance he received for a book deal. “If anything, now, how much the Speaker earns has grown much more dependent upon how hard his publishing house hawks his book,” Meek said. Republican Robert Smith Walker of Pennsylvania requested Meek’s words be taken down, prompting clerks to write out her words and read them back to the House. Clifford Bundy Stearns of Florida, the presiding officer at the time, ruled what she said out of order, which led to an animated debate on the floor. The Republican majority successfully voted to strike Meek’s words from the *Congressional Record*, 217 to 176. After the vote, Meek responded on the floor, “I have been elected to this House to speak the truth. There is nothing in the rules that says, ‘Carrie Meek can’t speak the truth,’ and that is what I have done.” Her Democratic colleagues applauded her remarks.<sup>12</sup>

Meek easily won all four of her re-elections. Her son, Kendrick, credited her success to her philosophy on campaigning. “She would always say to me, ‘Kendrick, you have a choice. You can run for office for three months and probably get elected, or you can treat every day as though you’re running for office and always be re-elected,’” he recalled. “She just worked all the time.”<sup>13</sup>

In 2002, Meek declined to seek certain re-election to a sixth term, citing her age. “I wish I could say I was tired of [Congress],” she told the *Miami Herald*. “I love it still. But at age 76, understandably, some of my abilities have diminished. I don’t have the same vigor that I had at age 65. I have the fire, but I don’t have the physical ability. So it’s time.”<sup>14</sup>

Kendrick B. Meek, who served in the Florida senate, announced his candidacy for the Democratic nomination in her district. When he won the November 2002 general election, he became the second child, after James Kee of West Virginia who followed his mother, Maude Elizabeth Kee, in 1965, to directly succeed his mother in Congress.

Meek continued to serve as a sounding board for her son during his House career. She offered advice on legislative strategy, campaign techniques, and constituent relations. To help him better understand the history and experiences of African Americans in Florida, she told him stories of the racial discrimination she faced growing up. Years after she retired from Congress, he recalled, “She shared those experiences with me to make sure that I was well-rooted and understood the experience in Florida, which she, in many ways, was able to use ... as a policymaker. I think that’s what made her so powerful.” Carrie Meek died on November 28, 2021, at her home in Miami, Florida.<sup>15</sup>

### Manuscript Collection

**Florida A&M University, Carrie Meek-James N. Eaton Sr. Southeastern Regional Black Archives Research Center and Museum** (Tallahassee, FL). *Papers*: ca. 1993–2003, 250 cubic feet. The Carrie P. Meek Collection documents her career in the U.S. House of Representatives and includes campaign materials, legislation, constituent correspondence, press releases, programs, calendars, photographs, videotapes, and a museum collection. The manuscript collection is closed for processing; however, part of the museum collection is open.

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# Carol Moseley Braun

1947–

UNITED STATES SENATOR

1993–1999

Democrat from Illinois



Image courtesy of the U.S. Senate Historical Office

Elected in 1992, Carol Moseley Braun was the first African-American woman Senator, and only the second Black Senator since Reconstruction. “I cannot escape the fact that I come to the Senate as a symbol of hope and change,” Moseley Braun said shortly after being sworn in to office in 1993. “Nor would I want to, because my presence in and of itself will change the U.S. Senate.” During her single term on Capitol Hill, Senator Moseley Braun worked to improve civil rights in America and sought legislation on crime, education, and families.<sup>1</sup>

Carol Moseley Braun was born Carol Moseley in Chicago, Illinois, on August 16, 1947. Her father, Joseph Moseley, a policeman, and her mother, Edna Moseley, a medical technician, divorced when she was a teenager. The oldest of four children in a middle-class family, Moseley Braun graduated from Parker High School in Chicago and earned a bachelor’s degree in political science from the University of Illinois in 1969. As a teenager, Moseley Braun joined Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in a 1966 open housing march through the Chicago Lawn neighborhood on the southwest side of the city. When White residents opposed to neighborhood integration set cars on fire and violently attacked the peaceful marchers with rocks and bottles, she

observed King’s steadfast commitment to nonviolent protest and refrained from retaliation. By taking “the moral high road,” Moseley Braun recalled, King demonstrated that “we value each other’s humanity, that violence has no place in that.” Her experience marching with King was formative and shaped her approach to politics.<sup>2</sup>

Moseley Braun’s early interest in politics led her to work on the campaigns of state senator Richard Newhouse and state representative Harold Washington; Washington would later serve as a U.S. Representative and as the first African-American mayor of Chicago. In 1972, Moseley Braun graduated from the University of Chicago School of Law, where she founded the school’s Black law students’ association. In Chicago she met and later married Michael Braun; they divorced in 1986. The couple raised a son, Matthew. Moseley Braun worked as a prosecutor in the office of the U.S. Attorney in Chicago from 1973 until 1977. In 1978, she won election to the Illinois state house of representatives and served for a decade. In the state house, she coordinated with Harold Washington’s powerful mayoral administration on issues and policies important to Chicago. After an unsuccessful bid for Illinois lieutenant governor in 1986, Moseley Braun was elected the Cook

County, Illinois, recorder of deeds in 1988, becoming the first African American to hold an executive position in Cook County.<sup>3</sup>

Unsatisfied with her position as recorder of deeds—and frustrated with national politicians she believed to be out of touch with the average American—Moseley Braun contemplated running for Congress. Following the controversial confirmation hearing for Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas in 1991, Moseley Braun set her sights on the Senate, resolving to run when several Senators dismissively questioned Anita Hill, Thomas's former employee who had accused him of sexual harassment. The Senate, she observed, "absolutely needed a healthy dose of democracy ... it wasn't enough to have millionaire white males over the age of 50 representing all the people in this country."<sup>4</sup>

Moseley Braun officially entered the race for the Senate in November 1991, challenging two-term Democratic incumbent Alan John Dixon in the 1992 primary. Moseley Braun focused her primary campaign on the need for diversity in the Senate and Dixon's vote to confirm Thomas's appointment to the Supreme Court. Moseley Braun struggled to raise funding during the race, but on Election Day she stunned the experts, defeating her two opponents, Dixon and Alfred Hofeld, an affluent Chicago lawyer, by capturing 38 percent of the primary vote. "This democracy is alive and well, and ordinary people can have a voice with no money," Moseley Braun proclaimed. In the general election, she faced Republican candidate Richard Williamson, a lawyer and former official in the Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush administrations, focusing on a message of change and diversity expressed in slogans such as, "We don't need another arrogant rich guy in the senate." In November 1992, Moseley Braun defeated Williamson with 53 percent of the vote. In the "Year of the Woman," during which a record-breaking number of female candidates won election to Congress, Moseley Braun's election became a national symbol of change, reform, and equality. But she was not satisfied with the status afforded by her victory. "Symbols will not create jobs and economic growth," she declared. "They do not do the hard work of solving the health care crisis. They will not save the children of our cities from drugs and guns and murder."<sup>5</sup>

In the Senate, Moseley Braun and Senator Dianne Feinstein of California became just the second and third women ever to serve on the influential Judiciary

Committee. Moseley Braun also served on the Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee and on the Small Business Committee. In the 104th Congress (1995–1997), she became the first Democratic woman to serve on the powerful Finance Committee when a top-ranking Democrat, Thomas Andrew Daschle of South Dakota, gave up his seat in exchange for her vote to elect him as Democratic Leader. She also picked up a seat on the Special Committee on Aging. As one of the Senate's few female Members at the time, Moseley Braun quickly developed a camaraderie with the other women in the chamber, including Barbara Ann Mikulski of Maryland as well as Feinstein. "The women senators were all pretty much facing the same things, whether they were Republican or Democrat," she recalled. "We were forced into bipartisanship because we were such a minority."<sup>6</sup>

In 1993, Moseley Braun waged a prolonged fight to prevent the renewal of a design patent for the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) because it contained the Confederate flag. The patent had been routinely renewed for nearly a century, but Moseley Braun used her seat on the Judiciary Committee to strip the renewal provision from pending legislation. When Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina responded by preparing an amendment to approve the patent extension which he planned to offer on the Senate Floor, Moseley Braun threatened to filibuster the legislation "until this room freezes over." While discussing the symbolism of the Confederate flag, she declared, "This is something that has no place in our modern times. ... It has no place in the Senate. It has no place in our society." Moseley Braun's impassioned plea launched a candid discussion on race and the legacy of slavery on the Senate Floor. "We were human chattel. We were property. We could be traded, bought, and sold," she reminded her colleagues, adding that "on this issue there can be no consensus." Swayed by Moseley Braun's argument, the Senate rejected the UDC's application to renew its patent.<sup>7</sup>

Moseley Braun sparred with Helms once again during debate on a measure providing federal funding for the Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Commission, which had been established in 1984 to promote national recognition of the holiday. Moseley Braun helped thwart a Helms amendment to the legislation that would have replaced government money with private donations. The Illinois Senator invoked memories of her participation in the

1966 march with King in Chicago to win support for the legislation. The Senate eventually approved the bill. Moseley Braun also sought to commemorate earlier parts of African-American history and sponsored a bill to fund historic preservation of Underground Railroad sites within the National Park Service; a companion House bill became law in 1998.<sup>8</sup>

Moseley Braun held prominent roles in shaping and passing major legislation spearheaded by party leaders and the William J. Clinton administration. When the Senate debated the 1994 crime bill, it approved Moseley Braun's amendment to allow adolescents as young as 13 to be charged as adults for certain violent crimes. The Illinois Senator was also a major proponent of crime prevention initiatives. She introduced a bill to establish additional "midnight basketball" leagues, a crime diversion program that hosted youth sports games between 10:00 p.m. and 2:00 a.m. The bill was incorporated into the major education bill known as the Goals 2000: Educate America Act. As Congress considered another education reform bill known as the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA), Moseley Braun brought attention to the crumbling physical infrastructure of the nation's schools. She requested a General Accounting Office study which revealed that public schools faced a \$112 billion repair backlog. Portions of her bill—the Education Infrastructure Act of 1994—were included in the IASA, and authorized grants for the renovation and repair of school buildings.<sup>9</sup>

During her term in the Senate, Moseley Braun regularly addressed issues affecting women. She introduced legislation to assist divorced and widowed women, arguing, "Pension laws were never written for women ... no wonder the vast majority of the elderly poor are women." In 1994, the President signed her bill requiring states to enforce the child support laws of other states. Moseley Braun was a consistent supporter of equal opportunity and affirmative action and spoke out against sexual harassment. In 1995, she joined five of her women colleagues in the Senate to call for public hearings on alleged sexual misconduct by Senator Robert William Packwood of Oregon.<sup>10</sup>

Moseley Braun faced a handful of controversies during her Senate career. Initially accused of violating campaign finance regulations during her 1992 race, the charges were dismissed when a five-year investigation by the Federal Election Commission turned up only a minor discrepancy of \$311. In 1996, the Congressional Black Caucus and

human rights organizations criticized Moseley Braun for taking a private trip to Nigeria to attend the funeral of General Sani Abacha's son despite objections by the U.S. State Department.<sup>11</sup>

Closely scrutinized and lacking strong financial support from her party, Moseley Braun faced a difficult challenge in her 1998 bid for re-election. In the November general election, she came up short with 47 percent of the vote, losing to Republican Peter G. Fitzgerald, an Illinois state senator who spent nearly \$12 million of his own money on the campaign. After leaving the Senate, President Clinton appointed Moseley Braun the U.S. Ambassador to New Zealand and Samoa; she served from 1999 until 2001. Moseley Braun later founded an organic food company, taught college courses in political science, and managed a business consulting company in Chicago. In 2004, she unsuccessfully sought the Democratic presidential nomination, and in 2011, she waged a losing campaign for mayor of Chicago.<sup>12</sup>

### Manuscript Collection

**Chicago Historical Society** (Chicago, IL). *Papers*: 1992–1998, 371 feet. Correspondence, phone logs, personnel files, reports, press releases, research materials, invitations, voting records, briefing books, speeches, newspaper clippings, legislation, grants, and audits comprise the collection, documenting Carol Moseley Braun's term in the U.S. Senate. Also included are materials from her senatorial campaigns in 1992 and 1998. Topics include health care and education reform, civil rights, women's rights, and social security. *Additional Papers*: Carol Moseley Braun, one folder of manuscript materials on the 2011 mayoral election; a Federal Election Commission report on Moseley Braun's campaign spending in 1991 and 1992 and newspaper clippings, speech notes, and other campaign material from her 1992 campaign. A finding aid is available in the repository and online.

### Notes

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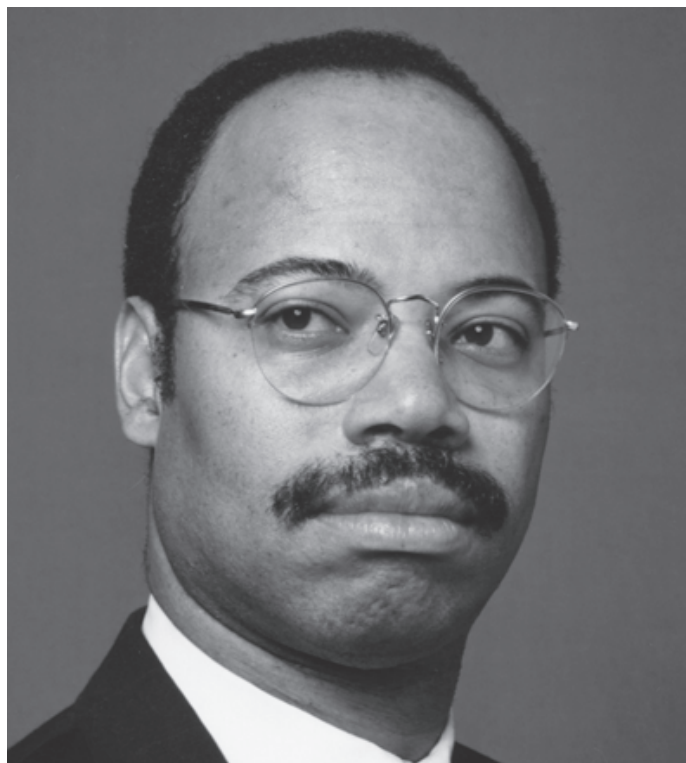
# Mel Reynolds

1952–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1993–1995

Democrat from Illinois



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 1992, Mel Reynolds won a seat in the 103rd Congress (1993–1995) after two unsuccessful earlier campaigns against the incumbent Representative Gus Savage in the Democratic primary. In his first term in the U.S. House of Representatives, Reynolds received a seat on the influential Ways and Means Committee where he supported a major international trade deal.<sup>1</sup>

Mel Reynolds was born on January 8, 1952, in Mound Bayou, Mississippi, to Essie Mae and Reverend J.J. Reynolds. When Reynolds was a child, his family moved to Chicago, where he attended public schools, including Mather High School. Reynolds received an associate's degree from Chicago City College in 1972, and two years later graduated with a bachelor's degree from the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana. One of the first African-American students from Illinois to be selected as a Rhodes Scholar, Reynolds earned a bachelor of laws from Oxford University in 1979. He later completed a master's degree in public administration at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government in 1986. While at Harvard, Reynolds met his future wife, Marisol Concepcion. The couple married in 1990 and had three children: Corean, Marisol Elizabeth, and Mel Jr.<sup>2</sup>

Reynolds initially worked as an assistant professor of political science at Roosevelt University in Chicago and hosted a local radio talk show. He also launched the organization American Scholars Against World Hunger to fight famine in Africa. Reynolds became involved as a community activist, participating in an anti-drug campaign on Chicago's South Side and directing the Community Economic Development and Education Foundation, which provided scholarships to local students. He gained political experience working on the campaigns of several unsuccessful Democratic presidential candidates, including Edward Moore "Ted" Kennedy, Reverend Jesse Jackson, and Michael Dukakis. In 1987, Reynolds participated in Chicago Mayor Harold Washington's victorious re-election campaign.<sup>3</sup>

In 1988, Reynolds challenged the four-term Democratic incumbent Gus Savage for the congressional district encompassing portions of Chicago's predominantly African-American South Side. Reynolds focused his campaign on his roots in the community and his status as an outsider to Chicago's powerful ward system. "It's more of a commitment to me than just a job," he remarked during the election. "Obviously as a black Rhodes Scholar, I can work in any corporation in America. I've chosen to

be in my community.” Reynolds placed a distant third in the primary with 14 percent of the vote. Reynolds made another run for the seat two years later, citing unhappiness with Savage’s representation of the Chicago district. In a three-candidate primary, Reynolds took 43 percent of the vote against Savage who had a history of making controversial remarks as well as a volatile relationship with the press.<sup>4</sup>

In 1992, Reynolds orchestrated a third campaign to unseat Savage. Reynolds received a boost after redistricting that year shrank Savage’s stronghold in the city’s Black neighborhoods, replacing them with White suburbs south of Chicago. In the March primary, Reynolds easily defeated Savage, 63 to 37 percent. Reynolds went on to earn 78 percent of the vote in the general election against Republican candidate Ron Blackstone and third-party opponent Louanner Peters. In his subsequent election, he bested two challengers in the Democratic primary with 56 percent of the vote and easily defeated a write-in candidate in the general election to earn a second term in the House.<sup>5</sup>

During his first term in Congress, Reynolds successfully lobbied for a seat on the powerful Ways and Means Committee. With the backing of longtime committee chair and fellow Illinois Representative Daniel David Rostenkowski, Reynolds became the first freshman lawmaker in 14 years to sit on Ways and Means. In 1993, Reynolds joined Rostenkowski in voting for the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which sought to facilitate trade between United States, Canada, and Mexico. As the only two Democrats representing Chicago to back the controversial trade deal, both Members faced widespread criticism from organized labor leaders who believed the agreement would undermine wages and job security for American workers. In response for his support, President William J. Clinton—who had pushed for NAFTA’s passage in the House and Senate—personally campaigned for Reynolds during his 1994 re-election.<sup>6</sup>

During his time in the House, Reynolds worked to improve conditions for his many impoverished constituents by backing an earned income tax credit and hosting a series of job fairs in Chicago. He also worked to curb crime in his district by supporting gun control legislation. In 1993, the Chicago Representative authored a bill to facilitate lawsuits against gun manufacturers for deaths or injuries caused by their firearms. He also proposed doubling the excise tax on guns, with a portion of the additional revenue

to be allocated for urban hospitals that cared for uninsured patients with gunshot injuries. Reynolds insisted, “We must hold people and corporations responsible for their actions, as well as provide relief to those impacted so heavily by the destructive cost of gun violence.”<sup>7</sup>

Reynolds faced a series of legal problems during his House career. Early in his first term, published reports emerged alleging that Reynolds owed thousands of dollars in campaign debts and educational loans. The Illinois Representative explained that he had delayed paying his student loans so that he could fund his three election campaigns. In August 1994, a Cook County grand jury indicted Reynolds on counts of criminal sexual assault, child pornography, and obstruction of justice. Reynolds denied the accusations.<sup>8</sup>

Despite these charges, Reynolds won re-election to a second term with no significant opposition in 1994. But with the opening of the 104th Congress (1995–1997), Republicans gained control of the House for the first time in 40 years. As the lowest-ranking Democrat on the Ways and Means Committee, Reynolds lost his position when Republicans reduced the number of seats on the panel; he instead received a spot on the Economic and Educational Opportunities Committee. When a Chicago jury found Reynolds guilty of multiple criminal counts in August 1995, House Democratic leadership called for his resignation. Reynolds resigned from the House, effective October 1, 1995.<sup>9</sup>

While imprisoned Reynolds was indicted and convicted on federal charges of bank and campaign fraud. President Clinton commuted his sentence shortly before leaving office in 2001. In 2004, Reynolds attempted to resurrect his political career by running against Representative Jesse L. Jackson Jr., who had succeeded him in office, but his comeback stalled when he received only 6 percent of the vote in the Democratic primary. In a February 2013 Democratic special primary election, Reynolds again unsuccessfully sought to succeed Jackson, who had resigned three months earlier.<sup>10</sup>

After his political career, Reynolds engaged in business and consulting work overseas. He represented American business interests attempting to finance hotel and construction projects in Zimbabwe, where he was convicted of violating the nation’s immigration laws and was subsequently deported in 2014. Back in the United States, Reynolds was convicted of failing to pay federal income taxes in 2018.<sup>11</sup>

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## Walter R. Tucker III

1957–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1993–1995

Democrat from California



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 1992, Walter R. Tucker III won election to the U.S. House of Representatives from Southern California. Tucker came from a prominent political family and, just a year before entering Congress, had served as the youngest mayor of Compton, California. He arrived in Washington in 1993 with the goal of bringing “positive attention to Compton,” a city that had been wracked by destructive civil violence months earlier following the acquittal of police officers in the beating of Rodney King.<sup>1</sup>

Walter R. Tucker III was born on May 28, 1957, one of four children in a prominent political family in Compton, California. His father, Walter R. Tucker II, worked as a dentist and entered politics in 1967, when he won election to the Compton school board. He was eventually elected mayor of Compton. Tucker’s mother, Martha, was a real estate agent and writer. The Tucker family was often referred to as the “Kennedys of Compton” because of its political power. Tucker graduated from Compton High School in 1974. He attended Princeton University from 1974 to 1976 before returning home to finish his studies at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles in 1978. Tucker earned a law degree at Georgetown University Law School in Washington, DC, in 1981, after which he

returned to Compton to work as an attorney. Tucker served as deputy district attorney for Los Angeles County from 1984 to 1986 as well as an associate minister in Carson. Tucker’s wife, Robin, and their two children—Walter IV and Autumn—lived with the extended Tucker family near Compton city hall.<sup>2</sup>

In 1991, Tucker’s father died of cancer during his third term as Compton’s mayor. Tucker ran to succeed his father and won on April 16, 1991, at the age of 33. Tucker’s mayoral tenure focused on economic improvement in the impoverished city. Once a bustling economic center—former President George H.W. Bush had a home in the city in the late 1940s—Compton had experienced an economic downturn in the second half of the twentieth century after civil violence spread across the city and nearby Watts in the summer of 1965. The city struggled with poverty, crime, and gang violence in the ensuing decades.<sup>3</sup>

When six-term U.S. Representative Mervyn M. Dymally announced his retirement in 1992, Tucker entered the race to fill the seat. Dymally’s district encompassed working-class neighborhoods south of Los Angeles, including Compton; it was roughly 34 percent African American, and 40 percent Hispanic. Dymally endorsed his daughter, Lynn, a member

of the Compton school board, to succeed him. One month before the primary, in May 1992, a Los Angeles jury's acquittal of four police officers accused of beating Black motorist Rodney King sparked widespread violence and property destruction in the city. Compton suffered an estimated \$100 million in damage: nearly 200 buildings were vandalized, and more than 130 reports of arson. As mayor, Tucker worked to stop the violence, and images of him touring the city with civil rights activist Reverend Jesse Jackson were shown on national television. Tucker won the nomination with 39 percent against Dymally's 37 percent. Vera Robles DeWitt, who served on the Carson city council, took 11 percent, with two other candidates splitting 12 percent. Tucker easily won the general election in the overwhelmingly Democratic district, with 86 percent of the vote.<sup>4</sup>

On Capitol Hill, Tucker was assigned to the Public Works and Transportation Committee and the Small Business Committee. He backed tax-exempt funding to construct the Alameda Corridor, a truck and rail line that would expedite the shipment of cargo from the port of Los Angeles inland through the congested city. Despite heavy lobbying, Tucker made a rare break from President William J. Clinton's administration by voting against the North American Free Trade Agreement, which he worried would result in the loss of low-wage jobs in the Los Angeles area. Tucker focused on alleviating unemployment and poverty, particularly in his district. He was credited with securing \$5.9 million in extra police funds for Southern California.<sup>5</sup>

In March 1994, federal prosecutors revealed that Tucker and a member of the Compton city council were the subjects of a federal bribery investigation. Tucker denied the charges, adding "I will not allow this matter to impede on the important work that I am doing in the U.S. Congress." On August 22, Tucker pled not guilty to 10 counts in a federal district court in Los Angeles. After easily winning the Democratic nomination that year, he defeated his lone opponent, Libertarian Guy Wilson, in the general election with 77 percent of the vote.<sup>6</sup>

On December 8, 1995—one month after his re-election—Tucker was convicted on seven counts of extortion and two counts of tax evasion. During the trial, the prosecution had presented evidence including video and audio tapes of Tucker demanding cash in exchange for public projects. Tucker maintained his innocence and accused the government of what he said was "entrapment." He resigned from Congress on December 15, 1995. On April 17, 1996,

Tucker was sentenced to 27 months in prison—prior to his sentencing the citizens of Compton wrote more than 200 letters in support of him.<sup>7</sup>

Shortly after his resignation, Tucker endorsed his wife, Robin, to fill his vacancy. She finished sixth in the crowded special election, losing to California state lawmaker Juanita Millender-McDonald, who prevailed with a 27 percent plurality.<sup>8</sup>

Upon his release in September 1998, Tucker served as the Southern California director of a prison fellowship program headed by Charles "Chuck" Colson, a former aide to President Richard M. Nixon and a central figure in the Watergate scandal. Tucker was ordained in 2003 and pastored in Chicago for nine years before establishing a church in Carson, California, in 2012.<sup>9</sup>

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## Melvin L. Watt

1945–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1993–2014

Democrat from North Carolina



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

Melvin L. Watt, an eleven-term U.S. Representative from North Carolina, served as a vocal advocate for civil liberties and played an influential role in shaping the relationship between the banking industry and the government from his seat on the Financial Services Committee. Born into poverty, Watt brought a unique perspective to a district known for its banking sector. “People look at you in a suit as a member of Congress, and they think you’ve always been in a suit and always been a member of Congress,” he once said. “I came out of a different kind of history.”<sup>1</sup>

Melvin Luther Watt was born in Charlotte, North Carolina, on August 26, 1945, to Graham Edward Watt and Evelyn Lucille Mauney. He grew up in a tin-roofed shack without running water or electricity and attended segregated public schools in Mecklenburg County. Watt started college shortly after many southern universities had been desegregated, and he was among a relatively small number of Black students enrolled in the North Carolina state university system. He attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, graduating Phi Beta Kappa with a business administration degree in 1967. Three years later, Watt earned a law degree from Yale University Law School. He returned to Charlotte, passed the North Carolina bar,

and for the next 20 years worked in the law firm of civil rights attorney Julius Chambers, specializing in minority business and economic development law. Watt eventually served as president of the Mecklenburg County bar. He married Eulada Paysour, and they raised two sons: Brian and Jason. He served a single term in the North Carolina state senate, from 1985 to 1987, but left to spend more time with his teenage sons. Much of Watt’s early political work was behind the scenes, including stints as campaign manager for Harvey Gantt, a rising African-American politician who served on the Charlotte city council and as mayor.<sup>2</sup>

After managing Gantt’s unsuccessful effort to win a U.S. Senate seat against incumbent Jesse Helms in 1990, Watt ran for office himself. In 1992, redistricting created a central North Carolina congressional district that was 53 percent African American, stretched through parts of 10 counties, and included portions of Durham, Greensboro, Winston-Salem, and Charlotte. Watt won the crowded Democratic primary with 47 percent of the vote, defeating his closest rival, North Carolina state representative Mickey Michaux, by 19 points. Against Republican Barbara Gore Washington in the general election, Watt captured 70 percent of the vote.<sup>3</sup>

Watt's uniquely-shaped district led to a number of challenges in court, but Watt embraced his role as "the poster child of redistricting." To maintain its majority-Black population demographics, the district meandered along the I-85 corridor, causing one court decision in 1993 to note that "northbound and southbound drivers on I-85 sometimes find themselves in separate districts in one county, only to 'trade' districts when they enter the next." Watt's district was redrawn five times between the late 1990s and early 2000s but retained its "serpentine" appearance. In 1998, during a particularly controversial effort to reconfigure the district, Watt experienced his narrowest margin of victory, when he defeated Republican challenger John "Scott" Keadle with 56 percent of the vote. In his subsequent seven re-elections, Watt won by comfortable margins, usually by 60 percent of the vote or more.<sup>4</sup>

When Watt entered the U.S. House in January 1993 he received appointments to the Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs Committee (later renamed Financial Services) and to the Judiciary Committee. Watt served on both panels throughout his House career. In the 109th Congress (2005–2007), he was ranking member of the Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Commercial and Administrative Law. On Financial Services, Watt chaired the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations in the 110th Congress (2007–2009) and the Subcommittee on Domestic Monetary Policy and Technology in the 111th Congress (2009–2011). For a single term in the 103rd Congress (1993–1995), he served on the Post Office and Civil Service Committee before it was abolished. In addition, Watt was named to the Joint Economic Committee in the 107th and 108th Congresses (2001–2005). Watt was unanimously elected chair of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) for the 109th Congress.

As a freshman in the 103rd Congress, Watt voted with the Democratic majority nearly 90 percent of the time, although he broke with President William J. Clinton to vote against the North American Free Trade Agreement and the administration's 1994 crime bill. During the 1990s, Watt also criticized efforts to dismantle federal welfare programs and legislation that reinforced or upheld use of the death penalty.<sup>5</sup>

Watt put his experience as an attorney to use on the Judiciary Committee, and his extensive preparation and detailed knowledge of legislation were widely recognized by his peers. He co-authored the 2006 extension of the Voting Rights Act with Judiciary's Republican chair, Frank James Sensenbrenner Jr. of Wisconsin. The reauthorization

tightened the enforcement language for the bill by considering both the intent and impact of changes to state voting laws and district lines. Watt's investment in the bill stemmed from his frequent experience with redistricting, as the federal preclearance provision of the Voting Rights Act, which originally passed in 1965, applied to 40 counties in North Carolina. On the House Floor, Watt joined Sensenbrenner in leading the opposition to several restrictive amendments designed to weaken the Voting Rights Act. Watt reflected on the uneven history of Black representation in Congress, particularly in states like North Carolina, which did not elect a Black Member during the twentieth century until Watt and Representative Eva M. Clayton in 1992. He urged lawmakers to support reauthorization, stressing that "although the successes of the Voting Rights Act have been substantial, they have not been fast and they have not been furious." The bipartisan bill passed by a vote of 390 to 33 in the House and with unanimous support in the Senate.<sup>6</sup>

On the Judiciary Committee, Watt vigorously defended constitutional prerogatives and civil liberties. After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, he was one of a minority of House Members to oppose the USA PATRIOT Act, which vastly expanded the surveillance powers available to law enforcement agencies. Though Watt voted for a prior version of the bill in committee and supported provisions added to counter money laundering as a funding tool for criminal and terrorist activities, he feared the law would enable the government to "abuse due process through law enforcement." Watt advised his colleagues to balance the needs of law enforcement with the concerns of those "who have a different history in America," such as African Americans, who "do not have the luxury of being able to just sit back and give more authority than is warranted."<sup>7</sup>

After 2011, when Democrats lost the House majority, Watt became the ranking Democrat on the Financial Services Subcommittee on Intellectual Property, Competition, and the Internet, which was responsible for internet policy and intellectual property rights. He was a leading advocate for the Stop Online Piracy Act in 2011, a bill aimed at combating online copyright infringement and counterfeit goods. In a Judiciary Committee hearing on the bill, Watt insisted that the bill was designed to protect intellectual property rather than impose "government censorship." The bill never made it to the floor for a vote.<sup>8</sup>

Watt also worked to balance the needs of the major banking industries headquartered in his district against

the consumer-oriented concerns of his constituents. Early in his career on the Financial Services Committee, Watt often collaborated with Republicans to focus on banking and other business interests that dominated his district. In 1994, he supported an interstate banking provision that led to a dramatic expansion of national and international banking corporations as they rapidly bought out local branches, which Watt considered a “much more logical way to expand into a new territory instead of setting up a whole new line of branches there and having to compete.” He also backed a 1999 measure to revise the Glass–Steagall Act, which allowed commercial banks to sell stocks, bonds, and insurance. Later in his career, Watt embraced the role of consumer advocate. In 2009, he aligned with consumer groups against major banks in his own district to support bans against predatory credit card billing practices.<sup>9</sup>

In 2003, President George W. Bush proposed the creation of a new regulatory office overseeing Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, the federally-backed mortgage insurers originally chartered by Congress to boost the mortgage industry and provide funding for more affordable, longer-term loans. The move followed an investigation into manipulated accounting records and risky lending practices by the two financial giants and was designed to eliminate congressional oversight by shifting regulatory responsibilities to the U.S. Department of Treasury. Watt labeled the reforms a “shell game” that would lead to tighter regulation and discourage the financing of affordable housing. His position shifted following the housing crisis in 2008, when Watt supported a similar reorganization as part of the Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008, which created the Federal Housing Finance Agency (FHFA). Watt worked with Massachusetts Representative Barney Frank both in committee and on the floor to limit civil litigation against the banks and instead provide funding for financial counseling to citizens affected by bad loans. He also called on mortgage holders to delay foreclosures until the housing reform bill containing consumer aid had passed. At the same time, Watt opposed a plan to suspend compensation packages for Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac executives, arguing the action would negatively impact the future of the companies.<sup>10</sup>

As the economic downturn continued in late 2009, Watt joined nine of his CBC colleagues on the Financial Services Committee to call attention to what they said were limited efforts by the Obama administration to

help African-American communities. The CBC members abstained from a committee vote on a banking bill that was an administration priority and threatened to continue boycotting the bill on the floor. The CBC claimed victory two weeks later after House leadership added several requested provisions to the final bill, including funding for low-interest loans and a federal program to purchase foreclosed homes and rent them to low-income families.<sup>11</sup>

Watt also participated in negotiations on the Dodd–Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act in the 111th Congress, which aimed to improve regulations and transparency in the financial services industry in the wake of the mortgage industry collapse and Great Recession. Through their positions on the Financial Services Committee, Watt and California Representative Maxine Waters secured funding for a new Office of Minority and Women Inclusion within the Securities and Exchange Commission, to ensure equal employment in federal financial services agencies. Watt worked with fellow North Carolina Democrat Brad Miller to include safeguards against predatory lending and defended the provision establishing the new Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.<sup>12</sup>

Ahead of President Obama’s second term, the CBC lobbied the president to include more people of color in his Cabinet, suggesting Watt for the position of U.S. Commerce Secretary. On May 1, 2013, President Obama nominated Watt to head the FHFA. Watt’s appointment to the regulatory agency drew scrutiny given his connection to prominent banks in his district. The CBC continued to advocate for his appointment during the lengthy seven-month confirmation process. The Senate confirmed him on December 10, 2013, and he was sworn in as director of the FHFA on January 6, 2014. Watt resigned on January 6, 2019, following an investigation by the FHFA’s Office of the Inspector General into accusations of sexual harassment and misuse of his position.<sup>13</sup>

### Manuscript Collection

**University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library** (Chapel Hill, NC). *Papers*: ca. 1990–2014, 90 linear feet. Melvin L. Watt’s papers consist mostly of office files related to his time in Congress, including correspondence, campaign materials, financial papers, memos, clippings, programs, and other materials. A finding aid is available in the repository and online.

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# Albert Russell Wynn

1951–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1993–2008

Democrat from Maryland



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

Albert Russell Wynn won election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1992, in an affluent, predominantly African-American district in suburban Maryland. With a decade of service in the state legislature, Wynn quickly adapted to the U.S. House, eventually earning a seat on the prestigious Energy and Commerce Committee, becoming a subcommittee chair, and moving into a prominent role in the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC). During his tenure, Wynn focused on helping his constituents. “I wanted to always be in a position where the office was saying, ‘Yes,’ and, ‘We’ll try,’ and trying to help, as opposed to saying, ‘Oh no, we don’t do this. We don’t do that. We don’t do the other.’ Because people, they’re looking for leadership. They’re not looking for who has what title and what narrow jurisdiction.”<sup>1</sup>

Albert Wynn was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on September 10, 1951. His family moved to North Carolina, where his father, Albert Fitzgerald Wynn, farmed and his mother, Rose Russell Wynn, taught school. The Wynns lived in a supportive community, but he recognized the stark racial divisions of the Jim Crow South. “Day-to-day, you were in a Black, African American culture with the churches and all the other activities and the school activities, on a separate basis, but you were always aware that there

were people out there who really hated Blacks, and there was significant hostility.” When his father was hired by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the family moved to the Washington, DC, area, where Wynn attended the public schools in Prince George’s County, Maryland. In 1973, Wynn graduated with a degree in political science from the University of Pittsburgh. He briefly studied public administration at Howard University in Washington, DC, before entering Georgetown University and earning a law degree in 1977. Wynn later served as director of the consumer protection commission for Prince George’s County. After opening his own law firm in 1982, Wynn won election to the Maryland house of delegates, where he served from 1983 to 1987. He was then elected to the Maryland state senate, serving there until 1993 and rising to the post of deputy majority whip. Wynn was married to Gaines Clore Wynn until her death in 2011. He has a daughter, Gabrielle, and a stepdaughter, Meredith.<sup>2</sup>

In 1992, Wynn entered a crowded Democratic primary for a newly created congressional district that encompassed sections of Prince George’s and Montgomery counties along the border of the District of Columbia. African Americans accounted for 58 percent of the heavily Democratic district,

which had one of the largest concentrations of middle-class African Americans in the country. In a field of 12 other candidates, many with political backgrounds, Wynn recalled searching for ways “to break out.” Wynn prioritized direct, personal contact with the voters: waving on street corners in the morning and shaking hands at grocery stores, train stations, barber shops, and back-to-school nights. “Wherever there were people, we would go.” Wynn won the March 3 primary with 28 percent of the vote, defeating his closest opponent Alex Williams, the state’s attorney for Prince George’s County, by several percentage points. Wynn easily prevailed in the general election, capturing 75 percent of the vote against Republican candidate Michele Dyson, an African-American business consultant. In each of his subsequent seven re-elections, Wynn won with more than 75 percent of the vote and faced no serious challenges until 2006.<sup>3</sup>

Wynn was one of 16 new African-American lawmakers elected in 1992, bolstering the ranks of the CBC. Thirteen of the first-term Members came from southern states—some as the first Black Members since Reconstruction—and many represented rural or suburban areas outside majority-Black urban districts. “By virtue of that election in ’92, the caucus broadened, its interest broadened,” Wynn remembered. “People brought in rural issues that had not been in the forefront before. . . . But also, suburban issues that I wanted to talk about, like federal employees and minority small business issues.”<sup>4</sup>

With these interests in mind, Wynn requested to be put on the prestigious Commerce Committee. Instead, he received assignments on three different committees: Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs (later named Financial Services); Foreign Affairs; and Post Office and Civil Service.

In his first term, the *Washington Post* reported on the lack of commercial and mortgage loans granted to Black residents of the Washington area. Wynn worked with Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs Committee Chair Henry B. González to combat lending discrimination. “As a Hispanic Member, he knew exactly what I was talking about,” Wynn recalled. “His community was experiencing the same thing. So, he was very amenable to doing this, to putting a spotlight on this issue.” The committee chose part of Wynn’s district as a test site and challenged banks and regulators to improve their lending practices in one year.<sup>5</sup>

In 1997, Wynn focused on increasing the number of government contracts granted to small businesses

and assessed the tendency of many federal agencies to consolidate contracts: “Bundled contracts require companies to have more equipment, personnel, insurance and more bonding,” Wynn explained. “Large companies are designed to handle these requirements; but they are barriers for small businesses, particularly minority small businesses, who want to compete for government business.” Wynn’s bill, the Small Business Opportunity Preservation Act, aimed to make more contracts available to small businesses, but it was never reported out of committee. Wynn also organized business fairs in his district, inviting “women-owned businesses, Hispanic businesses, African-American businesses, small businesses generally, to come out” and meet representatives of federal agencies. “I was able to connect a lot of people to the contracting procurement process in government.”<sup>6</sup>

Wynn’s district was home to more than 70,000 federal workers—the largest in the country—many of whom commuted into Washington, DC. With similar interests, he teamed up with his regional colleagues to pass legislation and appropriations related to the area. In the 104th Congress (1995–1997), he cosponsored the District of Columbia Emergency Highway Relief Act, introduced by DC Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton. The bill was signed into law and increased funds for transportation projects in the city. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Wynn worked to secure funding to add more lanes and emergency shoulders to the Woodrow Wilson Memorial Bridge, connecting Maryland and Virginia across the Potomac River. In 2006, Wynn went to bat for 1.3 million Washington Nationals baseball fans who were unable to watch games because of broadcasting contracts in the region.<sup>7</sup>

Wynn addressed discrimination against workers of color within federal agencies. “I worked with a lot of people who were on strike. I protested at almost every agency,” Wynn recalled. “Constituents would come in, and everyone would say, ‘My agency’s the worst. It’s the last plantation.’” In 1994, he and his colleagues introduced the Architect of the Capitol Human Resources Act to improve personnel management in the office of the Architect of the Capitol, the agency that maintains the grounds and buildings of the Capitol campus. “We’ve passed hundreds of laws here in Congress so that American workers have basic rights. It is a disgrace that employees of the Capitol, itself, aren’t covered by those laws,” Wynn said when the bill was introduced. Three years later, Wynn sided with Black employees of the Library of Congress in their protest of unequal hiring and

promoting practices. “People want to move forward. They want to move up into management,” Wynn said. “They are not just satisfied with a ‘good government job.’”<sup>8</sup>

In the House, Wynn steadily accrued leadership roles in the CBC and the Democratic Party. From 2002 until 2007, Wynn chaired the CBC’s Political Action Committee and headed task forces on campaign finance reform and minority business. He also served as a senior regional whip for the Democratic Party.<sup>9</sup>

In the 105th Congress (1997–1999), Representative Wynn gained a seat on the Commerce Committee, requiring him to give up his prior assignments. In 2005, House leadership chose Wynn to sit on the conference committee with the Senate to finalize the Energy Policy Act of 2005. The bill, signed into law in August 2005, primarily focused on the competition, regulation, and development of power markets and infrastructure. The final version included language from Wynn’s bill, the Interstate Transmission Act, which supported mandatory standards for electricity providers and was written to prevent widespread blackouts, such as the one the northeastern region experienced in 2003.<sup>10</sup>

With his party in the majority in the 110th Congress (2007–2009), Wynn was appointed chair of the Subcommittee on Environment and Hazardous Materials on the renamed Committee on Energy and Commerce. He held hearings on the regulation of asbestos, perchlorate, and mercury, citing the rampant misuse of these harmful substances in Black communities around the country. In October 2007, he held a hearing on proposed legislation governing how and when the Environmental Protection Agency reports toxic emission data to the public.<sup>11</sup>

Reapportionment after the 2000 Census changed the political makeup of the district; it added more Republican voters in the suburbs of Montgomery County, but it also brought in additional progressive White voters. In 2006, Wynn faced a stiff primary challenge from Donna F. Edwards, a lawyer and nonprofit director, who criticized what she said were his frequent absences from the district and his support for the George W. Bush administration’s decision to take military action in Iraq. Local newspapers from the time of the primary election claimed Wynn was not tuned into the needs of the district’s new progressive voters, who disagreed with his support of estate tax repeals and oil and gas subsidies, and his disinterest in campaign finance reform. Although the *Washington Post* endorsed Edwards two weeks before the election, Wynn prevailed

in the primary by roughly 3,000 votes and then won reelection with 80 percent of the vote. After his victory in 2006, Wynn and his team decided to approach constituent service differently. He met with constituents both one-on-one and in group church meetings and promised to continue his college and job fairs. When Edwards ran against him again, in 2008, she challenged Wynn’s leadership in the district and criticized his environmental activism as ineffective. In the Democratic primary on February 12, 2008, Wynn lost to Edwards who had won 60 percent of the vote. Wynn resigned from the House on May 31, 2008, and joined a lobbying firm.<sup>12</sup>

### Manuscript Collection

**University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections and University Archives, Hornbake Library** (College Park, MD). *Papers*: 1983–2008, 37.5 linear feet. This collection pertains entirely to Albert Russell Wynn’s service in the U.S. House of Representatives. A large portion of the collection consists of news clippings, correspondence, and committee files, as well as extensive video and audiotapes and photographs documenting Wynn’s activities. Subjects include the war in Iraq, the environment, minority-owned and small businesses, energy policy, television ratings, affirmative action, and employment discrimination. Correspondents include many national politicians active from 1993 to 2008, especially other members of Maryland’s congressional delegation, Presidents William J. Clinton and George W. Bush, Vice President Albert Gore Jr., and members of the Congressional Black Caucus. The collection is unprocessed, but a preliminary inventory is available.

### Notes

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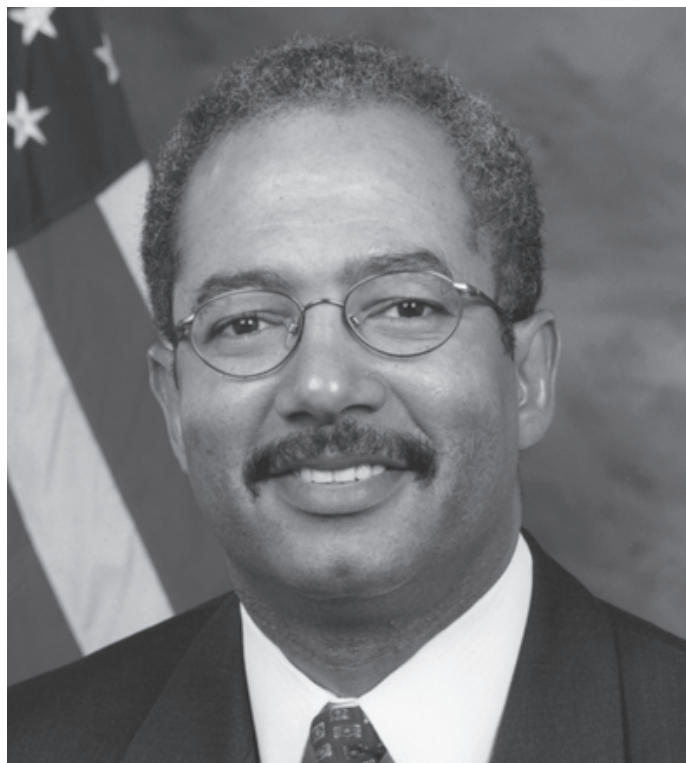
# Chaka Fattah

1956–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1995–2016

Democrat from Pennsylvania



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

Chaka Fattah represented a U.S. House of Representatives district covering northern and western Philadelphia for 11 terms. A political activist from an early age, Fattah served 12 years in the Pennsylvania state legislature before winning his first House election in 1994, building a powerful local organization that enabled him to acquire resources for his district. “Even though my family wasn’t involved in politics, I had this political interest in terms of community involvement,” he noted. “My thinking ... is that you can provide community service in a variety of venues. But as a politician, you could provide community service that no one else really could.”<sup>1</sup>

Chaka Fattah was born Arthur Davenport, the fourth of six sons, on November 21, 1956, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. His father, Russell Davenport, was a U.S. Army sergeant, and his mother, Frances Davenport, was an editor at the *Philadelphia Tribune*, the oldest continuously published Black newspaper in America and a community activist. His father died when he was young. In 1968, Frances married David Waters, a local activist, and they adopted the surname Fattah. Frances took the name Falaka and renamed her son Chaka after a Zulu warrior. The social activism of his mother and stepfather shaped Fattah’s

political development. “I grew up in a home where being involved in community life was a norm,” he recalled.<sup>2</sup>

In 1968, the family opened the House of Umoja, a shelter that helped homeless youth and young men looking to escape unstable home lives find secure housing. While sharing his room, clothes, and food with the residents, Fattah recalled discussing every subject under the sun. “These guys were like my older brothers ... so I thought it was a great thing.” Fattah’s first exposure to local politics occurred when he was 14 years old. As the House of Umoja grew beyond the first floor of the Fattah family home, Chaka, still only a teenager, successfully submitted a proposal to a local bank to purchase several vacant houses on the block. The organization relied on community support, and Fattah became adept at acquiring resources, building relationships with local leaders, and working with a variety of people in his neighborhood and in the local government. The House of Umoja expanded into more than 25 homes within the next 30 years.<sup>3</sup>

Out of Fattah’s experience with the House of Umoja, he became involved in community politics and started volunteering for local campaigns. “I saw these people marching up and down the street saying ‘power to the

people' and putting up posters. ... I fell into this, giving out leaflets and having fun." By 1971, Fattah, still not even old enough to get a driver's license, had volunteered to work on a mayoral campaign, participated in voter registration drives, and mediated gang conflict with his parents throughout Philadelphia. With his parents' permission, Fattah dropped out of Overbrook High School and earned a GED. "I was involved in a lot of things and school didn't have a lot of rigor. There's nothing remarkable about it ... 15 million people have a G.E.D." Fattah attended the Community College of Philadelphia, but he did not earn a degree. He briefly worked in the Philadelphia housing department. Fattah graduated with a master's degree in government administration from the University of Pennsylvania's Fels School of State and Local Government in 1986.<sup>4</sup>

A seasoned political activist at the age of 22, Fattah ran for a seat on the Philadelphia city commission in 1979, where he placed fourth in a field of 22 candidates. In 1982, he unseated a Democratic incumbent by 58 votes to win a seat in the Pennsylvania state house of representatives. At age 25, he was one of the youngest people ever to serve in the state legislature. In 1988, Fattah won a seat in the Pennsylvania state senate, where he beat a 20-year incumbent in the primary. He chaired the education committee in his first term and went on to serve in the state senate for six years. In 1996, Fattah married Patricia Renfroe, a local attorney. The couple had two children, Frances and Chaka Jr., and divorced in 1997. In 2001, Fattah married Renee Yvette Chenault, a former lawyer and prominent television reporter in Philadelphia. Fattah became stepfather to Chenault's daughter Cameron, and they are the parents of another daughter, Chandler.<sup>5</sup>

Fattah made his first bid for the U.S. House in a 1991 special election, when Congressman William H. Gray III resigned from a seat that covered large areas of Center City Philadelphia, West Philadelphia, Chestnut Hill, and the University of Pennsylvania. Fattah served in what he called the "historically African American Second District," which he described as an "urban, economically and ethnically diverse" area that had a mixture of the richest and poorest sections of the city. In the special election to succeed Gray, city councilman Lucien E. Blackwell received the Democratic nomination, and Fattah ran under the Consumer Party banner. Blackwell won with 39 percent of the vote to Fattah's 28 percent. Fattah recalled, "It was

a twenty-eight-day campaign and the organization was able to slot their candidate before I got started. Since I had said I was going to run, I felt I had to."<sup>6</sup>

Following reapportionment in 1992, Pennsylvania lost two seats in Congress. As a state senator, Fattah helped redraw Pennsylvania's House districts and ensured that the new seat covering northern Philadelphia—the Second District—overlapped with much of his state senate district. "My advantage ... over Blackwell was that I knew every inch of the Second Congressional District—because as a state senator, I drew the lines." Over his career, Fattah had also built a multi-ethnic coalition of supporters independent of the local Democratic Party organization, and he used this network to challenge Blackwell's mostly working-class, African-American support base. Fattah's campaign ignored television ads, and instead "relied on radio ... we did direct mail. We walked door-to-door ... and we had phone banks," he recalled. Fattah won the Democratic primary in 1994 with 58 percent of the vote. In the heavily Democratic and majority-Black district, he won the general election with 86 percent of the vote. With his win, Fattah became the fourth African American from Pennsylvania to be elected to Congress. Fattah went on to win his subsequent 10 re-elections with at least 86 percent of the vote.<sup>7</sup>

When Fattah entered the House in 1995, he was assigned to the Small Business Committee and to the Government Reform and Oversight Committee. Later in his first term, he joined the Committee on Economic and Educational Opportunities. Fattah left Small Business and joined the Committee on the Standards of Official Conduct—colloquially known as the Ethics Committee—for the 105th and 106th Congresses (1997–2001), and the Committee on House Administration in the 106th Congress. In 2001, Fattah resigned from these committees when he joined the Appropriations Committee, where he served for the remainder of his House career. He was also a member of the Joint Committee on Printing for the 106th and 107th Congresses (1999–2003).

Fattah's primary legislative interest as a state legislator had been to open access to quality educational opportunities for minority students, and he continued that effort in the House. His biggest legislative success came in the 105th Congress when he submitted the 21st Century Scholars Act, which directed federal funds to prepare low-income students to enter college through a competitive grant program that provided six to seven years of financial support. Although

the bill did not survive on its own, Fattah found bipartisan support in the House and Senate and inserted the bill into an omnibus educational package. Throughout the process, Fattah coordinated support between his House colleagues, the White House, and the Senate to usher the legislation through to final passage. The final version, GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs), was signed by President William J. Clinton as part of the Higher Education Amendments of 1998. Fattah submitted other education bills throughout his congressional career, including the Student Bill of Rights Act, which required each state to certify with the U.S. Secretary of Education that its public school system provided students with equal access to resources and qualified teachers.<sup>8</sup>

Fattah's initial term in the House during the 104th Congress (1995–1997) coincided with the first Republican majority in nearly 40 years. House Democrats recognized Fattah's state legislative experience serving in the minority party and tapped him to serve on the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee, which determined committee assignments and helped coordinate the party's overall strategy. Fattah also served as whip for the Congressional Black Caucus.<sup>9</sup>

Alongside his educational policy work, Fattah took an interest in tax reform and debt reduction. In the 108th Congress (2003–2005), Fattah submitted the Transform America Transaction Fee proposal, which sought to replace all federal individual and business taxes with a revenue system based on fees for most transactions higher than \$500. In the 111th Congress (2009–2011), Fattah submitted the Debt Free America Act, which outlined a plan to pay off the national debt in seven years and eliminate individual income taxes by allowing cities and towns to levy a 1 percent transaction fee. Although neither bill made it out of committee, Fattah submitted similar versions of these bills in subsequent Congresses.<sup>10</sup>

Early in his House career, Fattah strongly opposed the “Contract with America,” the legislative agenda of Speaker Newt Gingrich of Georgia; he voted against more of the measures in the Republican package than nearly any other Member. Fattah defended President Clinton during his impeachment but regularly broke with the Clinton administration on policy. He objected to Clinton's requests for fast-track authority to negotiate trade deals, concerned about the lack of safeguards for workers. He also opposed a

welfare reform bill—the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act—that the President negotiated with the Republican House majority. Over the course of four days, Fattah took to the floor three times to voice his frustrations with the bill. “We have some tough cowboys here on the floor of the House,” Fattah declared on the final day of debate. “This is a new interesting kind of wagon train in which the cowboys have decided to throw the women and infants and the children and the senior citizens out of the wagon train so they can get where they are going faster. It is cruel.”<sup>11</sup>

When it came to investing in America's cities, Fattah reached across the aisle on bipartisan projects. He worked with Republicans to promote President Barack Obama's tax cut extension deal in 2010. And as chair of the Urban Caucus, Fattah brought together House Members who represented the nation's largest metropolitan areas to develop solutions to the challenges in America's cities. Fattah submitted bills such as the 2007 Homeowners' Emergency Mortgage Assistance Act to create an emergency mortgage fund for single- and multi-family households and the Urban Jobs Act in 2013 designed to provide Labor Department grants for job training programs for young people.<sup>12</sup>

About a decade into his House tenure Fattah began considering a run for mayor of Philadelphia. He was able to run for both mayor and his House seat according to Pennsylvania law. Fattah declared his candidacy for mayor in November 2006 and entered a crowded field. His platform sought to expand economic opportunities for Philadelphians and to use new technology to make the city safer; Fattah also promoted after-school activities for teenagers. He promised a “new era of openness” by strengthening ethics requirements in city hall while promoting small businesses. In the May 2007 primary, Fattah placed fourth, losing to Michael Nutter, a city council member who went on to win the general election.<sup>13</sup>

After losing the mayoral race, Fattah served in the House for four more terms. During that time, he directed federal funding and resources to his district while continuing his work to improve America's educational system and to overhaul how the U.S. Treasury collected revenue. In July 2015, Fattah was charged in a racketeering conspiracy for using campaign funds and federal grant money to finance his 2007 mayoral run, repaying illegal campaign loans, and rewarding members of his local political network. Following his indictment, Fattah drew three challengers in the 2016 Democratic primary. In April of that year, he lost

the nomination to state senator Dwight Evans. Two months later, Fattah was found guilty of all charges. Fattah resigned from the House on June 22, 2016.<sup>14</sup>

On December 12, 2016, Fattah was sentenced to 10 years in prison. He reported to the Federal Correctional Institution-McKean in Lewis Run, Pennsylvania, on January 25, 2017. On August 9, 2018, a federal appeals court overturned some of Fattah's convictions based on a ruling from the U.S. Supreme Court but allowed the other convictions to stand. In 2020, Fattah returned to Philadelphia to serve the remainder of his sentence in "community confinement."<sup>15</sup>

## Manuscript Collection

**Temple University Libraries, Special Collections Research Center** (Philadelphia, PA). *Papers*: 1986–1995, 17 linear feet. The papers of Chaka Fattah contain correspondence; financial records; subject files on activities, organizations, and political subjects; election and legislative materials; brochures, newsletters, and pamphlets; audiovisual materials; and memorabilia. A finding aid is available in the repository and online. The collection is open to research with some restrictions.

## Notes

- 1 Kia Gregory, "Man on the Run," 11 October 2006, *Philadelphia Weekly*: n.p.
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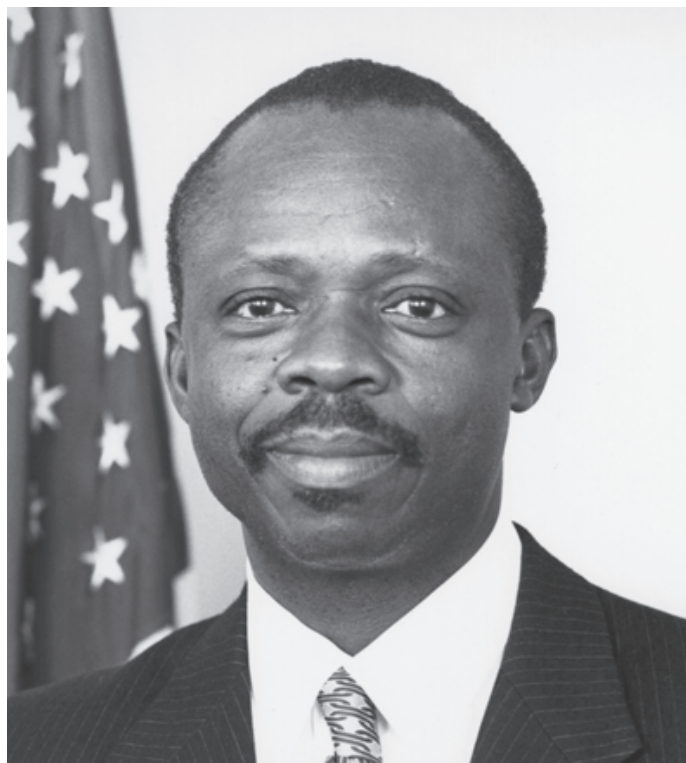
## Victor O. Frazer

1943–

DELEGATE

1995–1997

Independent from the U.S. Virgin Islands



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After a surprise victory in 1994, Victor O. Frazer became the second Black Delegate to represent the U.S. Virgin Islands in the U.S. House of Representatives. During his brief stint in Congress, Frazer promoted the interests of his constituents in the American territory, focusing on procuring federal money for hurricane relief and attracting tourism to the eastern Caribbean.

Victor O. Frazer was born on May 24, 1943, in Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, one of 10 children to Albert Frazer and Amanda Blyden. After graduating from Charlotte Amalie High School in 1960, Frazer earned a bachelor's degree from Fisk University, in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1964, and a law degree from Howard University Law School in Washington, DC, in 1971. Frazer worked as an attorney for the District of Columbia office of the corporation counsel (later called the office of the attorney general of the District of Columbia) from 1974 to 1978, before stints as a banker and as a lawyer for the Interstate Commerce Commission and the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. He later served as general counsel for the Virgin Islands water and power authority from 1987 to 1989. Frazer acquired congressional experience as an administrative assistant for California Representative

Mervyn M. Dymally, as a special assistant for Michigan Representative John Conyers Jr., and as counsel for the House Committee on the District of Columbia. He also worked in a private legal practice. Frazer has two daughters: Kaaren and Aileene.<sup>1</sup>

In 1992, Frazer made an unsuccessful run for Congress against longtime Virgin Islands Delegate Ron de Lugo. Frazer, a Democrat who ran as an Independent, lost by more than 5,000 votes in a race that drew 22,997 total voters. When de Lugo announced his retirement in 1994, Frazer ran for the House again as an Independent. In a four-way race to represent the Virgin Islands in Congress, he placed second to Democrat Eileen R. Petersen, a former judge, but qualified for the runoff election on November 22 after none of the candidates earned a majority of the vote. Petersen had the support of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), but Frazer had secured the endorsement of retired U.S. Ambassador Terrance Todman, who was from the Virgin Islands. Despite struggling to raise funding, Frazer upset Petersen in the runoff, winning 55 percent of the vote and astounding the experts; publishers scrambled to locate a photograph of Frazer to include with those of the other new Members in upcoming publications about the

104th Congress (1995–1997). Following his win, Frazer proclaimed, “This is the people’s victory.”<sup>2</sup>

During the 104th Congress, Frazer served on the Committee on International Relations. As one of the five nonvoting Members of the House—four territorial Delegates and one Resident Commissioner—Frazer could vote in committee but not on the House Floor. The rights of the Delegates and the Puerto Rican Resident Commissioner had been expanded in the 103rd Congress (1993–1995), allowing them to vote in the Committee of the Whole. But when Republicans took control of the House in 1995, they rescinded the privilege. “We are not less American because we live in the Virgin Islands,” Frazer remarked. As an Independent, Frazer lacked a formal party organization in the House, and after several weeks of deliberation, he opted to caucus with the Democratic Party. He also became one of a handful of non-Democratic Members to join the CBC.<sup>3</sup>

Frazer used his one term in Congress to highlight issues important to his constituents in the Virgin Islands. When Hurricane Marilyn struck the chain of islands in 1995—St. Thomas sustained the most damage—Frazer worked with President William J. Clinton to ensure that the Virgin Islands received federal funds for disaster relief. In the aftermath of the hurricane, Frazer emphasized the need for additional protection against natural disasters. He urged the federal government to require private insurance companies to provide coverage for wind damage in their standard policies for homeowners in areas prone to experiencing hurricanes. In 1996, he sponsored legislation directing the Federal Emergency Management Agency to study the feasibility of providing insurance protection from windstorms for residents of the Virgin Islands.<sup>4</sup>

Frazer also sought to revive the tourism industry of the Virgin Islands—an essential segment of its economy. In 1995, he backed the Travel and Tourism Partnership Act aimed at promoting international travel and tourism to the United States because it “would enhance the limited resources of the Virgin Islands.” Frazer also successfully lobbied for an increase in funds to fight the growing problem of international drug trafficking in the U.S. territory. Shortly after he took office in 1995, Frazer joined Representatives from Hawaii, the Delegates from Guam and American Samoa, and the Resident Commissioner from Puerto Rico, to protest a shipment of nuclear waste that was scheduled to travel through the Caribbean. The radioactive

materials, which originated from Japanese nuclear plants, were shipped to France to extract plutonium and then sent back to Japan as part of an energy program sponsored by the Japanese government. Frazer also supported an increase in the federal minimum wage, warning that even though “the Virgin Islands is considered an American paradise,” many of its residents lived below the poverty line.<sup>5</sup>

In his bid for re-election to the 105th Congress (1997–1999), Frazer portrayed himself as an active advocate for the Virgin Islands in the House and argued that his status as an Independent allowed him the flexibility to cross party lines to better represent his constituents. In a three-way race, Frazer’s opponents criticized his legislative style, especially his frequent trips abroad. During his one term in office, Frazer took more than 10 trips overseas. He defended his travel as necessary given his seat on the International Relations Committee, assuring voters, “I have never traveled without promoting the Virgin Islands.” During the campaign, Frazer’s two challengers contended that the incumbent should have lobbied for exemptions from the 1996 welfare reform legislation to protect the citizens of the Virgin Islands. “No one member of Congress is going to hold back the tide of legislation,” Frazer responded. “We ought not to embrace welfare as something we welcome.” None of the candidates earned 50 percent of the vote in the general election, sending the contest to a runoff. Frazer and Donna M. Christensen, a physician, received the largest shares of the votes cast. On November 19, 1996, Frazer lost to Christensen by fewer than 1,000 votes. Frazer alleged that fraud and error at the polling sites had undermined the integrity of the election. He demanded a recount but failed to prove his claim of vote tampering.<sup>6</sup>

After his term in Congress, Frazer worked as an attorney and opened his own consulting firm in Washington, DC. In 2008, he challenged Christensen in the Democratic primary for his old seat in Congress, but lost, taking 20 percent of the vote.<sup>7</sup>

## Notes

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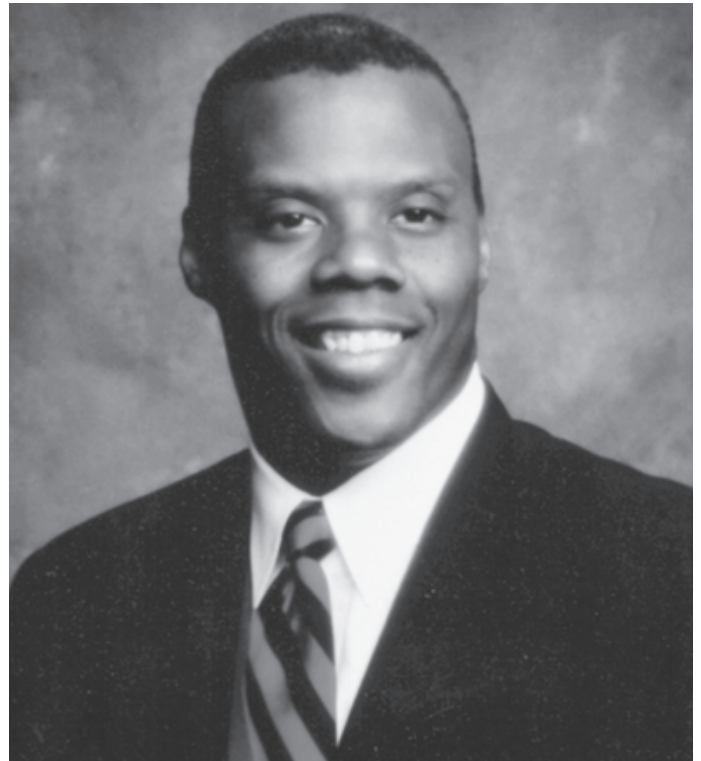
## J.C. Watts Jr.

1957–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1995–2003

Republican from Oklahoma



Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center Archives, University of Oklahoma, Julius Caesar “J.C.” Watts Jr. Photo, Box 1, Folder 4, Item 3

In 1994, J.C. Watts Jr. became the first African-American lawmaker from Oklahoma to serve in Congress. The first Republican to win the southwest Oklahoma seat in 72 years, Watts was one of two Black Republicans elected in a year which saw the GOP capture the House majority for the first time in decades. Watts became one of the most prominent legislators in the House, quickly rising to the position of Republican Conference chair, the fourth-ranking Republican in the House and responsible for communicating much of the party’s agenda. Watts cited his humble roots in a segregated Oklahoma farm town as the source of his politics and his belief in self-reliance. “My parents just taught by example,” Watts recalled. “They taught me and my brothers and sisters that if you lived under their roof, you were going to work.”<sup>1</sup>

Julius Caesar “J.C.” Watts Jr. was born in the farming community of Eufaula, Oklahoma, on November 18, 1957. His mother, Helen Watts, a homemaker, raised six children: Melvin, Lawrence, Mildred, Gwen, J.C., and Darlene. Watts’s father, Julius Caesar “Buddy” Watts, was a police officer, a businessman, and a minister. The elder Watts also served on the Eufaula city council, and along with his brother, Wade, was active in the Democratic

Party and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Wade Watts headed the Oklahoma branch of the NAACP for 16 years. J.C. Watts was one of the first Black children to attend a previously all-White elementary school in Eufaula. At Eufaula High School, Watts was the first African-American quarterback on the school’s football team; some of Watts’s teammates from the mostly segregated local community initially protested his spot on the team. Watts married Frankie Jones in 1977. The couple, who first met at Watts’s seventh birthday party, have five children: LaKeshia, Jerrell, Jennifer, Julia, and Trey. Watts has a child, Tia, from another relationship before his marriage who was adopted by a family member.<sup>2</sup>

Watts played football and studied journalism at the University of Oklahoma in Norman. At first, he was a seventh-string quarterback. Discouraged with his minimal playing time, he left school multiple times. In each instance, his father persuaded him to return. In 1979, Watts became the starting quarterback and led the Sooners to Orange Bowl victories in 1980 and 1981. He was named the bowl’s most valuable player both years and was inducted into the Orange Bowl Hall of Fame in 1992.<sup>3</sup>

Following Watts's graduation in 1981, the New York Jets, a National Football League (NFL) team, offered him a place on their roster, but not as quarterback. Instead, Watts turned down the NFL and played from 1981 to 1986 in the Canadian Football League. Watts then became a youth minister at Sunnyvale Baptist Church, in Del City, Oklahoma. Ordained in 1993, he supplemented his ministerial income by opening a highway construction company. However, Watts soon found himself courted by state Republican officials eager to back his entry into politics.<sup>4</sup>

Watts grew up in a family with long-standing ties to the Democratic Party. Buddy Watts once quipped that “a black man voting for the Republicans makes about as much sense as a chicken voting for Colonel Sanders.” But in 1980, as Watts covered a 1980 Oklahoma senate campaign as a journalism student, he found that his views were more in line with those of the Republican candidate, Don Nickles. After years of careful thought, Watts officially changed his party affiliation in 1989. “I switched my registration not out of convenience but out of conviction,” Watts later recalled. “I knew what I was doing would not be popular. It created some strain, even in relationships I had built over the years. But I knew in my heart that this was the right road, the honest road for me to take and remain true to my own principles.” In 1990, officials in the state Republican Party eagerly embraced Watts when he ran for and won a seat on the Oklahoma corporation commission, which regulated the state's telephone, oil, and gas industries. He was the first African-American to hold statewide office in Oklahoma and served as chairman of the commission from 1993 until his departure in 1995.<sup>5</sup>

In 1994, when seven-term Representative David Keith McCurdy of Oklahoma announced his candidacy for the U.S. Senate, local Republicans and business leaders urged Watts to run for McCurdy's seat. McCurdy represented a conservative southwest Oklahoma district, with several oil reserves and three major military installations. Agriculture was also a major industry and the district included the University of Oklahoma in Norman. In the primary, Watts ran on a platform squarely in line with the emerging consensus in the Republican Party. He favored the death penalty, school prayer, a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution, and welfare reform. He also opposed abortion and cuts in defense spending.<sup>6</sup>

In a tough August primary challenge against state representative Ed Apple, Watts won 49 percent to Apple's

48 percent, but since neither candidate captured 50 percent of the vote, the race moved to a runoff in September. Watts brought in high-powered Republicans to campaign for him, including New York Representative Jack French Kemp, a former football star, and National Rifle Association spokesman and actor Charlton Heston. Watts also secured the endorsement of the House Republican leadership. Apple lambasted Watts's courting of out-of-state luminaries. But while the runoff remained close, Watts prevailed with 52 percent of the vote.<sup>7</sup>

Heading into the general election, Watts continued to host high-profile Republicans, including former President George H.W. Bush, Kansas Senator Robert Joseph Dole, and Republican Whip—and future Speaker of the House—Newt Gingrich of Georgia. Watts faced a close, heated campaign against his Democratic opponent, local attorney and self-described conservative David Perryman. In a controversial advertisement that attracted national attention and accusations of racism, Perryman juxtaposed images of himself as a teenager posing with his prize-winning pigs at a youth farming contest with a photo of Watts in his high school football uniform. The state GOP chair said Perryman's advertisement was a “deeply disturbing” attempt to use race as a divisive issue in the campaign. On Election Day, Watts defeated Perryman with 52 percent of the vote. Watts increased his victories in his next three re-elections, winning with as much as 65 percent in 2000.<sup>8</sup>

Watts was sworn in to the 104th Congress (1995–1997) as part of the first GOP House majority in 40 years. He received assignments on the Banking and Financial Services Committee and the National Security Committee. The latter panel was crucial to the oversight of the three military installations in his district. Watts left the Banking and Financial Services Committee for a spot on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee in the 105th Congress (1997–1999). Watts valued his seat on the Transportation Committee so much that he turned down a position on the prestigious Appropriations Committee when a seat opened midway through the 106th Congress (1999–2001).

The GOP hoped that Watts and Representative Gary A. Franks of Connecticut—the two Black Republicans in the House—would help the party attract African-American voters, who overwhelmingly voted Democratic in national elections. Watts focused on promoting the GOP through Black organizations, such as the NAACP and historically

Black colleges and universities. “Most black people don’t think alike. Most black people just vote alike,” he said. “Why is it that so many people in the black community [who] would agree with Republican issues, why don’t they vote Republican? I think that’s the question we have to ask.” Watts also declined an invitation to join the overwhelmingly Democratic Congressional Black Caucus (CBC). “I think the CBC and I want the same things for the black community,” he observed. “The difference is how we get there.”

Representative Watts voted 95 percent of the time for legislative initiatives from the “Contract with America,” a 1994 Republican campaign promise to reduce government spending and reform how the House operated. In 1995, Watts teamed with Representative James Matthes Talent of Missouri to create Saving Our Children: The American Community Renewal Act of 1996, which sought to create tax breaks, remove regulation on small businesses, institute school vouchers for parents who wanted to choose their children’s schools, and provide funding for faith-based organizations assisting low-income communities. Although the bill never received a vote on the House Floor, Watts regularly reintroduced it, adding tax cuts for disadvantaged communities as well as opportunities for homeownership. Watts also worked with Ways and Means Committee Chair William Reynolds Archer Jr. of Texas to include provisions in the Financial Freedom Act of 1999, which was designed to eliminate the capital gains tax and provide a “wage credit” for businesses that hired qualified low-income employees. Watts argued these changes would ultimately help families save money. “Under the current tax system, we penalize savings and investment and productivity,” he argued. “Those are three things we should be rewarding.” Although President William J. Clinton vetoed the Financial Freedom Act, Archer folded Watts’s funding provision for religious organizations into the Community Renewal Tax Relief Act of 2000. The bill became law as part of an omnibus appropriations act in December 2000.<sup>10</sup>

On other issues, including affirmative action, Watts took a different approach than many in his party. “Affirmative action isn’t the problem,” Watts argued. “Lousy education for black kids is the problem. Until you fix these schools don’t talk to me about equal opportunity.” Watts pointed to his own personal experience with racism to show that the United States was not ready to abolish inclusive policies for minorities in education and employment. In the 104th Congress, he opposed a bill submitted by Gary Franks and

Florida Republican Charles Terrance Canady to eliminate affirmative action practices in the federal government. As the bill gained momentum in the Republican House, Watts appealed directly to Speaker Newt Gingrich to block it. “Look, in principle I don’t agree with affirmative action,” he told Gingrich, “but in practice, we still don’t have a level playing field.” After their conversation, Gingrich told Franks to pull the bill. Watts also suspected that Gingrich prevented an effort the following year to try and repeal the policy again.<sup>11</sup>

During his time in the House, Watts became known as the GOP’s “Great Black Hope” amid efforts by the party to rehabilitate its image with African-American voters. In 1997, the Republican Party tapped him to deliver the response to President Clinton’s State of the Union Address. He was the first African-American Republican chosen by the party to deliver a televised response to the President’s address. Watts spoke about reducing the role of government in American society and urged voters to move past anti-poverty programs and legislative efforts to end racism and discrimination. “Government can’t ease all pain. In fact, Government sometimes rubs the wound raw and makes healing harder,” he argued, adding that the Clinton administration only offered “the same old, same old—a bunch of sermons and sloganizing that defends the old assumption that Government can heal the racial divide.” Instead, Watts concluded, the GOP’s “mission is to return power to your home, to where mothers and fathers can exercise it according to their beliefs.” In 1996, Watts was named as a possible vice-presidential candidate, serving as co-chair for the campaign of GOP presidential candidate Bob Dole.<sup>12</sup>

In 1998, Watts challenged incumbent Republican Conference chair and future Speaker John A. Boehner of Ohio after the party lost a handful of seats in the midterm elections. Though Republicans had maintained their majority, exit polls showed high African-American voter turnout in the South, the GOP’s stronghold, but that only 11 percent of Black voters in the region voted Republican—down from 18 percent in 1996. Watts emphasized the GOP’s need to broaden its appeal among people of color. In a letter to House Republicans, he wrote, “It is time to let the American people know that the Republican Party is the party of all Americans. We are the party of inclusiveness. Our ideas are good for everyone.” Watts prevailed against Boehner, 121 to 93, to win election as chair of the Republican Conference, the GOP’s fourth-ranking position in the House. Watts was

the first African American to join the Republican leadership and was subsequently re-elected to the position for the 107th Congress (2001–2003).<sup>13</sup>

Watts's time in leadership proved challenging. Watts claimed he did not receive staff or a budget as conference chair until four months into the job, and he largely eschewed appearances on talk shows and rarely spoke at leadership meetings. The criticism directed at him from rank-and-file Members combined with the lack of support from his colleagues in party leadership led him to feel alienated by GOP decision makers. He found himself at odds with powerful Republican Whip Thomas Dale DeLay of Texas. Watts disagreed with DeLay's heavy-handed tactics to maintain party unity, and DeLay often overstepped Watts's role as the hub for communication within the Republican Conference. In July 1999, Watts threatened to resign from leadership to protest DeLay's aggressive tactics, but he stopped short of doing so. When Majority Leader Richard Keith Armey of Texas announced his retirement in 2002, Watts considered running to replace him and quietly solicited the aid of congressional allies. But before Watts could make a formal announcement about his candidacy, DeLay had secured enough votes to all but guarantee his election as Majority Leader.<sup>14</sup>

An early and avid supporter of Republican President George W. Bush, Watts was dissatisfied with the Pentagon's 2002 handling of funding for an \$11 billion weapons system that would be partially assembled in Watts's district in Elgin, Oklahoma. Watts later claimed that President Bush refused to return his phone calls after targeting the project for spending cuts. Watts was furious when Secretary of Defense Donald Henry Rumsfeld announced the end of the program without consulting him. When the President addressed the Republican Conference on Capitol Hill the following week, Watts did not attend.<sup>15</sup>

In 2002, Watts declined to run for re-election to the 108th Congress (2003–2005), citing a desire to spend more time with his family, who had remained in Oklahoma during his tenure in Washington. "This business is hard on families," he said. "I don't want to do this for the rest of my life. There are other things I want to do and can do. You have to be careful about getting on this treadmill." Leaders in both parties implored him to stay, recognizing that his unique position brought new ideas to the House. "I hate to see him go," noted prominent Democrat and CBC member James E. Clyburn of South Carolina. "J.C. is

someone who really has been quietly and forcefully doing a lot of good." Civil rights activist Rosa Parks, who, in 1955, famously refused to give up her seat on a Montgomery, Alabama, bus, wrote to Watts. "If you can," Parks implored him, "please remain as a pioneer on the Republicans' side until others come to assist you. I am glad that I stayed in my seat." After leaving Congress Watts formed a lobbying and consulting business and served as chair of political action committee working to elect Republican candidates. He also appeared on television as a political analyst and worked as a news media entrepreneur.<sup>16</sup>

### Manuscript Collection

**University of Oklahoma, Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center, Congressional and Political Collections** (Norman, OK). *Papers*: 1992–2002, 100 boxes. The papers of J.C. Watts Jr. consist of speeches, photographs, correspondence, and other material documenting his legislative activities. The collection contains audiovisual materials. A finding aid is available in the repository and online.

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## Jesse L. Jackson Jr.

1965–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1995–2012

Democrat from Illinois



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

Jesse L. Jackson Jr. won his first campaign for elected office at the age of 30 when he prevailed in a special election to represent a U.S. House of Representatives district that stretched across South Chicago and outlying communities. The son of one of the foremost civil rights activists of the twentieth century, Jackson used his seat on the House Appropriations Committee to focus on improving the economy of his largely suburban district and attended to national issues affecting African Americans, such as voting reform and health care. “I’m in Congress not because of something I’ve done,” Jackson once said, “but because of the many African Americans who have fought for me to be there.”<sup>1</sup>

Jesse L. Jackson Jr. was born in Greenville, South Carolina, on March 11, 1965, the second of five children of Reverend Jesse Jackson Sr. and Jacqueline Davis Jackson. Jackson Sr., one of the country’s foremost civil rights activists, was in Alabama marching from Selma to Montgomery with Martin Luther King Jr. when his son was born. Jackson Sr. went on to start two political organizations, PUSH (People United to Save Humanity) and the Rainbow Coalition; he also ran for president in 1984 and 1988. When Jesse Jackson Jr. was a boy,

his family moved to Chicago so his father could attend the Chicago Theological Seminary. He grew up in the city and attended Le Mans Academy, a private military preparatory school in Indiana, before graduating from St. Albans School, an elite boarding school in Washington, DC. Jackson turned down football scholarships from the University of Michigan, Notre Dame, and the University of Southern California, and enrolled at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, a historically Black school and his father’s alma mater. Jackson graduated in 1987 with a bachelor’s degree in business management. Two years later, he earned a master’s degree in theology from the Chicago Theological Seminary. In 1993, he completed a law degree at the University of Illinois College of Law. Jackson accrued political experience as a student while campaigning for his father’s presidential runs in the 1980s. After law school, he served as secretary of the Democratic National Committee’s Black Caucus and as national field director for the Rainbow Coalition. Jackson’s wife, Sandi, whom he married in 1991, represented Chicago’s seventh ward on the city council. The couple has two children: Jessica Donatella and Jesse L. Jackson III. They filed for divorce in 2016.<sup>2</sup>

In September 1995, Jackson declared his intention to run for the U.S. House seat held by Representative Mel Reynolds of Illinois. The incumbent had been convicted on sexual abuse charges and announced his resignation effective October 1. The district, which included much of Chicago's South Side and a swath of suburbs toward the south, was 68 percent Black. It was economically diverse, with rich and poor neighborhoods, abandoned steel mills, and suburban tract housing. Jackson's most significant challenger in the Democratic primary was Emil Jones, minority leader of the Illinois state senate and a legislator for 22 years. Jones touted his lengthy political record and criticized Jackson's lack of experience. The primary, scheduled for November 29, was expected to draw low turnout due to voter apathy and the holiday season, prompting Jackson to focus his campaign efforts on mobilizing and registering young voters, his core supporters. Jackson won the highly contested race with 48 percent of the vote, despite a low turnout of 21 percent. In the special election on December 12, 1995, Jackson defeated his Republican opponent, former Chicago Heights police officer Thomas Somer, by a nearly three-to-one margin. Jackson was sworn in two days later, as Representative Sidney Richard Yates—the dean of the Illinois delegation from a North Side Chicago district—introduced him on the floor. Jackson easily won re-election nine times.<sup>3</sup>

Jackson received assignments to the Banking and Financial Services Committee and the Small Business Committee during the 104th Congress (1995–1997). In the 106th Congress (1999–2001), he left both panels after securing an exclusive post on the Appropriations Committee, where he served for the rest of his House career.<sup>4</sup>

From the 106th to the 112th Congresses (1999–2013), Jackson introduced a total of 56 constitutional amendments, including proposals designed to abolish the Electoral College and guarantee voting rights, high-quality education, health care, and employment. Jackson believed that the Tenth Amendment—which reserved powers not explicitly written in the Constitution to state governments—hampered the federal government's ability to pursue major quality of life improvements on a national scale. "Human rights must be advanced by this Congress in order to broaden the definition of what it means to be an American," he declared on the House Floor.<sup>5</sup>

Jackson supported projects in the Capitol complex that memorialized Black Americans and the civil rights

movement. He drafted the bill that placed a statue of civil rights pioneer Rosa Parks in the Capitol's Statuary Hall. He also co-wrote legislation with Zachary Paul Wamp of Tennessee to designate the large entrance hall of the new Capitol Visitor Center as Emancipation Hall, in recognition of the enslaved workers who constructed the Capitol.<sup>6</sup>

During Jackson's brief service on the Banking Committee, Democratic leaders considered replacing the panel's top Democrat, Henry B. González—the committee's former chair and the longest-serving Hispanic Representative at the time—with a younger Member. Jackson came to González's defense, delivering an impassioned speech in which he declared that seniority-based leadership—in which committee members are ranked based on their length of service on the panel—empowered women and lawmakers of color.<sup>7</sup>

From his seat on the Appropriations Committee, Jackson led efforts to increase funding for the Minority HIV/AIDS Initiative from \$166 million in 1998 to more than \$400 million by 2007. In 1999, he introduced a bill to create a research center within the National Institutes of Health to study racial inequalities in healthcare. It also boosted funding for historically Black schools for medical and health professions. The bill was incorporated into the Minority Health and Health Disparities Research and Education Act, which President William J. Clinton signed into law in 2001.<sup>8</sup>

Jackson also succeeded in obtaining humanitarian aid for sub-Saharan African countries. A year after he joined a congressional delegation on a 2004 trip to refugee camps in the Darfur region of Sudan, Jackson amended an emergency defense appropriations bill to boost emergency famine relief and refugee assistance for Sudan and surrounding countries by \$100 million. "Most of Africa's urgent humanitarian needs are shockingly affordable," he said on the House Floor.<sup>9</sup>

For his district, Jackson regularly secured millions of dollars in earmarks for job training, health care, education, and transportation and infrastructure projects. To galvanize support for federal aid, Jackson frequently took politicians and journalists on "The Tour," a four-hour ride across his district that went through struggling neighborhoods and revealed dilapidated infrastructure. "I represent political, financial and economic interests," Jackson once said. "Interests that are different from many that people in this room represent. ... I have chosen to describe the divide not in racial terms, which has historically been the

history of Chicago, but in economic terms. What have I discovered? That when I do that, people can hear me.” He also worked to funnel nearly \$150 million in federal money to the Deep Tunnel system, a Chicago flood protection system. Jackson championed the construction of a third Chicago-area airport south of his district to foster economic development, although political opposition prevented the project from moving forward.<sup>10</sup>

Known as a charismatic speaker, Jackson had an active media following early in his career and was not afraid to criticize the Clinton Administration over policy differences. He expressed disappointment when President Clinton signed the Republican-led 1996 welfare reform bill and was one of only 85 Members to vote against the 1997 Balanced Budget Act, which he believed would exacerbate economic inequality. In the wake of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, Jackson voted against the 2001 USA PATRIOT Act, claiming it would allow the government to “invade our privacy, imprison us without due process and ultimately punish dissent.” He criticized the George W. Bush administration and opposed military intervention in Iraq, preferring to resolve the conflict with Saddam Hussein’s regime through peaceful means. Jackson was a strong proponent of President Barack Obama’s first-term agenda. He backed the nearly \$800 billion stimulus package in 2009, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010, and the repeal of the military’s “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy that prevented gay servicemen and women from serving openly.<sup>11</sup>

Toward the end of 2008, federal investigators looked into allegations that Jackson’s supporters had offered Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich money in exchange for Jackson’s appointment to the U.S. Senate seat vacated by Obama following his election as President. Blagojevich was ultimately convicted in the scheme to sell the Senate seat, but Jackson claimed no wrongdoing and was never charged. In June 2012, Jackson’s office announced that the Congressman was on a medical leave. After his re-election that year, Jackson resigned from the House effective November 21, 2012, citing ongoing health issues. At the time, Jackson was under investigation over allegations that he spent campaign funds on personal electronics, furniture, vacations, and furs. Three months later, he pleaded guilty to a felony fraud charge. On August 14, 2013, a Washington judge sentenced Jackson and his wife to federal prison. He completed his sentence on September 20, 2015.<sup>12</sup>

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# Juanita Millender-McDonald

1938–2007

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1996–2007

Democrat from California



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 1996, Juanita Millender-McDonald of California won a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives just six years after capturing her first elected office at the local level. From her position on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Millender-McDonald shaped highway projects and federal programs that directly affected her Los Angeles district. In 2007, she made history by becoming one of the first African-American women to chair a standing committee in Congress, the House Administration Committee.

Juanita Millender-McDonald was born Juanita Millender on September 7, 1938, in Birmingham, Alabama, one of five children raised by Shelly and Everlina Millender. After her mother Everlina died, Shelly Millender, a minister, moved his family to California. Juanita Millender married James McDonald Jr. on July 26, 1955, and by the time she was 26, the couple had five children. A homemaker for 15 years, Millender-McDonald returned to college and earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from California's University of Redlands in 1981. Millender-McDonald earned a master's degree in educational administration from California State University in Los Angeles in 1988. After teaching math and English in a public high school, she worked as an administrator in the

Los Angeles school district—eventually directing its gender equality programs.<sup>1</sup>

Millender-McDonald first entered politics at the local level in Los Angeles and served as a delegate to the Democratic National Conventions in 1984, 1988, and 1992. In 1982, she worked on behalf of the unsuccessful gubernatorial campaign of longtime Los Angeles mayor Tom Bradley. Afterward she worked on several local campaigns before entering and winning election for a seat on the Carson city council in 1990. She excelled at building networks of political support during the race. The first time she asked for the backing of Representative Mervyn M. Dymally of California, he declined, telling Millender-McDonald, “Local politics is too divisive.” But she persisted. Dymally said, “She came back, this time with a delegation of friends and supporters. I said, ‘What do you want?’ She said, ‘I need your endorsement.’ I said, ‘You have it.’” Millender-McDonald became the first African-American woman elected to the council and in 1991 served as mayor pro tempore.<sup>2</sup>

In 1992, following the reapportionment of California state assembly districts, Millender-McDonald prevailed in the Democratic primary for a seat in the state legislature against two incumbent assemblymen whose Los Angeles-area districts

had been merged. She went on to serve in the California state assembly until 1996. Within her first year in the assembly, she chaired two panels: the insurance committee and the revenue and taxation committee. Millender-McDonald sponsored a major transportation bill to create the Alameda Corridor, a national transportation artery designed to improve railroad and highway access to the San Pedro Bay Ports, which constitute one of the nation's largest shipping complexes.<sup>3</sup>

In December 1995, Millender-McDonald announced her candidacy to fill a U.S. House seat left vacant by the resignation of Representative Walter R. Tucker III. Tucker's congressional district—which encompassed suburbs south of Los Angeles, including Carson and Compton—was predominantly Democratic and working-class. African Americans and Hispanic Americans composed roughly 75 percent of the population. Although no GOP challenger entered the March 26, 1996, special election to fill the remainder of the 104th Congress (1995–1997), Millender-McDonald faced eight other candidates, including fellow state lawmaker Willard H. Murray, and Robin Tucker, the wife of Walter Tucker. With support from former longtime speaker of the state assembly and San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown, Millender-McDonald won with 27 percent of the vote; her nearest competitor, Murray, received 20 percent. The Democratic primary for the full term in the 105th Congress (1997–1999) was held on the same day, and Millender-McDonald prevailed over Murray by an even narrower margin: 24 to 21 percent. In the fall 1996 general election for the 105th Congress, she defeated Republican Michael E. Voetee with 85 percent of the vote. Millender-McDonald won her subsequent five re-elections with majorities of at least 75 percent.<sup>4</sup>

After she was sworn into the House on April 16, 1996, Millender-McDonald served on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and the Small Business Committee. She kept both assignments throughout her congressional tenure. In the 106th Congress (1999–2001), she was appointed ranking member of the Small Business Subcommittee on Empowerment. Democratic leaders also named her a regional whip, and in the 107th Congress (2001–2003) she co-chaired the Democratic Caucus for Women's Issues. In the 108th Congress (2003–2005) she drew assignments on the House Administration Committee and the Joint Printing Committee, and she served as ranking member of the Small Business Subcommittee on Tax, Finance, and Exports.<sup>5</sup>

In the 109th Congress (2005–2007), Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi of California appointed Millender-McDonald ranking member of the House Administration Committee. After Democrats regained control of the House in the 2006 elections, Millender-McDonald was named chair, joining the new head of the Ethics Committee, Stephanie Tubbs Jones of Ohio, as the first African-American woman to chair standing committees of the House. Millender-McDonald was also vice chair of the Joint Committee on the Library, whose membership roster was drawn from the House Administration Committee and the Senate Rules and Administration Committee.<sup>6</sup>

Many of Millender-McDonald's legislative initiatives came from her seat on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. In 2001, she authored the Terrorism Threat to Public Transportation Assessment Act to evaluate vulnerabilities in the nation's mass transit systems. She also was a lead sponsor of the Nuclear Waste Responsible Component and Protection Act, which sought to ensure that hazardous chemical material was transported and stored safely and environmentally outside of inner cities. The committee's jurisdiction also allowed Millender-McDonald to attend to transportation projects directly affecting her district. During her first months in the House, Millender-McDonald secured \$400 million in federal loan guarantees necessary to complete her longtime work on the Alameda Corridor, a 20-mile railroad artery that connects the national rail system to the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach. In the 108th Congress, Millender-McDonald helped draft the six-year Transportation Equity Act—which brought in more than \$87 million in federal money for highway projects in and around her district. Her addition to the bill, the Projects of National and Regional Significance program, allocated more than \$6.6 billion toward major transportation projects nationally.<sup>7</sup>

In the House, Millender-McDonald continued to work on issues she first addressed in the California assembly: the Los Angeles public school system, job training, childcare, education, women's issues, and combating addiction. Millender-McDonald also worked to promote awareness of national health issues like cervical cancer, AIDS, asthma, and bone marrow registration. She introduced concurrent resolutions in the 106th and 107th Congress urging frequent testing and stressing the severity of cervical cancer. Millender-McDonald submitted the Asthma Awareness, Education, and Treatment Act four times between 1999 and 2005, hoping

to expand research, unify federal efforts to treat asthma, and incentivize climate and pest control businesses to assist with improving air quality in low-income and multi-family housing units.<sup>8</sup>

Millender-McDonald introduced the Freedmen's Bureau Records Preservation Act of 2000, which authorized funds and directed the National Archives to update and index the department's records and place them on microfilm to improve access. On the House Floor, Millender-McDonald spoke "as a descendant of slaves" to urge passage of the bill, which she called a significant genealogical resource for Black Americans. "African-Americans, like many other Americans, look to official records for their ancestors. As ship manifests are the vital link between European-Americans and their European ancestors, the Freedmen's Bureau records are the link for African-Americans to their slave and African ancestors." The bill passed both chambers without objection.<sup>9</sup>

Although she avoided the limelight, Millender-McDonald occasionally orchestrated dramatic political moments. In November 1996, shortly after taking office, she brought CIA director John Deutch to a Watts town hall meeting, where Deutch fielded questions about allegations that the CIA funneled proceeds from the sale of illegal drugs to purchase arms for the Nicaraguan Contras. Three years later, seeking to boost the stalled ambassadorial appointment to New Zealand of former U.S. Senator Carol Moseley Braun of Illinois, Millender-McDonald staged a sit-in at the office of Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina, who was blocking the appointment. As ranking member of the House Administration Committee, she called for an election reform field hearing to collect testimony in Columbus, Ohio, regarding allegations of voting restrictions and poorly administered polling places in the state during the 2004 general election.<sup>10</sup>

In mid-April 2007, Millender-McDonald took a six-week leave of absence from her House duties to receive treatment for cancer. She passed away at her home in Compton on April 21. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi remembered Millender-McDonald as "a trailblazer, always advocating for the full participation of all Americans in the success and prosperity of our country."<sup>11</sup>

### Manuscript Collection

California State University, Dominguez Hills, Donald R. and Beverly J. Gerth Archives and Special Collections (Carson, CA). *Papers*: ca. 1984–2007, 13.34

linear feet. The Juanita Millender-McDonald Collection includes correspondence, newsletters, press releases, speeches, reports, flyers, questionnaires, bills and amendments, greeting cards, newspaper clippings, and ephemera including photos, plaques, and videotapes. A large number of files are devoted to the Congressional Black Caucus, the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, the Congressional Caucus on Women's issues, the House Administration Committee, and the California assembly. Subjects include labor issues, HIV/AIDS, CIA Nicaraguan Contra scandal, education, minority issues, finance, health, the John Kerry presidential campaign, political practices and policies, transportation, and China. A finding aid is available in the repository and online.

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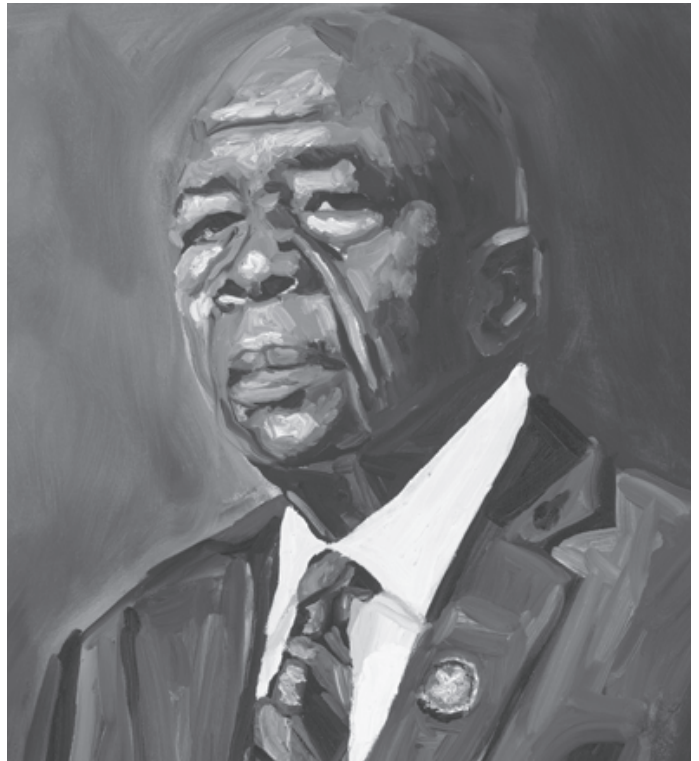
# Elijah E. Cummings

1951–2019

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1996–2019

Democrat from Maryland



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Elijah E. Cummings, the son of South Carolina sharecroppers who moved to Baltimore for a better life for their children, won election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1996, beginning what would become a celebrated 23-year career in Congress. Cummings, an influential and well-respected Representative who rose to become chair of the Oversight and Reform Committee in 2019, spent his career advocating for policies to help poor and working-class Americans. “The true measure of our union,” he once proclaimed from the House Floor, “is the state of the least among us.” Cummings believed the government should play a vital role in helping people. “We, as leaders,” he explained in an interview toward the end of his life, “have a duty and a responsibility to keep our promise to them when we ran for office and won—and that is to make their lives better. While we’re all on this earth, that’s my message.”<sup>1</sup>

Elijah Eugene Cummings was born on January 18, 1951, in Baltimore, Maryland. He was one of seven children born to Robert, a chemical plant worker, and Ruth Cummings, a domestic worker and preacher. Cummings’s parents had left their home in South Carolina for the opportunities found in the booming economy of post-World War II Baltimore.

Religion and education were paramount in the Cummings household. “My father ... he told us, ‘If you miss one day of school that meant you died the night before.’ And he meant that. I did not miss one second of school between kindergarten and graduating from high school.” His mother, meanwhile, held prayer meetings in the basement of their house that she soon expanded into her own church.<sup>2</sup>

In 1962, at age 11, Elijah Cummings participated in a demonstration to desegregate a local Whites-only public pool. The protest was led by Juanita Jackson Mitchell, an accomplished civil rights activist, lawyer, and sister-in-law of future Representative Parren J. Mitchell, the first Black Representative from Maryland. As Cummings and two-dozen peers jumped into the pool, a large crowd of angry White counter protesters spouted insults and hurled rocks and bottles at the children. The experience had a profound effect on Cummings and combined with the inspiration of Jackson Mitchell’s leadership, Cummings remembered that “at 11 years old, I declared in that moment that I was going to be become a lawyer.”<sup>3</sup>

Cummings graduated from Baltimore City College, a selective Baltimore high school, in 1969 and went to Howard University, where he graduated Phi Beta Kappa

with a bachelor's degree in political science in 1972. At Howard, Cummings served as sophomore class president and as the student government president. In 1976, Cummings earned a law degree from the University of Maryland School of Law and founded a law firm in Baltimore. He worked at his practice for two decades until his election to Congress. Cummings first entered public office when he won election to the Maryland house of delegates in 1982. For 14 years, he represented a predominantly Black district in southwestern Baltimore. He served as vice chairman of both the constitutional and administrative law committee, and the economic matters committee. Cummings was twice married and had three children.<sup>4</sup>

In the state legislature, Cummings chaired the Black caucus and eventually became the first African American in Maryland history to be named speaker pro tempore—the house of delegates' second-highest position. Cummings was an advocate for Black Marylanders and for investments in Baltimore. He helped establish and then served as chairman of the Governor's Commission on Black Males, which focused on ways the state of Maryland could help alleviate high rates of “unemployment, arrest, AIDS infection and school failure among young black men.” Cummings also worked to improve affirmative action programs in state agencies and private companies. “We are not asking anything that business does not already do for other communities,” Cummings said of one venture between the Maryland assembly's Black caucus and private businesses. “We are just asking them to spread the wealth into our constituencies.” During his time in the assembly, Cummings also supported needle-exchange programs in Baltimore, passed tax reforms to assist Marylanders living in poverty, and was a strong supporter of gun-control laws.<sup>5</sup>

When five-term Representative Kweisi Mfume of Maryland resigned his seat in the House to become chief executive officer of NAACP in February 1996, Cummings entered the race to succeed him. Mfume's crescent-shaped Baltimore district encompassed poor and affluent areas in the city center, Black communities on the west side, and the working and middle-class towns of Catonsville and Randallstown. The district was overwhelmingly Democratic and about 70 percent of its voters were African American. Cummings's status in the house of delegates, his ties to the community, key endorsements from local politicians, and the support of the *Baltimore Sun* and the city's Black

newspaper, the *Afro-American*, made Cummings the favorite in the crowded 26-candidate field. He won the primary with 37 percent of the vote, defeating his closest competitor by 13 points. He easily defeated Republican Kenneth Kondner in the April 16 special election, garnering 81 percent of the vote. Cummings later said that he hoped “to be the voice of those people who put their faith and trust in me. Hopefully, I will build a record ... that reflects that goal.” Even after redistricting twice expanded Cummings districts into Whiter, more middle-class Howard and Baltimore counties, to account for the declining population of Baltimore City, Cummings maintained a firm grip on his largely Democratic district, consistently winning more than 70 percent of the vote.<sup>6</sup>

After Cummings was sworn into office in April 1996, he was assigned to the Government Reform and Oversight Committee and the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. He remained on both panels for his entire career. Cummings also served on the Committee on Armed Services during the 110th Congress (2007–2009) and on the Joint Economic Committee from the 109th through the 113th Congresses (2005–2015). During the 110th and 111th Congresses (2007–2011), Cummings served as the chair of Transportation and Infrastructure's Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation. From 2014 to 2016, he served as the ranking minority member on the Select Committee on the Events Surrounding the 2012 Attack in Benghazi. In the 116th Congress (2019–2021), Cummings became the chair of the Oversight and Reform Committee. He also served as the chair of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) during the 108th Congress (2003–2005).

From his seat on the Subcommittee on the Civil Service of the Government Reform and Oversight Committee, Cummings pushed for legislation that would aid federal workers, a significant constituency in his district, many of whom commuted to work in Washington, DC. “Public service work can sometimes be difficult,” he said, “but regardless of the circumstances, these hardworking individuals are committed to doing excellent work and to making a major difference.” Two of Cummings's most significant legislative victories early in his career were bills that expanded federal employees' healthcare coverage and provided more leave time for federal employees who were organ donors.<sup>7</sup>

Cummings also sought to protect and expand policies that supported the employment of minorities in the federal

government and with federal contractors. Early in his career on the Subcommittee on the Civil Service, Cummings convinced subcommittee chair Republican John L. Mica of Florida to hold a hearing on discrimination in the federal workplace. As Cummings explained in his opening remarks during the hearing: “[T]here appears to be abundant evidence that people of color and other minorities are being subjected to verbal and psychological abuse, unfairly evaluated and denied opportunities for advancement throughout the Federal work force.” Cummings was especially concerned about a backlog of cases at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. During his career, Cummings repeatedly introduced legislation to strengthen equal employment regulations and protect federal employees from discrimination. Three of his antidiscrimination bills passed the House but died in the Senate.<sup>8</sup>

Cummings’s seat on the Government Reform and Oversight Committee enabled him to combat drug addiction and crime caused by the illegal drug trade in Baltimore. Cummings advocated for a drug policy that balanced criminal prosecution with effective counseling and rehabilitation programs. “We want to make sure that those people who find themselves in the clutches of drug addiction are able to depend upon treatment that can best help them.” From his seat on the Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources, Cummings worked closely with the Republican subcommittee chair Mark Edward Souder of Indiana to pass the Office of National Drug Control Policy Reauthorization Act of 2006. Included in the legislation was the Dawson Family Act which Cummings had earlier sponsored as a stand-alone bill. Cummings proposed the Dawson Family Act after seven members of the Dawson family—including five children—were killed when their house was firebombed. The perpetrator targeted the Dawson family because a member of the family had informed the police about drug trafficking in their neighborhood. The Dawson Family Act directed High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Program funds to support local programs that aimed to protect witnesses like Angela and Carnell Dawson.<sup>9</sup>

In the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, Cummings advocated for highway, harbor, and public transportation projects in Baltimore. Early in his career, Cummings steered more than \$30 million in highway funds to his district. He also sought more funding for mass transit, including Amtrak and a light rail line planned for

West Baltimore but which was never built. To promote the employment of African Americans and other minorities, Cummings worked to direct federal infrastructure contracts to Disadvantaged Business Enterprises which were owned by entrepreneurs of color, women, or other disadvantaged small businessowners. “As we rebuild America from the pavement up,” Cummings said, “it is critical that every American has the opportunity to help in that effort.”<sup>10</sup>

When he served as chair of the Subcommittee on Coastguard and Maritime Transportation during the 110th and 111th Congresses, Cummings led the passage of the Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2010. As subcommittee chair, Cummings also sought ways to increase the recruitment of minorities into the Coast Guard. He held hearings on the matter and cosponsored legislation to increase the diversity at the Coast Guard Academy. The act passed the House but was removed from a larger Coast Guard funding bill in the Senate. As chair, Cummings also successfully worked to modernize the Coast Guard’s procurement practices after problems arose with the construction of new ships.<sup>11</sup>

As chair of the CBC during the 108th Congress (2003–2005), Cummings advocated for policies to help poor and working-class Americans and often confronted the George W. Bush administration over policies he opposed. In 2003, Cummings publicly turned down an invitation from President Bush to attend a meeting with the CBC. It was Cummings’s response to the fact that Bush had earlier ignored several requests to meet with the caucus. “I would not necessarily call it a protest. It’s a call for respect,” he said. Later that year, Cummings led the CBC in opposition to new funding for the Iraq War. Eventually four members of the CBC voted in favor of the funding, but Cummings won plaudits for his efforts to keep the 39-member caucus unified. “This is the first time in our history when we’ve had such opposing opinions, but it reflects black Americans in general,” Cummings said.<sup>12</sup>

During the financial crisis and the Great Recession in the late 2000s, Cummings, from his position on Oversight, was a vocal critic of companies that he believed had abused federal bailout funding. Cummings supported the passage of the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008, which included the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP), but he was critical of policies that he said favored the banking industry and did little to prevent foreclosures. In 2009, Cummings initiated a letter signed by 26 other

lawmakers demanding an audit of TARP payments made to an insurance and banking company at the center of the 2008 financial crisis amid suspicions the company had used federal rescue money to offer bonuses to executives. The letter resulted in an eight-month audit and the formation of an investigatory subcommittee in 2011 by the new Republican Oversight chair, Darrell Issa of California.<sup>13</sup>

Cummings sought to help ease the foreclosure crisis at the heart of the recession, calling it a “wrecking ball smashing through communities across the nation.” Between 2008 and 2010, 11,000 mortgages in Baltimore went into foreclosure. Moreover, the U.S. Justice Department alleged that a mortgage lender participated in discriminatory lending practices with Black and Latino homeowners in the Washington, DC-Baltimore region. The bank eventually settled with the Justice Department for \$175 million. In 2010, Cummings helped write legislation creating the Emergency Homeowner’s Loan Program (EHLPP) which was passed as part of the Dodd–Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act. The EHLPP program provided “bridge loans” through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to homeowners struggling to pay their mortgage. And from his position on the Oversight Committee, Cummings pressured federal agencies to use TARP funds to reduce the principle on mortgage holders’ outstanding debt. Cummings also frequently held foreclosure prevention seminars in his district that connected his constituents seeking mortgage help with advisors and lenders.<sup>14</sup>

Baltimore and especially its poor and working-class Black residents were always at the forefront of Cummings’s congressional work. “I don’t live in the inner city,” he said. “I live in the *inner-inner* city and there are not a lot of congressmen who grew up in the inner city, let alone still live there. It is an important voice to bring to Congress that needs to be heard.” In April 2015, Freddie Gray, a 25-year-old Black man from Baltimore, died from injuries he suffered while in police custody. Demonstrations and protests followed, and on multiple occasions civil unrest, arson, and looting broke out in the city. Cummings was ever present in Baltimore during the crisis, working to bring peace; he walked the streets with a bullhorn reassuring residents and calling for people to return to their homes. At Gray’s funeral, Cummings put words to the pain felt by mourners across the city. “I’ve often said that our children are the living messages we send to the future we will never

see, but now, our children are sending us to a future they will never see. There is something wrong with that picture.”<sup>15</sup>

In 2011, House Democrats promoted Elijah Cummings to ranking minority member of the Oversight and Government Reform Committee. Cummings had been third in line in Democratic seniority behind New York Representatives Edolphus Towns, the chair of the committee during the previous Congress, and Carolyn Boshier Maloney. But Democratic House leadership believed Cummings was better suited to defend the Barack Obama administration against investigations pursued by the new Republican House majority. “I come from a tough place,” Cummings reportedly told his fellow Democrats, and promised not to be outworked. While ranking minority member, Cummings led Democratic opposition to high-profile investigations into the Internal Revenue Service, the Justice Department, and the 2012 Benghazi, Libya, terrorist attack that killed four Americans. When Republicans created the Select Committee on the Events Surrounding the 2012 Attack in Benghazi in 2014, Cummings served as its ranking minority member as well.<sup>16</sup>

Oversight hearings during this period were often combative. At one point, Republicans cut off Cummings’s microphone mid-statement. With his booming voice, Cummings continued his remarks, shouting to the committee chair Darrell Issa and other Republicans a variation of one of his oft-used quotes: “We’re better than that as a country. We’re better than that as a committee.” Cummings was also willing to push back. On one occasion, his office authored a report that compared Republican investigations into the IRS to the anticommunist hearings held by Senator Joseph Raymond McCarthy in the 1950s.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the rancor found in the committee room, Cummings was often able to work with leading Republicans on the committee. Shortly before Jason Chaffetz of Utah became Oversight chair in 2015, he and Cummings scheduled trips to visit each other’s districts in hopes of better understanding the issues their constituents faced. “I always try to concentrate on not so much on who I’m fighting against, but what I’m fighting for,” Cummings explained after Chaffetz visited Baltimore. “If I can help somebody understand what I’m fighting for, maybe compromise becomes a little easier.” Other Republicans on the committee respected Cummings for the sincerity of his convictions. As Trey Gowdy of South Carolina, the Oversight chair for the 115th Congress (2017–2019), said about Cummings:

“It’s not about politics to him; he says what he believes ... you can tell the ones who it’s coming from their soul. And with Mr. Cummings, its coming from his soul.”<sup>18</sup>

After Democrats regained control of the House in January 2019, Cummings was elected chair of the Committee on Oversight and Reform. It was an especially high-profile position as Democrats expected the committee to investigate various aspects of President Donald J. Trump’s administration. Cummings’s Oversight Committee held hearings on the Trump administration’s immigration policy, the U.S. Commerce Department’s development of the 2020 Census, the political activities of federal employees, and President Trump’s alleged financial improprieties. Cummings argued the committee had a “duty to serve as an independent check on the executive branch.”<sup>19</sup>

As Oversight chair, Cummings led investigations into issues he had spent his career working on, including the pharmaceutical industry and the cost of prescription medicine. “We have seen time after time that drug companies make money hand over fist by raising the prices of their drugs, often without justification, and sometimes overnight, while patients are left holding the bill,” he said. The committee eventually released a report that included the recommendation that the House pass the Elijah E. Cummings Lower Drug Costs Now Act, which the House did in December 2019.<sup>20</sup>

Cummings also led the Oversight Committee in support of strengthening voting rights. “I believe that we should be doing everything in our power to make it easier for eligible American citizens to exercise their constitutional right to vote,” Cummings explained at an Oversight hearing for H.R. 1, a voting rights bill, that was one of the top priorities for House Democrats in the 116th Congress. Under his leadership the committee also began investigations into alleged voter suppression in at least three states.<sup>21</sup>

Cummings had been sick for several years by the time he became Oversight chair. In 2017, he spent two months in the hospital recovering from heart surgery, then soon after he contracted an infection from a knee surgery that led to three more months of recovery. Despite his difficult ailments he continued to work, signing paperwork for the first impeachment of President Donald J. Trump just days before he passed away. Elijah Cummings died on October 17, 2019, from “complications concerning longstanding health challenges.” On October 24, 2019, Cummings lay in state in the Capitol’s National Statuary

Hall; he was the first Black Member to receive that honor. In February 2020, House Democratic leadership honored Cummings by renaming the Oversight and Reform Committee hearing room in the Rayburn House Office Building, the Elijah E. Cummings Room.<sup>22</sup>

## Notes

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## Julia May Carson

1938–2007

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1997–2007

Democrat from Indiana



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

Julia May Carson overcame poverty and racism to serve nearly two decades in state and local government—including 17 years in the Indiana state legislature—before winning election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1996. Carson, the first African American and first woman to represent Indianapolis in Congress, focused on issues that affected working class Americans, many of which she knew firsthand. “I’m the kind of individual that politicians talk negatively about,” she said upon her election to Congress. “I was born to a teenage mother out of wedlock when she had just turned 16. ... And for someone like me to be able to walk life’s journey into the halls of the United States Congress as an elected member of that body is most overwhelming.”<sup>1</sup>

Julia Carson was born Julia May Porter in Louisville, Kentucky, on July 8, 1938. Her single mother, Velma Porter, moved to Indianapolis, Indiana, to find work as a housekeeper. At one point during her childhood, Carson’s mother got sick and was unable to work. Carson went to a local government office to ask about food assistance, and later remembered being humiliated by the staff. “They looked at me something awful,” Carson recalled. “I had tears in my eyes. I said ‘I need some food for my mom. She’s very ill and can’t work.’ They gave me lard

and cornmeal.” The staff told her to never return. Carson attended the local public schools, and worked part-time waiting tables, delivering newspapers, and harvesting crops, among other jobs. In 1955, she graduated from Crispus Attucks High School in Indianapolis. A short while later she married and had two children: Sam and Tanya. She divorced while her children were still young. Carson studied at Martin University in Indianapolis and Indiana University in Bloomington. In 1965, she was working as a secretary at a local chapter of United Auto Workers when she met newly elected U.S. Representative Andrew Jacobs Jr., who hired her as a caseworker and district aide. Carson worked for Jacobs for seven years until 1972, when he encouraged her to run for office in the Indiana legislature. He recalled sitting in Carson’s living room for an hour, trying to convince her to run. “I liked working for a candidate rather than being a candidate myself,” Carson later reflected. But Jacobs’s words changed her mind. “Come on, kid,” he encouraged. “This is the time to step up.”<sup>2</sup>

Carson won election and served in the state house of representatives from 1973 to 1977, holding the post of assistant minority caucus chair, before winning election to the Indiana state senate. There, she worked alongside Katie

Hall, who would become the first Black woman to represent Indiana in Congress. Carson was a state senator until 1990, sitting on the finance committee and eventually holding the minority whip position. In the state legislature, Carson earned a reputation for defending low-income residents that lasted throughout her career. One of her bills would have pinned the responsibility for distributing aid to homeless residents onto county—not municipal—governments. “If you spread out the tax base so that poor relief funding would come from the county rather than from the township, then it makes it more equitable,” she reasoned. She also authored a bill that would have authorized state-funded compensation for victims of violent crime. While in the legislature, Carson worked as the human resources director at an engine manufacturing company—a job she held until 1985, when she opened her own retail clothing store. In 1990, Carson won election as a Center Township trustee. As trustee, she administered government aid payments in central Indianapolis. Carson successfully erased the agency’s \$20 million deficit, leaving a \$6 million surplus prior to winning a seat in Congress. “Julia Carson,” observed the county’s Republican auditor, “wrestled that monster to the ground.”<sup>3</sup>

When Jacobs retired from the House in 1996 after 15 terms representing a district encompassing greater Indianapolis, Carson entered the race to fill his seat. The district, which in 1996 was described as “marginally Democratic,” was 68 percent White and 30 percent Black. With Jacobs’s endorsement, Carson defeated the former district party chair, Ann DeLaney, in the Democratic primary with 49 percent of the vote. In the general Carson faced Republican Virginia Blankenbaker. Both candidates supported abortion rights and opposed the death penalty. When Blankenbaker mailed campaign advertisements with Carson’s picture on them, Carson and others criticized the decision as an attempt to make her race a campaign issue. “I am not your African American candidate,” Carson said. “I am the Democratic candidate for Congress. I don’t allow my opponents to stereotype me and confine me to a certain segment of the population.” On Election Day, Carson won with 53 percent of the vote to Blankenbaker’s 45 percent.<sup>4</sup>

Carson underwent heart surgery shortly after her election and was sworn into office from her hospital bed on January 9, 1997. She was unable to travel to Washington, DC, until early March. Her health problems led to speculation she would not seek re-election in 1998, but Carson quickly

quieted the rumors. Carson won re-election four times by slightly larger margins in her competitive district. Reapportionment in 2001 added more than 100,000 new constituents—many of them Republican. Nevertheless, Carson was re-elected in 2004 and 2006, both times with 54 percent of the vote.<sup>5</sup>

When Carson claimed her seat in the 105th Congress (1997–1999), she served on the Banking and Financial Services Committee and the Veterans’ Affairs Committee. In the 108th Congress (2003–2005), she left Veterans’ Affairs to accept an assignment on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.

Carson’s legislative interests in the House ranged from national issues affecting children and working-class Americans to local programs of interest to her Indianapolis constituency. From her seat on Financial Services, Carson authored legislation to reform the debt consolidation industry. Boosting America’s “financial literacy” was one of her chief goals. To that end, she helped create the Indiana Mortgage and Foreclosure Hotline to counsel homeowners and potential buyers about the mortgage process. Carson noted that Indiana residents had one of the country’s highest rates of homeownership in 2001, only to see a record number of foreclosures in 2004. “Homeownership,” Carson declared, “is the cornerstone of a healthy thriving city.” Carson was a regular sponsor of children’s safety, health, and nutrition legislation. In 1999, she submitted comprehensive gun safety legislation, including a provision requiring safety locks on handguns. “Kids and guns are a deadly combination,” she noted. “It makes no sense that it is easier for kids to operate a handgun than it is for kids to open an aspirin lid.” Having grown up in a single parent household, Carson introduced several pieces of legislation calling attention to the importance of fatherhood in children’s lives, including a bill that sought to establish a nationwide media campaign promoting responsible fatherhood. “My experience growing up fatherless is what has stirred my passion to become a leader in this movement,” she said on the House Floor.<sup>6</sup>

Carson’s work on Transportation and Infrastructure also allowed her to support local infrastructure development in her home city. She inserted over \$45 million worth of earmarks in the 2005 surface transportation bill for various projects around Indianapolis, including the construction of the city’s downtown transit center, which would bear her name when it opened in 2016. In 2002 and 2003, she

sponsored a large-scale Amtrak reauthorization bill—the National Defense Rail Act. The \$40 billion bill would have provided for the development of new high-speed rail corridors and enhanced security measures in response to the terrorist attacks on September 11. Amtrak was a major employer in Indiana and housed its largest repair facility near Indianapolis.<sup>7</sup>

In 2000, Carson was one of the last House Members to support the extension of permanent normal trade relations with China. The William J. Clinton administration had intensely lobbied Carson to support the bill, but she hesitated because of China's questionable human rights record and because organized labor in the United States opposed the measure. "I feel like I have been put in a Maytag washer and put on the spin cycle," she noted before the vote. She reluctantly voted in favor of the legislation, believing that increased foreign trade would benefit Indianapolis businesses. Carson later opposed the George W. Bush administration's invasion of Iraq, which she claimed would draw too much attention and resources away from America's domestic issues. "A preemptive war is a war nonetheless," she declared.<sup>8</sup>

One of Carson's crowning legislative achievements was the bill she authored and introduced during the 106th Congress (1999–2001) to award the Congressional Gold Medal to civil rights activist Rosa Parks. It was while reading Parks's autobiography, *Quiet Strength*, in early 1998, that Carson decided that Parks—whose refusal to move to the back of a segregated bus in 1955 galvanized the modern civil rights movement—should be awarded the highest civilian honor bestowed by Congress. "I had a lingering kind of adoration in my own soul for Rosa," Carson noted. "I always believed in my heart that it was Rosa who paved the way for me to go to Congress and to other places. I felt like it then became my purpose to give her some honor, to repay her." Carson introduced a resolution to honor Parks with the medal on February 4, 1999—Parks's 86th birthday. Initially, the bill attracted 88 cosponsors—including most Members of the Congressional Black Caucus. Carson began a media campaign on nationally syndicated radio and television programs, eventually netting 328 cosponsors. On April 20, the House passed the bill, 424 to 1. Knowing the civil rights icon was watching House proceedings on her television, Carson ignored a House rule requiring Members to address only the Speaker pro tempore. "Mrs. Parks . . . I am grateful for your steadfastness," she declared. Carson's

bill was supplanted by a Senate version that was sponsored by Senator Spencer Abraham of Michigan. President Clinton signed the bill into law on May 6, 1999. "This is one of the best days of my life," declared a tearful Carson. "Not for anything I have done to honor her, but the honor Rosa Parks brought to this whole nation." On June 15, 1999, visitors packed the Capitol Rotunda to attend the Congressional Gold Medal ceremony. Carson was among the dignitaries who spoke at the ceremony, along with President Clinton, who presented the medal to Parks. Carson later helped pass legislation allowing Parks to lie in honor in the Capitol Rotunda when she died in October 2005. Parks was the first woman to be given this honor.<sup>9</sup>

In late 2007, Carson's health once again became a concern. The Representative expressed frustration with her regular battle with asthma and diabetes. After missing an important vote due to health problems, Carson noted, "I understand how an athlete feels when they sit one out to recover from an injury. The minutes move slowly, and you want nothing more than to be in for the big game." In October, Carson took a two-week leave of absence to recover from a leg infection that had required her to traverse the Capitol in a wheelchair. One month later, Carson announced that she had been diagnosed with terminal lung cancer during a follow-up examination of her leg. Carson died on December 15, 2007, in her Indianapolis home. She lay in state in the statehouse in Indianapolis on December 21. "Let's remember Congresswoman Carson by doing the people's work and fighting for those who don't have a voice," said her grandson, André Carson, who later succeeded her in the House. "When you talk about Julia Carson, you're talking about an American icon. The people's champ."<sup>10</sup>

### Manuscript Collection

**Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis University Library, Ruth Lilly Special Collections & Archives** (Indianapolis, IN). *Papers*: 1978–2007, 34.6 cubic feet. The collection is composed primarily of Julia May Carson's records from her years in Congress, including biographical materials, committee records, legislative records, subject files, caucus records, meetings and events records, speeches, correspondence, press releases, newsletters, office administration records, and audiovisual materials. A finding aid is available in the repository and online.

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## Donna M. Christensen

1945–

DELEGATE

1997–2015

Democrat from the U.S. Virgin Islands



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 1996, Delegate Donna M. Christensen won election to the U.S. House of Representatives, the first woman to represent the U.S. Virgin Islands, a multi-island territory in the Caribbean. During her tenure, Christensen, who was also the first female medical doctor to serve in Congress, focused on improving the living conditions and economic opportunities on the Islands, especially where they intersected with federal issues. Christensen noted that working as a doctor and serving in Congress were not that different. “In my practice you always find that there are a lot of social and other issues that impact the health of your patients,” Christensen noted. “Many times people would come in just to talk about whatever problems they were having, so I kind of looked at it as bringing my office work from a local level to a larger, national level.”<sup>1</sup>

Donna Christensen was born Donna Christian on September 19, 1945, in Teaneck, New Jersey, to Almeric L. Christian and Virginia Sterling Christian. Her mother was from New York, and her father, who served in the U.S. Army in World War II, returned to his native Virgin Islands with his young family after earning a law degree at Columbia University. Almeric became a U.S. attorney and then a chief judge of the Virgin Islands district court.

Growing up, Christensen said she “lived in the library” and later attended boarding schools in Puerto Rico and New York. She earned a bachelor’s degree from St. Mary’s College at Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana, in 1966, and a medical degree from the George Washington University School of Medicine in 1970.<sup>2</sup>

Christensen completed her residency at Howard University in Washington, DC, in 1974 and returned to the Virgin Islands. “I began working in a small emergency room in 1975, and after being home and hearing some of the issues that were of concern to the community, I decided to become active in the community,” she recalled decades later. “It is home and there were things that were happening that I thought individuals needed to be more proactive about, so I decided to involve myself in different issues like the appointment of local judges, sale of land that was important to my community and the private industry. But I was doing it as an organizer myself, organizing different coalitions and different groups to advocate or oppose an issue.” In addition to running an active family practice, she also worked as a health administrator, rising to the position of assistant commissioner of health for the Virgin Islands. In 1974, Christensen married Carl Green, and the couple had

two daughters, Rabiah and Karida, before they divorced in 1980. In 1998, she married Christian O. Christensen who had four children from a previous marriage.<sup>3</sup>

Christensen began her political career in the 1980s as part of the Coalition to Appoint a Native Judge, which emphasized judicial appointments from within the community and later as part of the Save Fountain Valley Coalition, which called for the protection of St. Croix's north side from overdevelopment. She served as vice chair of the territorial committee of the Democratic Party of the Virgin Islands and on the platform committee of the Democratic National Committee. From 1984 to 1986, she served as a member of the Virgin Islands board of education and was named to the Virgin Islands status commission from 1988 to 1992.<sup>4</sup>

Christensen lost her first bid for Delegate to Congress in 1994, failing to win the Democratic primary. But two years later, she ran again and won the party's nomination. On November 5, 1996, she challenged the one-term incumbent, Independent Victor O. Frazer, in a three-way general election. When no candidate earned more than 50 percent of the vote, a runoff election was scheduled for two weeks later. Frazer and Christensen captured the largest shares of the vote, and in the head-to-head contest Christensen prevailed with a slim majority, 52 to 48 percent. In her subsequent eight general election campaigns, Christensen won with comfortable majorities that ranged as high as 80 percent; she ran unopposed in 2008. Her narrowest margin of victory—a 56.6 percent majority—came in the crowded 2012 general election, when three independent candidates captured a combined third of the overall vote.<sup>5</sup>

In 1997, as a first-term Member of the 105th Congress (1997–1999), Christensen won a seat on the Resources Committee—renamed the Natural Resources Committee when Democrats controlled the chamber in the 110th and 111th Congress (2007–2011)—which had oversight of America's territories. She remained on that committee through the 111th Congress, serving as chair of the Insular Affairs Subcommittee in the 110th Congress. In the 111th Congress, Christensen earned a seat on the Energy and Commerce Committee, which had jurisdiction over much of the U.S. health care system. She served on that panel until she left the House in 2015. Additionally, Christensen served on the Small Business Committee from the 106th through the 109th Congress (1999–2007). In the 108th Congress (2003–2005), she gained a seat on the newly

created Select Committee on Homeland Security, primarily because of her expertise in public health. Christensen remained on the panel when it became a permanent standing committee in the following Congress and kept her seat until 2009.

Christensen spent much of her time on the Resources Committee trying to stabilize and strengthen the Virgin Islands' ailing economy. High energy costs slowed economic growth and an aging electric grid added to the rising expenses. The Great Recession of 2008 also led to new hardships, culminating in the closure of a major oil refinery and resulting in government layoffs.<sup>6</sup>

As part of the effort to help the Virgin Islands' economy, Christensen worked to expand key tax incentives (protecting and expanding the rebate on excise taxes of rum sales), boost tourism, and target spending. On several occasions the House passed Christensen's bill to create a chief financial officer to oversee the budgeting process in the Virgin Islands. "This bill is neither colonial or paternal, as has been claimed, but an attempt to bring greater transparency and accountability to the financial management and fiscal practices of the government of the Virgin Islands," Christensen said. Her proposal, however, had strong opposition from Virgin Islands governors, and it repeatedly died in the Senate.<sup>7</sup>

Christensen also played a leading role in expanding representation for the Northern Mariana Islands, another U.S. territory, during her tenure as chair of the Natural Resources Committee's Subcommittee on Insular Affairs. She sponsored a bill in the 110th Congress that established the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) and granted the territory, the only one without a voice in Congress, a nonvoting Delegate in the U.S. House. While managing the House Floor debate on the bill, she noted that it "would provide a stable immigration policy to rebuild the CNMI economy, augment current efforts to diversify and strengthen the future economy, increase the opportunities and skills of local residents to fill private sector employment needs, safeguard the existing foreign guest worker population from employer abuse, and secure the region in the interest of national security and give the CNMI representation in Congress." On December 11, 2007, her bill passed the House with broad bipartisan support on a voice vote. The Senate later folded it into another measure, and President George W. Bush signed it into law on May 8, 2008.<sup>8</sup>

As chair of the Subcommittee on Insular Affairs in the 110th Congress, Christensen also held hearings on a proposal for a constitutional convention in Puerto Rico to consider greater autonomy for the island and conducted numerous oversight hearings including the examination of budget requests for the Interior Department's Office of Insular Affairs.<sup>9</sup>

Health care remained one of Christensen's top priorities. As a longtime member of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), she chaired the CBC's Health Braintrust from 1999 to 2015. Her medical career made her a natural fit for the position, but her role in the CBC gave her vital experience and a powerful megaphone for someone from a small territory. "I don't know where I would be without the Congressional Black Caucus," Christensen remarked late in her career. The Health Braintrust platform put her at the forefront of congressional efforts to end health care disparities for minority communities and women, to fight HIV/AIDS both nationally and internationally, and to extend health insurance coverage.<sup>10</sup>

From her seat on the Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health, Christensen weighed in on significant pieces of the Affordable Care Act which was signed into law by President Barack Obama in 2010. For years, she had advocated universal access to health care, telling a reporter in 2001, "It is way past time for this country to make sure that healthcare is a right and not a privilege." Early in the discussion about a comprehensive reform bill in the 110th Congress, Christensen emphasized the need to shrink inequities in the health care system, particularly for African-American communities, in areas ranging from maternal and infant health care to preventative medicine. "Closing these and other gaps will improve healthcare for everyone in the country, improve our world standing and reduce the cost of healthcare," she said in testimony before the House Ways and Means Committee. "We therefore owe it to our fellow Americans, all of them, to eliminate the racial, ethnic, rural and gender health disparities that have plagued our country for too long."<sup>11</sup>

In the years after passage of the Affordable Care Act, Christensen—who often spoke on health issues on behalf of the Tri-Caucus of African American, Hispanic American, and Asian Pacific American Members of Congress—remained a stalwart defender of the bill in the face of Republican-led efforts to repeal it. She described the bill as "historic" and credited it for creating a "dramatic change in

the lives of people who live in this country. Not only will we be healthier, we will be more productive. That means our country will be stronger [and] more competitive."<sup>12</sup>

In 2014, Christensen announced that she would not seek re-election to a tenth House term and would instead run for governor of the Virgin Islands. Her 18-year career in the House made her the Virgin Islands' second-longest serving Delegate, behind only Ron de Lugo, the territory's first Delegate in Congress. She admitted that she had been planning to return to private life before recommitting herself to public service to address the economic and social problems that had buffeted the islands in the wake of the Great Recession. Though initially favored to win, Christensen finished second with 39 percent of the vote in the November 4, 2014, general election behind Kenneth Mapp who led the field of five candidates with 47 percent. In a runoff on November 18, Mapp prevailed against Christensen, 63 to 37 percent. In 2019, Christensen became a member of a medical nonprofit board and remained an advocate for health care equity.<sup>13</sup>

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## Harold E. Ford Jr.

1970–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1997–2007

Democrat from Tennessee



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

Elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1996, Harold E. Ford Jr. succeeded his father, Harold E. Ford, who had held the Memphis-based seat since 1975. In contrast to his father's generation of Black lawmakers in Congress who maintained the legislative legacies of the New Deal and the civil rights movement, Ford Jr. largely preferred to focus on broad policy items aimed at the middle class. "I vote what I believe is right. I challenge my leadership when I believe they are wrong," Ford stated early in his career. "I don't give them my vote because it's the partisan and political thing to do."<sup>1</sup>

The eldest son of Harold Eugene and Dorothy Bowles Ford, Harold Eugene Ford Jr. was born on May 11, 1970, in Memphis, Tennessee. His father was a member of the Tennessee state legislature who won election to the U.S. House when Ford was four years old and went on to serve for more than two decades. At his father's first swearing-in ceremony on Capitol Hill, Ford raised his hand and, according to his mother, declared, "This is what I want to be when I grow up." His mother was a longtime employee of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. After his family moved to Washington, DC, in the late 1970s, Ford attended the elite St. Albans School for Boys. Ford believed that his

time at the school helped shape his political philosophy. "For me, and for the other kids who were not white, it was a very heterogeneous place. ... I had to get along with everybody. That helped me later on when I was in situations where you had to say, 'Hey, let's all get together and try to figure this out.'" In 1992, he graduated with a bachelor's degree in history from the University of Pennsylvania and worked on William J. Clinton's presidential campaign. Following graduation, he served briefly as a staff aide for the U.S. Senate Committee on the Budget and as a special assistant at the U.S. Department of Commerce. In 1996, Ford earned a law degree from the University of Michigan School of Law. Ford also worked on his father's congressional campaigns in 1992 and 1994.<sup>2</sup>

After his father announced his retirement from the House in 1996, Ford ran to succeed him in the district encompassing the bulk of Memphis, Tennessee. The district was 60 percent African American and one of the most liberal in the state; more Black residents lived in Memphis than any southern city outside Texas. Ford's father served as his chief campaign strategist. With his prominent family name, Ford distributed campaign buttons and T-shirts that simply read "Jr." Ford ran on three issues: increased federal

funding for education and job training; opposition to Medicare price hikes; and crime prevention. In the primary, Ford defeated Stephen Cohen, a state senator, and Rufus Jones, a state representative, with 61 percent of the vote. His Republican opponent in the general election was Rod DeBerry, a local politician who had run against Harold Ford Sr. for the seat in 1992 and 1994. During the campaign, Ford emphasized improvements to the educational system in a city with a high dropout rate, including the creation of summer programs for city youth. In the general election, Ford prevailed with 61 percent of the vote, making him the first African-American lawmaker to succeed a parent in Congress. In his subsequent four re-elections, Ford won with 79 percent or more. He ran unopposed in 2000.<sup>3</sup>

Shortly after he entered Congress in January 1997, Ford was chosen by his Democratic colleagues as freshman class president, making him the spokesperson for the newly elected Members and an intermediary with House leaders. In his first term, Ford received committee assignments on Education and the Workforce and Government Reform and Oversight. He left the latter committee in the 107th Congress (2001–2003) to accept a seat on the Financial Services Committee (his father had served on the predecessor to that committee). In the following Congress, Ford won a seat on the influential Budget Committee. Pegged as a rising star in the Democratic Party, Ford received widespread media attention when he delivered the keynote address at the 2000 Democratic National Convention.<sup>4</sup>

From the start, Ford insisted that his legislative agenda would be distinct from his father's, who, like many Black lawmakers in the earlier generation, sought to protect and expand government-funded social programs and often prioritized issues affecting Black Americans. "I represent this entire district," Ford said. "I respect my dad and ... admire him a great deal," he continued. "But I don't think he would respect me if I didn't have the fortitude to disagree with him if I felt he was wrong." Ford worked to direct federal resources to Americans living in poverty, but he also emphasized different policies to fight poverty, such as expanding educational opportunities. Ford also reached out to some of his father's political rivals, such as Willie Herenton, the mayor of Memphis, with whom the younger Ford had developed a good relationship. Ford stressed political pragmatism. Memphis city hall, he observed, is "the principal contracting agency with the federal

government. I have a responsibility to secure what funds and resources I can for my state and city."<sup>5</sup>

During his career, Ford sponsored measures to reform the country's campaign finance system, equitably fund education, and support troops and veterans. Ford supported balancing the federal budget and frequently denounced spending that raised the national debt, particularly during the presidency of George W. Bush. In 2005, he bemoaned the Republican budget resolution and criticized its proposed spending. "I would be embarrassed if I had to vote for this budget," he said. "Thankfully I do not, and frankly I do not even know if I am going to vote for all the things we are going to present on our side, for one reason. It is not balanced."<sup>6</sup>

Ford often carved out independent positions and took policy stances different from those of the Congressional Black Caucus and House Democrats. "Ideology," he once lamented, "makes it easier to resist good ideas." Ford supported Democratic causes such as environmental protection and affirmative action, but he also backed measures that many in his party opposed, including private school vouchers, prayer in schools, and federal funding for faith-based charities. Ford made it a point to work with Republicans and supported GOP initiatives, including a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage and an effort to privatize Social Security. He voted for the USA PATRIOT Act in 2001, which vastly expanded the national security state following the terrorist attacks of September 11, and the 2003 Partial-Birth Abortion Act. He also supported the authorization to use military force in Iraq.<sup>7</sup>

In the House, Ford joined several caucuses that aligned with his efforts to limit federal spending and other policy interests, including the New Democrat Coalition and the Blue Dog Coalition. In 2002, Ford orchestrated what he described as an "underdog campaign" against Nancy Pelosi of California for the position of Democratic Leader that had been vacated by Richard Andrew Gephardt of Missouri. Ford joined the race late and publicized his candidacy through media outlets rather than using the traditional method of intense behind-the-scenes campaigning within the party caucus. The main issue separating the two contenders was the Iraq War resolution that Ford voted for in October 2002. The war separated Ford from many rank-and-file House Democrats who believed their constituents demanded a more aggressive opposition to the administration's stance on Iraq. Ultimately, Pelosi prevailed,

177 to 29, in her historic run to become the first woman to lead a party in Congress.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout his time in the House, Ford made no secret of his ambition to serve in the Senate. “I absolutely look forward to serving the entire state of Tennessee one day,” he said in early 2000. That year, he proposed challenging Republican Tennessee Senator William H. Frist, but ultimately passed on the race to support the presidential campaign of fellow Tennessean Vice President Albert Gore Jr. In May 2005, Ford announced his candidacy for the seat that Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist said he would vacate in 2007. “With five good terms in the House behind me ... I believe I’m ready to meet the challenges ahead of us in a way that will make Tennesseans as proud of me as I am of Tennessee,” Ford said. In the Senate, Ford said he would have a larger role shaping the country’s future.<sup>9</sup>

In his quest for the Senate, Ford worked to attract voters from across the political spectrum, campaigning on everyday issues including “health care, education, and economic development.” He emphasized his independence, once observing that “if I was doing the textbook thing that Democrats do ... I’d say ‘Republicans want to short Social Security, they want to rob poor children of their college education, they want to deny families the education system.’ Don’t get me wrong, there’s some truth to that. But that’s not me. Just let me be myself.” Ford faced minimal opposition in the Democratic primary, and entered the general election amid widespread voter dissatisfaction with the George W. Bush administration. In the general, Ford faced Robert “Bob” Corker, a former Chattanooga mayor. Although Ford performed well in Tennessee’s major cities, including Memphis, Nashville, and Chattanooga, Corker received support in suburban counties around Nashville and East Tennessee. Ultimately, Corker prevailed in a narrow win with 51 percent of the vote to Ford’s 48 percent.<sup>10</sup>

After leaving the U.S. House in January 2007, Ford served as a visiting professor at Vanderbilt University and the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas–Austin. He also succeeded Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack as chair of the Democratic Leadership Council, an organization that fostered a centrist approach to economic policy and politics. In 2008, he married Emily Threlkeld; the couple have two children: Georgia and Harold III. Ford moved to New York City where he worked in the financial services industry and as a political commentator on television. In 2010, he wrote

a memoir of his time in politics. In late 2020, Ford was named vice chair at a large banking firm.<sup>11</sup>

## Manuscript Collection

**University of Tennessee Libraries, Modern Political Archives** (Knoxville, TN). *Papers*: 1982–2006, 100 linear feet. This collection contains primarily materials from Harold E. Ford Jr.’s five terms as a U.S. Representative and his 2006 Senate campaign. It includes files related to his committee appointments, campaigns, speeches and events, Memphis politics, and community development, in addition to news clippings and media pieces about Ford. It also contains numerous audiovisual materials, including ads and news appearances. An inventory is available in the repository and online.

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## Carolyn C. Kilpatrick

1945–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1997–2011

Democrat from Michigan



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

A 30-year veteran of state politics, Carolyn C. Kilpatrick became the second Black woman to serve in the House from Michigan following her election in 1996. In only her second term, Kilpatrick was assigned to the prestigious Appropriations Committee, where she worked to direct federal resources towards her Detroit district. Her initial career as a schoolteacher inspired her to pursue public office. “For many of my students, the school lunch is the only meal they will eat in a day. That is what made me really want to fight,” she declared on the campaign trail in 1996. An active member of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), Kilpatrick was unanimously elected its chair for the 110th Congress (2007–2009).<sup>1</sup>

Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick was born Carolyn Jean Cheeks on June 25, 1945, in Detroit, Michigan, to Marvell Jr., an autoworker and handyman, and Willa Mae Cheeks, a beautician. In 1963, she graduated from the High School of Commerce in Detroit as president of her class and attended Ferris State University in Big Rapids. She earned a bachelor’s degree in education from Western Michigan University in 1972 and a master’s degree in education from the University of Michigan in 1977. In 1968, she married Bernard Kilpatrick, who would later win election as a Wayne

County commissioner. They raised two children, Ayanna and Kwame, and divorced in 1981. Kwame Kilpatrick served as mayor of Detroit from 2002 to 2008.<sup>2</sup>

In 1967, Kilpatrick joined the Shrine of the Black Madonna of the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church, a politically active congregation in Detroit that helped elect Detroit’s first Black mayor, Coleman A. Young, in 1973. Kilpatrick worked as a Detroit public school teacher for several years, until members of her church encouraged her to run for a vacant seat in the Michigan state house of representatives. In 1978, she won election to the first of nine consecutive terms in the Michigan house. Kilpatrick became the first African-American woman to sit on the appropriations committee in the state house, chairing both the corrections budget and the transportation budget subcommittees during 14 years on the committee. Kilpatrick was also a house Democratic whip, a role in which she worked to build consensus on legislation.<sup>3</sup>

In 1996, Kilpatrick challenged three-term incumbent Representative Barbara-Rose Collins for a Detroit-area seat in the U.S. House. Collins had faced scrutiny for her high rate of absenteeism and was also under investigation by the House Ethics Committee for alleged campaign finance

violations. The primary challenge ended a longtime alliance between the two politicians, both of whom were members of the Shrine of the Black Madonna church. “The bottom line is she has not represented the district,” Kilpatrick said. In her campaign, Kilpatrick pledged to work with business leaders in the community to reduce unemployment and direct resources to Detroit’s underserved neighborhoods. In the August primary, Kilpatrick bested Collins by 20 points. In the general election, the overwhelmingly Democratic district elected Kilpatrick with 88 percent of the vote. In her six re-elections, she won by similarly large margins.<sup>4</sup>

When Kilpatrick took her seat in the 105th Congress (1997–1999), she received assignments to three committees: Banking and Financial Services; House Oversight; and the Joint Committee on the Library of Congress. In the 106th Congress (1999–2001), Kilpatrick was required to relinquish these assignments when she obtained a seat on the House Appropriations Committee, where she served for the rest of her career. During this time she was the sole Michigan Democrat to serve on the committee, and when Republican Joseph Knollenberg failed to win re-election in 2010, she was the only Michigan lawmaker on the panel.<sup>5</sup>

From her seat on the Appropriations Committee, Kilpatrick worked to bring federally-funded projects to Michigan. From 2008 through 2010, she successfully requested more than \$70 million in earmarks for her district, including \$1.5 million for the purchase of alternative-fuel buses and \$500,000 for Detroit’s summer youth services program. She garnered funding for pre-college engineering instruction, children’s television programming, and enhanced rehabilitation services at the Detroit Medical Center. Kilpatrick supported the development of a southeast Michigan commuter rail system connecting downtown Detroit to Ann Arbor, and the 2005 transportation appropriations bill allocated \$5 million towards the project’s development. Kilpatrick’s efforts brought additional funding for many programs at Wayne State University in Detroit, including NASA’s Science, Engineering, Mathematics and Aerospace Academy for secondary school students, a prisoner rehabilitation program, and a business clinic for the university’s law school.<sup>6</sup>

Kilpatrick’s district included a significant portion of Detroit, and she allied herself with the city’s auto industry. She spoke out against attempts to mandate increased fuel economy requirements by adjusting the Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards, which automakers

opposed, even though many of her Democratic colleagues backed the measure. In 2001, Kilpatrick voted against a floor amendment to raise vehicle fuel economy standards because she believed that it would force automakers to close production plants. “Don’t mess with Michigan; don’t mess with auto-making centers such as Detroit, and don’t mess with auto workers and their families,” she wrote. During the 2008 financial crisis, she backed legislation to provide General Motors and Chrysler with federal aid.<sup>7</sup>

On the Appropriations Committee, Kilpatrick used her seat on the Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs to bring attention to health and economic concerns in sub-Saharan Africa. Kilpatrick favored funding to support AIDS research and prevention programs on the continent, and to provide military assistance for peacekeeping missions. In the 106th Congress, she offered an amendment to boost disaster-assistance funding for flood relief in Mozambique by \$60 million; two subsequent appropriations bills included \$25 million and \$135 million in international disaster assistance for Mozambique and the surrounding region.<sup>8</sup>

As chair of the CBC in the 110th Congress, Kilpatrick continued the organization’s focus on foreign affairs and pushed for monetary aid for the impoverished nation of Haiti. She hoped to fund domestic programs on education, health care, and disaster relief by pulling troops out of costly military conflicts in the Middle East. “Will there be money? No, not if we don’t come out of Iraq and Afghanistan, and that has to be No. 1,” she insisted. Under Kilpatrick’s leadership, the CBC was a significant force in the Democratic Party’s push to raise the minimum wage to \$7.25 an hour. Kilpatrick also sought to encourage American businesses and the federal government to invest more money into minority- and women-owned media outlets and advertising agencies.<sup>9</sup>

In 2010, Kilpatrick voted for the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, believing that it was a first step towards universal coverage. “I am a strong supporter of the single payer health care plan,” she wrote. Kilpatrick repeatedly proposed legislation to provide up to \$1,000 per month in tax credits for medical doctors who practice in underserved areas.

In 2008, Kilpatrick faced her first serious electoral challenge. In the months leading up to the August primary, her son, Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, faced eight felony charges for misconduct in office. Mary Waters

and Martha Scott, both members of the Michigan house of representatives, ran against her, citing the need for new leadership in the district. Despite the close contest, Kilpatrick received a 39-percent plurality and secured the nomination before winning re-election in November. In the 2010 Democratic primary, voters consolidated their support behind Detroit native and Michigan state senator Hansen Clarke. Kilpatrick touted her status as the only Michigan member of the Appropriations Committee and worked to distance herself from her son and his legal issues. Clarke's grassroots campaign, meanwhile, mustered support in Detroit and attracted enough support in the surrounding suburbs to defeat Kilpatrick in the primary with 47 percent of the vote; Kilpatrick took 41 percent.<sup>10</sup>

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# Stephanie Tubbs Jones

1949–2008

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1999–2008

Democrat from Ohio



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

Stephanie Tubbs Jones won election to the United States House of Representatives in 1998, becoming the first African-American woman to represent Ohio in Congress. During her time in the House, Jones became the first Black woman to serve on the Ways and Means Committee and was one of the first African-American women to chair a standing congressional committee—the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct, commonly known as the Ethics Committee. In the House, Jones focused on a range of policies important to her district, including homeownership, women’s health, and voting rights. “All my life I had wanted to help others, and I had been active in helping others,” she said. “I was always interested in service.”<sup>1</sup>

Stephanie Tubbs Jones was born Stephanie Tubbs in Cleveland, Ohio, on September 10, 1949, to Mary Tubbs, a factory worker and cook, and Andrew Tubbs, an airline skycap. The youngest of three daughters, Jones was raised in Cleveland’s Glenville neighborhood and graduated from Collinwood High School. At Case Western Reserve University, Jones founded the African American Students Association and, in 1971, graduated with a bachelor’s degree in sociology and a minor in psychology. She completed her law degree at Case Western University Law School in

1974. Jones then served as the assistant general counsel and the equal opportunity administrator of the northeast Ohio regional sewer district. She married Mervyn Jones and raised a son, Mervyn.<sup>2</sup>

Jones eventually became an assistant Cuyahoga County prosecutor and trial attorney for the Cleveland district Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. When she and several friends worked on a successful political campaign in 1979, the group began promoting Jones for public office. Noting a lack of people of color on the bench, Jones ran for a local judgeship and won election to the Cleveland municipal court. Ohio Governor Richard Celeste then appointed Jones to the Cuyahoga County court of common pleas, where she served from 1983 to 1991. In 1992, she was elected the Cuyahoga County prosecutor, making her the state’s first African-American prosecutor and the only Black woman prosecutor in a major urban area in the country.<sup>3</sup>

When Cleveland’s Representative of 30 years, Louis Stokes, retired in 1998, Jones entered the Democratic primary to succeed him. Jones told voters that she loved her job as county prosecutor but that she wanted to do more for the city. “I got to thinking what could I do for

seniors and children of the 11th District; and not just here, what could I do to see that every child in this country has the opportunity to do well,” she said. She ran on her long record in public office in Cuyahoga County and on her well-established connection with voters in the district. Her campaign slogan was simply “You know me.” Jones quickly became a frontrunner in the race, as did two other well-known community members: state senator Jeffrey D. Johnson and Reverend Marvin McMickle. During the primary, Jones’s opponents told voters that losing her as prosecutor would be a detriment to the Black community. But she countered, saying, “With my background as a criminal justice practitioner, I believe that the Congress will at least listen to me because I’ve had the experience and I will be able to speak out on issues that affect criminal justice in our city and on the national level.” Jones captured the nomination with 51 percent of the vote and then dominated the general election with 80 percent. Jones faced no serious challenges in her four re-elections; she usually won with 75 percent or more of the vote, and ran unopposed in 2004.<sup>4</sup>

When Jones took her seat in the 106th Congress (1999–2001), she received assignments on the Banking and Financial Services Committee (later renamed Financial Services) and the Small Business Committee. In the 107th Congress (2001–2003), she picked up a third assignment to the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct, which oversees House ethics guidelines for Members and staff. In the 108th Congress (2003–2005), Jones left the Financial Services and Small Business Committees to become the first African-American woman to hold a seat on the prestigious Ways and Means Committee, which writes and oversees America’s tax laws.<sup>5</sup>

Jones’s Ohio district encompassed some of Cleveland’s wealthiest suburbs as well as neighborhoods struggling with poverty. On Capitol Hill, she worked to control predatory mortgages and lending practices. As chair of the Congressional Black Caucus Housing Task Force, she facilitated a panel on homeownership at the Congressional Black Caucus Weekend in 2000. In the 107th Congress, she introduced the Predatory Mortgage Lending Practice Reduction Act to abolish certain fees and prevent lenders from targeting low-income and minority communities with subprime mortgages, which carried high interest rates. She routinely re-introduced the bill, and Congress eventually passed similar legislation amid the financial crisis in 2009 that curbed subprime lending.<sup>6</sup>

For four straight Congresses—the 107th through 110th Congresses (2001–2009)—Jones joined Maryland Senator Barbara Ann Mikulski in introducing the Uterine Fibroids Research and Education Act. The proposal included funding for research by the National Institutes of Health and for raising public awareness about the condition, which statistically affects African-American women more than others. “Research is needed to find out what causes uterine fibroids, why African American women are disproportionately affected, and what can be done to prevent and treat the condition,” Jones told her colleagues on the House Floor in 2007. Although the bill never became law, Jones believed more people learned about the disease through her legislative efforts.<sup>7</sup>

Jones also focused on fire safety on college campuses. Citing a number of deadly fires in the previous decade, Jones introduced the Campus Fire Prevention Act in the 107th Congress to create a grant program for sprinkler systems in student housing. She re-introduced it in the following three Congresses. The bill would have provided colleges and universities \$100 million a year for four years and directed 10 percent of the funds to “historically Black colleges and universities, Hispanic-serving institutions, and Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities,” as well as another 10 percent to fraternity and sorority housing. In 2009, Ohio Representative Marcia L. Fudge introduced the Honorable Stephanie Tubbs Jones College Fire Prevention Act—the same bill Jones introduced—which passed the House in May 2010.<sup>8</sup>

In the lead up to the 2004 presidential election, the Democratic Party chose Jones to serve as co-chair for the Democratic National Committee. She told a local newspaper she was chosen for the role because of her judicial background and Ohio’s status as a swing state but mainly because she was “not afraid to speak out” for what she felt was right. She co-chaired the platform committee, which held party meetings across the country in order to fine-tune the Democratic Party’s message. On July 26, 2004, she addressed a crowd at the Democratic National Convention in Boston touting Senator John Forbes Kerry of Massachusetts as the nominee.<sup>9</sup>

After President George W. Bush won re-election in 2004, Jones and a number of her Democratic colleagues suspected that irregular voting procedures in Ohio—including registration errors, long lines, malfunctioning machines, and high ballot rejection rates—had swayed

the state's results. Jones and a group of Democratic Members, including John Conyers Jr. of Michigan, the ranking Democrat on the Judiciary Committee, held unofficial hearings in Washington, DC, and Columbus, Ohio, in December to gather testimony about Election Day in Ohio. In 2005, the group published their findings and recommendations in *What Went Wrong in Ohio: The Conyers Report on the 2004 Presidential Election*.<sup>10</sup>

At the Joint Session of Congress convened on January 6, 2005, to count electoral votes, Jones needed a Senate colleague to join her in making a formal objection to Ohio's electoral vote count. California Senator Barbara Boxer agreed to pair with Jones to challenge the count—only the second time since 1887 that a successful objection by a Representative and a Senator forced an extended debate in the House and the Senate. At the time of the electoral count, two lawsuits concerning provisional ballots were pending in Ohio courts. Jones argued that the state's election results should not be certified until those lawsuits were resolved and that all the voting irregularities should be addressed by the House in the upcoming Congress. As the first to speak in the House debate, Jones said, "This objection does not have at its root the hope or even the hint of overturning the victory of the President; but it is a necessary, timely, and appropriate opportunity to review and remedy the most precious process in our democracy." She stressed that her goal was to draw attention to the problems in the 2004 election as well as voting practices across the nation. "We go across the world trying to ensure democracy," she added, "but there are some problems with the process in the United States." Both chambers debated the objection and ultimately voted to uphold the results: 74 to 1 in the Senate and 267 to 31 in the House.<sup>11</sup>

The following month, Jones joined Senators Boxer and Hillary Rodham Clinton of New York in introducing the Count Every Vote Act, which proposed wide-ranging electoral reform. The bill would have declared Election Day a national holiday, made the distribution of misleading election information a federal crime, and required a paper ballot back-up for every electronic vote to be used in the event of a recount.<sup>12</sup>

In the 110th Congress (2007–2009), Speaker Nancy Pelosi of California named Jones chair of the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct, more commonly known as the Ethics Committee, despite criticisms that Jones had used campaign funds for personal purchases and had taken

free flights from special interest groups. With Jones as chair, the Ethics Committee initiated guidance for Members who earmarked federal funding—line items in appropriations bills for specific projects—to avoid conflict of interest issues, and for Members who flew on private planes. The committee also began a yearly requirement for all House staff to complete ethics training.<sup>13</sup>

Representative Jones died of a brain aneurysm on August 20, 2008. At the news of her sudden passing, then Senator and Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama stated, "It wasn't enough for her just to break barriers in her own life. She was also determined to bring opportunity to all those who had been overlooked and left behind." Jones was succeeded by Marcia Fudge—one of her former aides and the mayor of Warrensville Heights, Ohio—in a special election on November 18, 2008.<sup>14</sup>

## Notes

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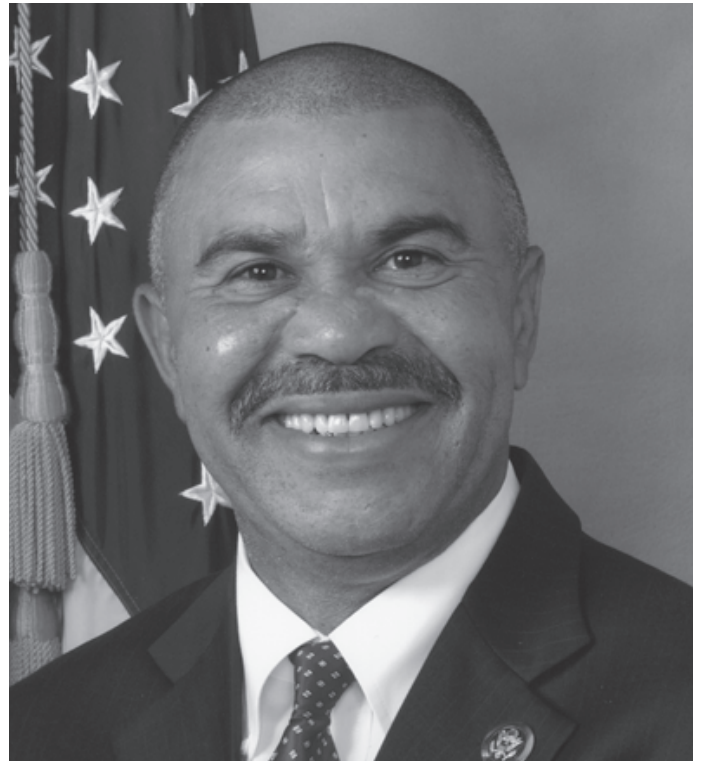
# William Lacy Clay Jr.

1956–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2001–2021

Democrat from Missouri



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 2001, William Lacy Clay Jr. succeeded his father, longtime Missouri Representative William Lacy “Bill” Clay Sr., in Congress. In the U.S. House of Representatives, the younger Clay advocated for government transparency, affordable housing, and voting rights. And like his father before him, Clay worked to alleviate economic and racial disparities back home in St. Louis. “We need to get to a place where the playing field is more level, where racial divisions are not as far apart,” Clay said. “We need to address the economic inequalities that persist in our region.”<sup>1</sup>

William Lacy Clay Jr.—who goes by Lacy Clay—was born in St. Louis, Missouri, on July 27, 1956, one of three children raised by Bill and Carol Ann Clay. His father, a union representative and St. Louis alderman, won election to the House in 1968. He went on to serve on Capitol Hill for 32 years and was a founding member of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC). His uncle, Irving, held several executive positions in the St. Louis city government before being elected an alderman. Clay grew up in St. Louis and spent his teenage years in suburban Maryland while his father served in Congress. He graduated from Springbrook High School in Montgomery County in 1974. While studying at the University of Maryland, Clay worked

as a doorkeeper on the House Floor. From his post in the chamber, Clay witnessed the legislative process and his father’s work firsthand. “My door was the west door on the Republican side because [Speaker of the House] Tip O’Neill did not want me to congregate with my dad,” Clay recalled. Outside work and school, Clay accompanied his father on the campaign trail and sat in on some of his meetings. “I didn’t originally want to go into politics. I wanted to do something like own a business,” Clay observed. “But I realized after working in Washington and the U.S. Congress that that was an option for me.”<sup>2</sup>

Not long after Clay earned his bachelor’s degree in government in 1983, a longtime member of the Missouri state house of representatives, Nathaniel Rivers, announced his resignation. Just months after graduating college, Clay returned to St. Louis where he campaigned for and won a special election for the vacant seat. He served in the state house until 1991, when he won election to the state senate. While in the Missouri legislature, Clay advocated for minority business owners, toughened the state’s hate crime laws, and worked to divest state pension fund investments from firms that did business in apartheid South Africa. In 1992, he married Ivie Lewellen, a communications

executive, and had two children: Carol and William III. They divorced in 2011. Clay later married Patricia Beauchemin, a nonprofit executive.<sup>3</sup>

When Bill Clay announced his retirement from the U.S. House in 1999, Lacy Clay was an immediate favorite to succeed his father. The district had a slight Black majority and encompassed northern St. Louis and the city's northern and western suburbs in St. Louis County. His platform included increased funding for public schools, the protection of Social Security benefits, Medicare expansion, and tax breaks for working families. "Although I am not my father, I am my father's son, in that we share the same values and commitment to principles, such as fairness and justice," Clay announced at the start of his campaign.<sup>4</sup>

In the crowded Democratic primary in August 2000, Clay's main opponent was Charlie Dooley, a popular St. Louis County councilman. The contest between the two highlighted the divide between the predominantly Black city of St. Louis and predominately White St. Louis County. Dooley, who was also Black, accused Clay of trying to rally Black voters against him for having mostly White political allies. "I have never engaged in racially divisive politics, and I never will," Clay responded. On primary day, Clay easily won the nomination with 61 percent of the vote, capturing the majority in both St. Louis city and county. In November, Clay won the general election with 75 percent of the vote.<sup>5</sup>

Clay continued to win re-election by wide margins for most of his congressional career, never receiving less than 70 percent. He faced a significant primary challenge after the 2010 census, when Missouri lost a House seat during the reapportionment process. Two St. Louis-area districts were consolidated into one, pitting Clay against incumbent Representative and fellow Democrat Russ Carnahan. Clay, whose old district encompassed a larger share of the new seat, won the support of party leaders—including the mayor and the governor—and won with 63 percent of the vote.<sup>6</sup>

After Clay was sworn in at the start of the 107th Congress (2001–2003), he was assigned to the Committees on Financial Services and Government Reform (later renamed Oversight and Reform). In his first term, Clay was elected president of the House Democrats' freshman class. The class president serves as the spokesperson for first-term colleagues and communicates policy goals with House leaders. He sat on both Financial Services and Government Reform for his entire House career, while also joining

the Natural Resources Committee in the 114th Congress (2015–2017). Clay chaired the Oversight Committee's Subcommittee on Information Policy, Census, and National Archives in the 110th and 111th Congresses (2007–2011), and he chaired the Financial Services Committee's Subcommittee on Housing, Community Development, and Insurance in the 116th Congress (2019–2021).

Representative Clay was a prominent advocate of electoral reform and voting rights. During his first election in November 2000, hundreds of voters were denied ballot access in St. Louis after the city had placed them on an inactive voter list. Clay sued to keep the polls open for three extra hours and later appeared before the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee to speak out against the use of inactive voter lists, which he said obstructed ballot access for Black voters. He convinced the Justice Department to send officials to monitor the city's 2001 primary elections while the city worked to reform its election procedures. In January 2005, Clay was one of the 31 Representatives who objected to counting Ohio's electoral votes from the 2004 Presidential election in a protest intended to highlight alleged voting irregularities. He also spoke out against the 2013 Supreme Court decision *Shelby County v. Holder*, which invalidated a portion of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, allowing several states to make changes to their election laws without first being approved by federal officials. "*Shelby County v. Holder* severely weakened the Voting Rights Act. Jurisdictions at all levels of government fear the diversity of the new American electorate," he declared.<sup>7</sup>

Clay collaborated with his colleagues in the Missouri congressional delegation to direct federal funding for several major projects in the state. He worked with fellow Representative Ann Wagner and Senators Roy Blunt and Claire McCaskill to introduce legislation to transfer authority over the West Lake Landfill near St. Louis to the Army Corps of Engineers. The site, which contained radioactive waste from the Manhattan Project, was under the jurisdiction of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which made the unpopular decision to leave the waste in place instead of removing it. Facing mounting pressure from lawmakers and local activists, the EPA eventually agreed to a \$205 million landfill cleanup project in 2018. Clay also co-wrote legislation with Senator Blunt to designate the Gateway Arch in downtown St. Louis as a National Park. When the National Geospatial-Intelligence

Agency (NGA) needed to move out of its aging St. Louis facility, Clay played a key role in preventing the agency from relocating to the suburbs. He told officials from the Barack Obama administration that building a centrally located NGA facility would yield a greater return than moving it to a rural area. “This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the federal government to reverse urban blight,” Clay wrote. When a north St. Louis site was chosen for the NGA’s new \$1.7 billion facility, Clay touted the plan as the largest single federal investment in the city’s history and called it “the greatest economic victory” for the region.<sup>8</sup>

As chair of the Oversight Committee’s Subcommittee on Information Policy, Census, and National Archives, Clay focused on improving government transparency. In February 2007, he held a hearing to assess the effectiveness of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), which enables the public to request documents created and held by federal agencies. As the number of FOIA requests increased over the years, many executive agencies faced growing backlogs. The subcommittee heard testimony from journalists and researchers frustrated with having their FOIA requests delayed, ignored, or denied. A month later, Clay introduced a bill to strengthen public access to government records by implementing a tracking system for FOIA requests, reimbursing attorney’s fees to requesters who successfully challenged a denied records request, and hiring a FOIA ombudsman to serve as a liaison between the public and federal agencies. His bill passed the House, and a Senate companion bill, known as the OPEN Government Act, became law at the end of 2007. “One of the cornerstones of our democracy is the ability of citizens to have timely access to Government information and records,” Clay declared.<sup>9</sup>

Clay’s seat on the Oversight Committee also allowed him to monitor the 2010 and 2020 Censuses. He questioned the Census Bureau’s policy of counting incarcerated people as residents of their prison rather than their last known address. Clay argued that the policy artificially inflated the population of predominately White and rural areas where prisons were usually located, which enhanced those communities’ political representation at the expense of the inmates’ hometowns—areas that were predominately urban, Black, and Hispanic. In 2010, Clay asked the Census Bureau to report its data on prison populations early—allowing states to choose whether to count inmates at their last known address for redistricting purposes. He later introduced legislation ahead of the 2020 Census that would

have mandated the Census Bureau to count prisoners as residents of their hometowns, but it died in committee.<sup>10</sup>

In recognition of the civil rights activism of his father’s generation, Clay sought to enhance national awareness of the historic civil rights movement. From his seat on the Natural Resources Committee, he shepherded into law a bill authorizing the National Park Service to establish the African American Civil Rights Network, a collaborative effort between federal, state, and private facilities across the country to develop educational programming on the civil rights movement. “The historic civil rights network ... will honestly tell the full and sometimes painful story of the struggle for civil rights, not just for African Americans, but to foster healing, tolerance and understanding among all Americans,” Clay said.<sup>11</sup>

In 2014, a White police officer shot and killed Michael Brown, an 18-year-old Black man, in Ferguson, a northwest suburb of St. Louis, igniting large-scale protests over racism and brutality in law enforcement. In response, the CBC selected Clay to lead a new task force on police reform. Clay immediately called on the Justice Department to launch its own investigation into the case. “We have too many unarmed young black men who interact with police and wind up dead. The resolution of that problem will only come through a painful, honest, national discussion about race,” he said on the House Floor. Clay introduced bills in 2015 to require racial bias and cultural sensitivity training for law enforcement officers, to provide funding for officer-worn body cameras, and to create a task force to track and restrict the use of military-grade equipment by police departments. Major police reform legislation failed to gain traction in the 114th Congress, however.<sup>12</sup>

As chair of the Subcommittee on Housing, Community Development, and Insurance of the Financial Services Committee during the 116th Congress, Clay focused on protecting access to affordable housing and raising homeownership rates among lower-income Americans. “Home ownership has proven to be one of the most consistent paths to obtaining wealth in America and narrowing the wealth gap,” he declared. Clay pushed back against the Donald J. Trump administration’s efforts to cut funding for public housing and held a hearing to highlight the country’s affordable housing shortage and the enormous backlog of needed repairs for public housing infrastructure. When the 200-unit Wellston housing complex in St. Louis County faced demolition,

Clay appealed to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for an alternative solution. After his intervention, HUD altered its plans and selected a developer to renovate the facility. In 2020, the House passed his bill, the Improving FHA Support for Small Dollar Mortgages Act, which required the Federal Housing Administration to investigate why applications for mortgages costing less than \$70,000 were denied at higher rates than larger mortgages. Clay also focused on preserving housing in rural areas. His subcommittee held a hearing to examine federal loan programs run by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for housing for rural low-income Americans. His bill, the Strategy and Investment in Rural Housing Preservation Act, passed the House in 2019 and sought to provide rental assistance to tenants living in properties under the USDA's Rural Housing Service.<sup>13</sup>

A year into Clay's housing subcommittee chairmanship, the COVID-19 pandemic upended the economy and left many tenants and homeowners unable to make rent and mortgage payments. Clay introduced a bill to allow mortgage holders of single and multifamily homes to request loan forbearance for the duration of the public health emergency if they provided rent relief for their tenants. Parts of his legislation were included in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, an economic stimulus package that also included eviction bans for homes financed under federally-backed mortgages.<sup>14</sup>

In the 2018 Democratic primary, Clay faced Cori Bush, a nurse, pastor, and community activist. Bush criticized the political establishment and argued that she was best suited to tackle issues such as homelessness, wage stagnation, and domestic violence because she experienced them herself. Clay defeated her with 57 percent of the vote, but Bush challenged him again in 2020. The rematch came amid the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as nationwide protests against police brutality and racism after the police killing of George Floyd, a Black man, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Clay insisted that his years of political experience and House seniority were crucial for acquiring federal funding for the district and for resolving the economic crisis brought on by the pandemic. "Now is not a time for amateur hour," he said. Bush accused Clay of being slow to respond to community needs and criticized his absence from the 2014 Ferguson protests. Bush defeated Clay by three points for the Democratic nomination. Clay's final term ended on January 3, 2021.<sup>15</sup>

## Notes

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## Diane E. Watson

1933–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2001–2011

Democrat from California



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

As a former educator, state legislator, and United States ambassador, Diane E. Watson entered the U.S. House of Representatives in 2001 with a wealth of public service experience. Throughout her 35 years in public office, Watson worked to improve the lives of women and children—especially those living in poverty. Her diverse legislative interests included welfare reform, civil rights, foreign aid for African nations facing the crises of HIV and AIDS, and improved health care and education in the United States. “People have trusted me, and I have not let them down,” Watson observed during her first congressional campaign. “People have read my name on the ballot for 25 years. They have been born, grown up and gotten married in that time. That means a great deal. When you work your base, you win.”<sup>1</sup>

Diane Edith Watson was born on November 12, 1933, in Los Angeles, California, the daughter of William Allen Louis Watson, a Los Angeles police officer, and Dorothy Elizabeth O’Neal Watson, a postal worker. After graduating from Susan Miller Dorsey High School in Los Angeles, Watson received her associate degree from Los Angeles City College in 1954 and a bachelor’s degree in education from the University of California, Los Angeles, in 1956.

Watson later earned a master’s degree in school psychology from California State University, Los Angeles, in 1967, and a Ph.D. in education administration from Claremont College in 1986. Watson worked as a teacher and school psychologist in the Los Angeles public schools, taught abroad in France and Japan, lectured at California State University campuses in Long Beach and Los Angeles, and worked in the California department of education.<sup>2</sup>

In 1975, Watson won election to the Los Angeles board of education and served until 1978. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, Watson became only the second Black woman to be elected to the school board. On the board, Watson worked to desegregate the city’s public schools. She went on to win a spot in the California state senate in 1978, becoming the first African-American woman to serve in that chamber. “I think I bring another dimension being a black female,” she said. “But I don’t want to be judged here as a black or a woman but as a senator.” During her two-decade career in the state senate, she chaired the health and human services committee where she worked to provide relief for Californians living in poverty and sought to rebuild central Los Angeles after the violence and property destruction that followed the 1992 acquittal of White police officers in the

beating of Rodney King, a Black man. In 1992, Watson ran for the Los Angeles county board of supervisors but lost to former California Representative Yvonne Brathwaite Burke in a close race. After state term limits forced Watson out of the California senate, President William J. Clinton nominated her as U.S. Ambassador to the Federated States of Micronesia in 1998.<sup>3</sup>

In December 2000, Representative Julian C. Dixon of California, Watson's friend and former high school classmate, died suddenly of a heart attack. A senior member on the powerful Appropriations Committee, Dixon had just won re-election to a twelfth term in Congress. Urged by colleagues to run, Watson declared her candidacy for the vacant seat in January 2001. Watson campaigned on her political experience, community activism, and local roots in the predominantly African-American and Hispanic district, which included West Los Angeles and Culver City. Watson earned a 33 percent plurality in the primary to defeat 10 opponents, including a state senator and a city councilman. In the June 5, 2001, special election, Watson easily carried the Democratic district with 75 percent of the vote against Republican businesswoman Noel Irwin Hentschel. In her four re-elections, Watson won with more than 80 percent of the vote.<sup>4</sup>

Watson took her seat in the House on June 7, 2001. "I never dreamed that this walk would direct me in the footsteps of my dear friend, the late esteemed Julian Dixon," she said. Watson received assignments on the Government Reform and the International Relations Committees and remained on both panels throughout her tenure in the House. As a former ambassador, she took a keen interest in American foreign policy, particularly relating to issues of racism and health care in the developing world. In the summer of 2001, Watson attended the United Nations Conference on Racism, Xenophobia, and Other Intolerance in Durban, South Africa. She later urged the United States to host its own conference on racism and called for reforms to American education, justice, and health care systems as possible means for reparations for the long and painful legacy of American slavery. Watson also supported the Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act, noting that incidents of violence against people of Middle Eastern and North African descent, which had risen since the 2001 terrorist attacks, were "the tip of a proverbial iceberg."<sup>5</sup>

Watson worked to increase U.S. aid to sub-Saharan African nations fighting a pandemic of HIV and AIDS.

She argued that the crisis was a humanitarian issue with repercussions that affected both regional stability and America's national security because of the strain it placed on so many developing economies. The disease, she observed, "in the very near term, if not more is done, may challenge the very notion of law-based nation states." Such instability, she also noted, could be taken advantage of by terrorist groups. Speaking in November 2001, Watson said "Let us not forget that Al-Qaeda terrorist leader Osama bin Laden has exploited the misery of another state where civil society has collapsed—Afghanistan—to serve as a base for his terror network."<sup>6</sup>

In addition to her humanitarian efforts, Watson sponsored reauthorization of the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, a bipartisan panel under the U.S. State Department overseeing both private and governmental efforts to promote American ideals abroad. Watson introduced bills proposing an expansion of the commission to include publicly available resource centers and libraries. Speaking in support of the bill on the House Floor, Watson suggested the program might "help redeem the status and prestige that the United States has lost around the world in recent years." She added, "An important point of regaining our rightful leadership role is to find more effective ways to let the world know who we are as Americans and what we stand for." The proposal passed the House by voice vote but stalled in the U.S. Senate.<sup>7</sup>

Watson used her seat in Congress to call attention to the needs of poor and underserved communities—particularly those in her district. Building on her work in the state legislature in support of "commonsense" welfare reform, Watson called on Congress to give the states leeway to manage their own need-based initiatives by reauthorizing the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program to provide education, childcare, job training, and employment opportunities to aid recipients. A consistent supporter of increased funding for Head Start, Watson also lobbied for federal assistance to combat gang violence and protect at-risk young people. Supporting President Barack Obama's agenda, Watson held town halls promoting aspects of the Affordable Care Act that would help seniors and families control the costs of health care. She regularly supported health care reform in House Floor speeches, specifically highlighting the benefits for maternity care.<sup>8</sup>

During her time in the House, Watson highlighted the achievements of important civil rights activists. In the 108th

Congress (2003–2005) she introduced a measure to award a Congressional Gold Medal to Dr. Dorothy Height, a longtime advocate for civil rights in Washington, DC. She also sponsored legislation to extend the construction deadline for a national memorial honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to allow the project more time to raise funding. Both bills were approved by the House and eventually became law.<sup>9</sup>

On February 11, 2010, Watson announced her decision to retire at the end of the 111th Congress (2009–2011) in order to spend more time with her 100-year-old mother. Reflecting upon her career, Watson said, “I have been really thrilled by the opportunity to help my constituents in whatever way I could.”<sup>10</sup>

### Manuscript Collection

**University of California, Los Angeles, Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library** (Los Angeles, CA). *Papers*: 1978–2011, 13.25 linear feet. The collection covers Diane E. Watson’s time in the California state senate and the U.S. House of Representatives, as well as a limited amount of material related to her ambassadorship to Micronesia. The collection includes press clippings, numerous photographs from events throughout Watson’s career, correspondence, and documents from various events, meetings, and conferences. The collection also contains materials related to specific areas of interest for Watson, including the controversy over Ebonics in the Oakland (CA) School District in the mid–1990s, the Sherrice Iverson Justice Committee, and the debate over the downsizing of the King/Drew Medical Center. Additionally, the collection includes mementos from Watson’s trip to South Korea in August 2010, which was particularly significant since her congressional district included Los Angeles’s Koreatown, home to the largest Korean population outside of Korea. Mementos from the trip include an honorary doctorate from Chung Ang University, Korean literature panels, and souvenir menus from banquets in Watson’s honor. A finding aid is available in the repository and online.

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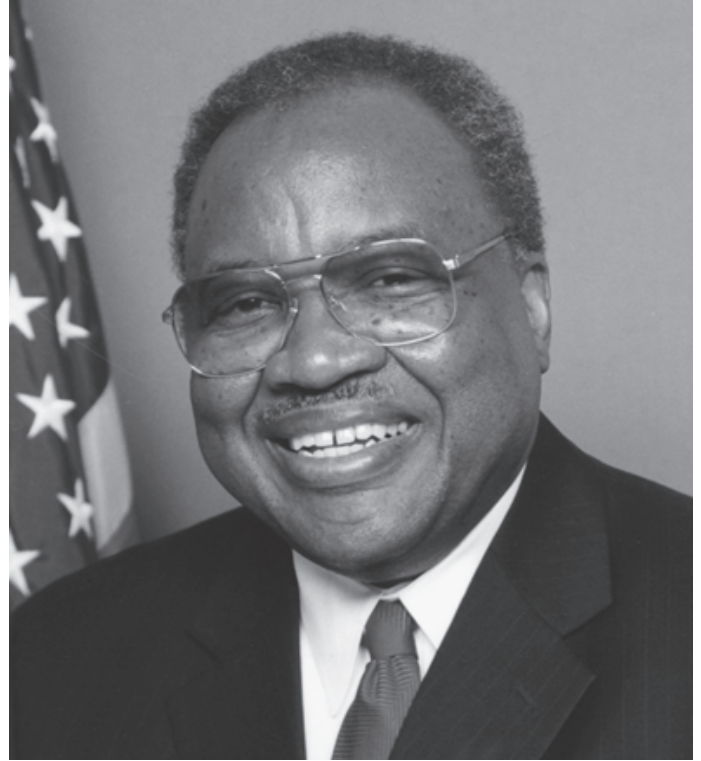
# Frank W. Ballance Jr.

1942–2019

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2003–2004

Democrat from North Carolina



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

Frank W. Ballance Jr. served in the North Carolina state senate for 13 years before winning a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives to succeed Representative Eva M. Clayton, the first Black woman to represent North Carolina on Capitol Hill. Ballance's victory marked the first time an African-American candidate from North Carolina succeeded an African-American incumbent in Congress. Ballance, who had grown up on a tobacco farm, used his seat on the Agricultural Committee to advocate for farmers in his largely rural district during his single term.<sup>1</sup>

Frank Winston Ballance Jr. was born in Windsor, North Carolina, on February 15, 1942, to Frank Winston, a sharecropper, and Alice Eason Ballance. According to a political activist in eastern North Carolina, Ballance's mother was the "political wheel" of Bertie County, organizing voter registration drives and advocating greater representation for the area's Black voters. Ballance grew up in a segregated society. "Prior to the sit-ins, you just kind of accepted that way of life," he later reflected. "You didn't like it. When you got to the age of 14 or 15 you'd ask, 'Why are we treated this way?'" Ballance graduated in 1959 from W.S. Etheridge High School in Windsor and four years later earned a bachelor's degree from North

Carolina Central University in Durham. In 1965, Ballance graduated with a law degree from the same institution. He was employed as a professor at another historically Black school, South Carolina State College (now South Carolina State University), from 1965 to 1966. Ballance served in the North Carolina National Guard in 1968 and continued as a reservist until 1971. He practiced law, establishing a firm with Theaoseus T. Clayton (the husband of future U.S. Representative Eva Clayton) in Warrenton, North Carolina. Ballance married Bernadine Smallwood, a lawyer, and they raised three children: Garey, Angela, and Valerie.<sup>2</sup>

As a college student, Ballance marched against segregation and, at age 24, served as a youth director of the local chapter of the NAACP. He eventually ran three unsuccessful campaigns for local office. In 1968, he ran for a seat as a judge on a district court in eastern North Carolina, and in 1970 he sought a seat on the Warren county commission. After switching to the Republican Party, Ballance tried again unsuccessfully for the commission in 1974. Ballance soon returned to the Democratic Party, "to my people, where my votes are."<sup>3</sup>

In 1982, Ballance won election to represent a newly redrawn district in the North Carolina state house—a

victory that a local newspaper had attributed to the record number of registered Black voters in Warren County, which had been steadily growing since the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The 1982 election more than doubled the number of African-American lawmakers in the state legislature. Ballance recalled, “Among the black community, there was great excitement that a new day had dawned and things would be different.” He served in the North Carolina state house of representatives from 1983 to 1986. Although he lost the Democratic primary for a seat in the North Carolina senate in 1986, he was later elected and served in the state senate from 1989 to 2002. As a state senator, Ballance was a leading critic of the death penalty, especially for people with intellectual disabilities. Ballance also spearheaded a four-year education plan that raised teachers’ salaries statewide, led a measure to support state community colleges with local bonds, and helped establish a mental health fund.<sup>4</sup>

In November 2001, when six-term Representative Eva M. Clayton announced her retirement from the House, Ballance entered the race to succeed her. Ballance had managed Clayton’s first successful run for the U.S. House in 1992. A decade later, Clayton encouraged Ballance to run for her seat. “Without Eva Clayton’s support, I would not have run,” Ballance recalled. The district encompassed much of northeastern North Carolina, arching southward from the Virginia border along the Albemarle and Pamlico Sounds and included areas encompassed by Ballance’s state legislative district. The district was heavily Democratic and was just over 50 percent Black. In the party primary, Ballance faced Sam Davis, a Pasquotank County commissioner; former U.S. Attorney Janice Cole; and Christine Fitch, chair of the Wilson County school board. A lawsuit over state redistricting delayed the May primary until September. Ballance campaigned on his 18 years of experience in the state legislature and prevailed over his three competitors in the Democratic primary, taking 47 percent of the vote and capturing 17 of 23 counties in the district; the nearest runner up, Davis, tallied 26 percent. In the general election, Ballance defeated Republican nominee Greg Dority, a security consultant, by a margin of 64 to 35 percent.<sup>5</sup>

In late November 2002, only weeks after winning election to Congress, the incoming group of new Democratic lawmakers chose Ballance as freshman class president—a position Representative Clayton had held ten years earlier. The class president traditionally

served as the spokesperson for first-term colleagues and as an intermediary with House leaders. When Ballance took his seat in the House in January 2003, he received assignments to the Agriculture Committee and the Small Business Committee.<sup>6</sup>

From his seat on the Agriculture Committee, Ballance worked on issues important to his rural district. Tobacco and cotton crops drove the region’s economy alongside the textile and lumber industries. Ballance also called attention to the plight of thousands of textile workers in his district who had recently lost jobs due to the outsourcing of textile production to other countries. Without more funding for unemployment benefits, Ballance warned that his state would “face a crisis of chronic unemployment with shrinking safety nets to combat this crisis.” As the House debated the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s 2004 funding bill, Ballance offered a floor amendment to increase available resources for the department’s civil rights office and its outreach programs for minority farmers by \$8 million. To support his district’s tobacco industry, Ballance cosponsored two bills that sought to eliminate the tobacco quota system, which limited tobacco cultivation to select farmers who held the rights to grow the crop. The Depression-era quota system sought to stabilize tobacco prices but made it difficult for growers to compete with foreign markets. “I have talked to many farmers in my district, tobacco farmers who are suffering,” Ballance said at a committee hearing to review the policy.<sup>7</sup>

Ballance also worked to secure federal money for education and disaster relief programs as well as better access to health care for his district. In 2003, he opposed a Medicare prescription drug plan backed by the George W. Bush administration, arguing that it favored the insurance industry and drug companies over the interests of many of the elderly and poor constituents of his district. Additionally, Representative Ballance joined members of the North Carolina delegation in October 2003 to advocate for federal relief funding for portions of North Carolina that were devastated by Hurricane Isabel. Ballance criticized President Bush’s 2005 education budget for slashing funding for education reform and after-school programs. He introduced a bill to waive the provision of the No Child Left Behind Act that punished underperforming schools until the schools received adequate funding for students with special needs.<sup>8</sup>

In fall 2003, Ballance faced state audits into a nonprofit substance abuse facility that he cofounded in 1985. The

John A. Hyman Memorial Youth Foundation, located in Ballance's hometown of Warrenton, North Carolina, was named after the state's first African-American Representative, who served what was then known as the "Black Second" district in Congress. As a state senator, Ballance had secured state funding for the nonprofit while continuing to serve as chair of the foundation's board of directors. Investigations by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and North Carolina state regulators uncovered "conflicts of interest"—including payments to Ballance's family members, political allies, and campaign staff. Additionally, the foundation had failed to file state and federal nonprofit taxes for years.<sup>9</sup>

Amid the investigations, several candidates entered the Democratic primary to challenge Ballance for the party nomination in 2004. Late in the filing period, Ballance formally entered the race, only to withdraw days later. On May 7, 2004, Representative Ballance announced his retirement from the House, citing myasthenia gravis, a chronic neuromuscular disease. "We expect that with time and medication that I'd be fine. It's just that it did not appear that I was going to have the energy and strength to run this vigorous campaign that I had to run," Ballance said. He resigned from the House on June 11, 2004, and retired to his hometown of Warrenton. Ballance was eventually succeeded by former North Carolina supreme court justice G.K. Butterfield in a special election held on July 20 to fill the vacant seat.<sup>10</sup>

In early September 2004, Ballance was indicted on federal corruption charges related to his management of the Hyman Foundation. In November 2004, he pled guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit mail fraud and launder money. In October 2005, he received a four-year jail sentence, which he completed in June 2009. Frank W. Ballance Jr. died on February 22, 2019, in Raleigh, North Carolina.<sup>11</sup>

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## Artur Davis

1967–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2003–2011

Democrat from Alabama



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

After growing up in a struggling neighborhood in Montgomery, Alabama, Artur Davis earned two Harvard degrees and launched a political career that brought him to the U.S. House of Representatives. Elected in 2002, Davis advocated for economic opportunities for low-income Americans and was especially attuned to the needs of his constituents. “I think I’ve always been able to overcome obstacles, overcome odds,” Davis said, shortly after winning his first election to the U.S. House. “That’s why I refuse to accept [that] the Black Belt has to lag behind the rest of our state.”<sup>1</sup>

Artur Davis was born on October 9, 1967, in Montgomery, Alabama. After his parents divorced, he was raised in the west end of Montgomery by his mother, Arthur-May Davis, a schoolteacher, and his grandmother. He attended the city public schools, graduating from Jefferson Davis High School. In 1990, Davis earned a bachelor’s degree from Harvard University, earning magna cum laude honors. Three years later he earned a law degree from Harvard Law School. He clerked for Judge Myron Thompson of the United States district court for the middle district of Alabama—one of the first African-Americans appointed to a federal judgeship in that state. In 1994,

Davis was appointed assistant U.S. attorney in Alabama’s middle district and served in that capacity until 1998. On January 1, 2009, he married Tara Johnson.<sup>2</sup>

In 2000, Davis ran for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives from a district that covered portions of Birmingham and Tuscaloosa as well as low-income agricultural counties in west-central Alabama that were part of the Black Belt, a region of the state known for its dark, fertile soils. In the Democratic primary he faced four-term incumbent Earl F. Hilliard. In his first foray into elected politics, Davis lost to Hilliard, who won with 58 percent of the vote. Davis challenged Hilliard again two years later, after the redistricting process following the 2000 Census changed the district’s borders. The district maintained its Black majority, but some 40 percent of the population was newly added, which eroded Hilliard’s electoral base. Hilliard faced criticism from pro-Israel groups for introducing legislation to end unilateral trade sanctions against rogue states like Libya and for voting against a 2002 resolution expressing solidarity with Israel against terrorism. Davis declared Hilliard to be “out of touch on the Middle East,” and received substantial out-of-state financial support from members of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

Within the district, Davis won the support of the mayors of Birmingham and Selma. He accused Hilliard of failing to mitigate the high poverty and unemployment rates in the district. “We have a health care crisis, an economic development crisis and we have an education crisis,” he said. “That is what this campaign has been about.” In the Democratic primary, neither Hilliard nor Davis won a majority after a third candidate, Sam Wiggins, siphoned off 11 percent of the vote. The contest advanced to a runoff election, in which Davis captured the nomination with 56 percent of the vote. In the general election, Davis commanded 92 percent of the vote against Libertarian challenger Lauren McCay. In his re-elections, Davis won 75 percent of the vote in 2004 and faced no major party opposition in 2006 or 2008.<sup>3</sup>

When Davis took his seat in the 108th Congress (2003–2005), he lobbied for a spot on the Financial Services Committee, which he received, along with an assignment to the Budget Committee. “The banking industry is very critical in the 7th Congressional District in two areas, housing and rural development, and economic development in the low-income areas in Birmingham,” Davis observed. In the 110th Congress (2007–2009), Davis left the Budget and Financial Services Committees and received a spot on the powerful Ways and Means Committee. While members of the tax-writing committee are not typically allowed to serve on additional panels, Davis successfully sought a waiver to join the Judiciary Committee, citing his experience as a federal prosecutor. That Congress, he also joined the Committee on House Administration, which oversaw federal elections and many of the day-to-day operations in the House.<sup>4</sup>

Davis quickly entered party leadership, and in only his second term he was named a chief deputy Whip for the Democratic Caucus. Hoping to bolster their presence in the South, Democrats also named Davis to the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, where he worked to recruit candidates. In the 110th Congress, party leaders placed him on the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee, which makes committee assignments and helps set the party’s agenda in the House.<sup>5</sup>

Davis described his legislative agenda as one focused on the “fundamentals,” including policies dealing with education, health care, and transportation infrastructure. Like many first-term Members, Davis committed himself to constituent services, assembling a professional staff that

ran five district offices and was eight times larger than his predecessor’s staff.<sup>6</sup>

In the House, Davis joined the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) as well as the moderate New Democrat Coalition. In the 110th Congress, he served as one of four vice-chairs of the New Democrats. On social and cultural issues, Davis gained a reputation for often voting with Republicans. “If I have to pick between representing the [Democratic] Caucus and representing the views and values of the people in my state and my district, it’s an easy choice,” he reflected. Davis voted with a minority of Democrats in support of the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act of 2003; he also supported a constitutional amendment to outlaw marriage for same-sex couples. In 2006, he voted with Republicans to allow oil and gas drilling in Alaska’s Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. After Democrats regained control of the House in the 110th Congress, Davis voted in favor of a reauthorization of the USA PATRIOT Act as well as an overhaul of the law permitting eavesdropping on foreign terrorists. In 2007, he voted against a bill that prohibited businesses from discriminating against employees on the basis of sexual orientation. “Non-discrimination principles are absolutely important and the right thing for public and government institutions,” Davis said. “But I think the bill goes a little bit too far ... sweeping into private organizations and small businesses.”<sup>7</sup>

Much of Davis’s agenda focused on improving and expanding economic and educational opportunities for his constituents. According to one analysis, Davis represented the fifth poorest district in the country. During his first term, Davis successfully amended an appropriations bill to restore funding for historically Black land grant colleges—including Tuskegee University—which faced cuts of more than 3 percent in the 2004 annual budget. “I think that all of us would recognize that we have some fundamental obligations to treat like institutions in the same manner. ... While so many programs have had to bear the brunt of the budget ax, we ought to make sure that it is administered in a fair and evenhanded manner,” he stated. When the steel and catfish industries in his district were threatened by a flood of cheap goods from China and Vietnam, Davis introduced a bipartisan bill to impose additional customs duties on foreign products that were subsidized by foreign governments. To help improve conditions in America’s public housing, the House approved Davis’s floor amendment to the 2006 Housing and Urban Development

appropriations bill to infuse \$60 million into the HOPE VI program, which revitalizes distressed public housing.<sup>8</sup>

As a member of the Judiciary Committee, Davis joined with Chair John Conyers Jr. of Michigan in passing a bill toughening sentencing for hate crimes. “If you don’t like people because of who they are, this bill says we are offended by that as a community,” Davis stated in support of the measure.<sup>9</sup>

During the financial crisis on Wall Street in late 2008, Davis supported the George W. Bush administration’s package meant to stabilize the country’s biggest banks, the Troubled Asset Relief Program, but Davis did not support federal loans to struggling automobile companies. In the 111th Congress (2009–2011), he occasionally broke with his party on major legislation. While he used his seat on the Ways and Means Committee to aid passage of an expansion of the State Children’s Health Insurance Program, Davis was the lone CBC member, and one of 34 Democrats, to vote against the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. Explaining his vote to his constituents, Davis said, “I didn’t vote against health care—I voted against the bill in Washington ... we can’t just keep throwing a trillion dollars toward the problem.”<sup>10</sup>

After term limits prevented Alabama Governor Bob Riley from running for re-election, Davis quickly declared his intention not to seek another term in the House and instead run for governor. On February 6, 2009, he announced his candidacy. In the Democratic primary, Davis faced Alabama agricultural commissioner, Ron Sparks, who was White and had won endorsements from civil rights groups in the state. Davis also found himself at odds with Black leaders in Alabama, who criticized his vote against the Affordable Care Act, which was popular among Black Alabamians. When one Black Democratic state party leader accused Davis of voting against the Affordable Care Act to help his gubernatorial campaign rather than help his constituents, Davis replied, “I ... vigorously reject the insinuation that there is a uniquely ‘black’ way of understanding an issue.” On Election Day, Sparks defeated Davis in the primary with 62 percent of the vote; Davis captured 38 percent.<sup>11</sup>

In early 2011, Davis reflected on his loss and his effort to transcend criticisms that he did not do enough for Black voters back home. “There are some on both the right and the left politically who profit from race being a pervasive topic,” he said in an interview with the *National Journal*. “There are some in the African-American community who

want to use it as an excuse, and there are some in other communities who use it as a basis for stigmatization. I have certainly been disappointed that race continues to be a topic of conversation.”<sup>12</sup>

After leaving public service, the rift between Davis and the Democratic Party that emerged during his House service widened. As a fiscal conservative, he continued to criticize the Affordable Care Act, believing it was too expensive for consumers. His support for voter-ID laws and opposition to affirmative action policies drew a swift rebuke from his former colleagues in the CBC, who wrote Davis an open letter in 2012 denouncing his views. That year, Davis temporarily left the Democratic Party. “Parties change,” he wrote. “Wearing a Democratic label no longer matches what I know about my country and its possibilities.” After living in Virginia for a brief period, he returned to Alabama in 2015 and waged three unsuccessful bids for local office as a Democratic candidate, for Montgomery mayor and for the Montgomery County commission in 2015, and again for Montgomery mayor in 2019.<sup>13</sup>

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## Denise L. Majette

1955–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2003–2005

Democrat from Georgia



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

After defeating a veteran incumbent in the Democratic primary for a Georgia congressional seat, Denise L. Majette coasted to victory in the 2002 general election, earning a spot in the U.S. House of Representatives for the 108th Congress (2003–2005). During her single House term, Majette sought to boost funding for a variety of social services and to support small businesses. “Long-term success in this country depends on high quality education, on stable and high paying jobs, and access to quality health care,” she declared.<sup>1</sup>

Denise L. Majette was born on May 18, 1955, in Brooklyn, New York, the daughter of Voyd, a real estate assessor, and Olivia, a teacher. As a teenager during the 1960s and 1970s, Majette said she looked up to pathbreaking Black Representatives Shirley Chisholm of New York and Barbara Jordan of Texas. Majette attended Yale University, graduating with a bachelor’s degree in American history in 1976. After college she attended law school, following a decision she had made at the age of 13. “I was very inspired during the civil rights struggles at the way people used the law to effect social change,” she later recalled. “And I wanted to do that, too.” After earning a law degree in 1979 from Duke University Law School,

Majette worked as a staff attorney at the Legal Aid Society in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and later served as an adjunct law professor at Wake Forest University. In 1983, Majette moved to Stone Mountain, Georgia, with her husband Rogers J. Mitchell Jr. and their two sons from former marriages, and accepted a position as a law clerk for Judge R. Keegan Federal at the superior court of DeKalb County. Over the next decade, Majette served as a law assistant to Judge Robert Benham of the Georgia court of appeals, a special assistant attorney general for the state of Georgia, and a partner in an Atlanta law firm. In 1992, Majette became a judge of administrative law for the Georgia state board of workers’ compensation. In 1993, Georgia Governor Zell Bryan Miller appointed Majette as a judge on the state court of DeKalb County, where she served for nearly nine years.<sup>2</sup>

On February 5, 2002, Majette announced her candidacy as a Democrat for a seat in the U.S. House from a suburban Atlanta district held by five-term Democratic incumbent Representative Cynthia A. McKinney. Majette said she decided to run for Congress because she felt McKinney had become disconnected from the issues affecting DeKalb County. The race garnered national attention

after McKinney implied that President George W. Bush deliberately ignored pre-September 11 intelligence reports suggesting an imminent terrorist attack and that his big-business supporters profited in the wake of the attacks. Majette criticized her opponent for the remarks and received a strong endorsement from Georgia Senator Zell Miller. Middle-class voters flocked to Majette in the August 20, 2002, primary, joined by Republicans who took advantage of Georgia state law, which allowed voters to switch parties during primaries. Majette captured the nomination with 58 percent of the vote. In the general election, she easily defeated her Republican opponent, Cynthia Van Auken, with 77 percent of the vote.<sup>3</sup>

Majette was sworn into in 108th Congress and immediately felt the weight of her responsibility. “I was just looking around the room and appreciating the kind of work the Congress will have to do and how that will impact the nation and the world,” she said after taking the oath of office. Majette received assignments on the Budget; Education and the Workforce; and Small Business Committees. She also quickly won a seat in party leadership, serving as president of the class of first-term Democrats and as assistant Democratic whip. Majette also chaired the Democratic Caucus’s Task Force on Jobs and the Economy.<sup>4</sup>

During her first year in Congress, Majette sponsored legislation to designate Arabia Mountain in southeast DeKalb County as a national heritage area, a classification that would make the metropolitan Atlanta region eligible for additional federal funding and likely increase tourism. Testifying before the House Resources Committee’s Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, and Public Lands, Majette called the locale “a living history lesson” and urged the preservation of the “area’s unique heritage for future generations.” As a member of the Small Business Committee, she criticized President Bush’s proposed budget for 2005, which sought to slash the Small Business Administration’s (SBA) budget and lending authority by millions of dollars. She later voted for an amendment to restore funding to the SBA loan program.<sup>5</sup>

Majette fought to protect a variety of federally-funded programs during her term in the House. She believed the Bush administration had failed to adequately fund education initiatives and criticized the President’s record on domestic violence against women. “It saddens me to think that millions of women continue to be abused each year, while this administration sits idly by, taking no initiative

and, in some cases, decreasing resources available to battered women,” Majette said. She voted against overhauling Medicare, labeling the Republican-sponsored Medicare Prescription Drug and Modernization Act of 2003 a “sham” that failed to include “adequate prescription drug coverage that our mothers and grandmothers absolutely deserve.” In 2003, she joined Democrats Christopher Van Hollen of Maryland and John F. Tierney of Massachusetts in proposing an amendment to increase spending for Head Start. “The program doesn’t just teach children to read,” Majette argued. “It provides nutritional support, it makes sure that children are properly vaccinated at the appropriate time, that parents are also being supported and supportive of the efforts, that children are given the overall support they need. It’s not just about teaching them their colors.”<sup>6</sup>

On March 29, 2004, Majette surprised her House colleagues, and even some of her staff, when she announced her candidacy for the Georgia Senate seat that was being vacated by the retiring Zell Miller. Although Majette lacked the traditional benchmarks in a run for statewide office—a large fundraising network and widespread name recognition—she ran an effective grassroots campaign on a limited budget. Forced into a runoff after failing to win a majority in the primary, Majette went on to capture the Democratic nomination by defeating millionaire businessman Cliff Oxford. The first African-American candidate to earn a nomination for the U.S. Senate from the state of Georgia, Majette lost in the general election, receiving 40 percent of the vote against three-term Republican Representative Johnny Isakson.<sup>7</sup>

“It was a leap of faith for me, another step in my spiritual journey,” Majette remarked after her loss. She expressed no regrets. In 2005, Majette began work as a judge in DeKalb County. A year later, she won the Democratic nomination for Georgia superintendent of schools, a position with oversight of the daily operations of the state’s department of education. She lost in the general election and returned to private practice as a lawyer. In 2014, the Georgia supreme court disbarred Majette for overbilling her clients.<sup>8</sup>

## Notes

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# Kendrick B. Meek

1966–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2003–2011

Democrat from Florida



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 2003, Kendrick B. Meek's election in a Florida district formerly represented by his mother, Carrie P. Meek, made him the first African-American lawmaker to succeed his mother in Congress. He advocated for minority-owned business defense contracts, sought funding for freight rail infrastructure, and supported the large Haitian population in his district. "I am very respectful of the fact that the reason I am able to assume this high office today is because of the sacrifices and struggles and the battles for equal rights that were fought by the generations that preceded me," Meek stated as he began his House service.<sup>1</sup>

Kendrick B. Meek was born in Miami, Florida, on September 6, 1966, the youngest of three children raised by Carrie Meek. Carrie Meek divorced as a young mother and went on to build a political career in the Florida state legislature and, eventually, as a Member in the U.S. House of Representatives. Growing up, Meek watched his mother interact with constituents wherever they went, including the grocery store, and took inspiration from the example she set. "She always loved people. And she still loves people to this day. I learned an appreciation for loving people. When I talked to people about running for public office, I said, 'You can't just like people; you have to love people. And

then you can be a better public servant if that's already in your mind, in your heart, as it relates to the work that you have to do.' That grew on me." Kendrick Meek graduated with a bachelor's degree in criminal science from Florida A&M University in 1989. After college, Meek worked for the Florida highway patrol, earning the rank of captain. For a time, he served on Democratic Lieutenant Governor Kenneth Hood "Buddy" McKay Jr.'s security detail. In 1994, Meek won election to the Florida state house of representatives and served four years before winning election to the state senate. In both instances, Meek defeated longtime Democratic incumbents. Meek has been married twice and has two children, Lauren and Kendrick Jr.<sup>2</sup>

As a state legislator, Meek focused on education and affirmative action, frequently coming into conflict with Florida Governor Jeb Bush. In response to Bush's proposal to end the state's preference for minorities in contracting and university admissions in 2000, Meek led a 25-hour sit-in, which sparked the largest protest march on the state capitol in Florida history. The same year, he led the "Arrive With Five" voting initiative, designed to bring women and minority voters to the polls. This effort helped register the greatest number of Black voters in state history. In 2002,

Meek set out to amend the state constitution to include a limit on the number of students in public school classes. He and his colleagues collected more than 500,000 signatures to get the issue on the ballot, which passed with 52.4 percent of the vote.<sup>3</sup>

When Carrie Meek announced her retirement in July 2002 after five terms in the U.S. House, Kendrick Meek became the immediate favorite to succeed her. His mother's popularity in the district, which was majority Black, heavily Democratic, and weaved through southeast Broward County and northeast Miami-Dade County, meant Meek faced little opposition securing the Democratic nomination. "Even though I was a policymaker and had a lot of legislative accomplishments, I enjoyed the shade of Carrie Meek," he recalled. In the fall general election, he faced no Republican opposition. In his 2004, 2006, and 2008 re-elections, he ran without Republican opposition.<sup>4</sup>

Meek was sworn into the 108th Congress (2003–2005) in January 2003 with his mother looking on. He became the second son, after James Kee of West Virginia, who followed Maude Elizabeth Kee in 1965, to directly succeed his mother in Congress. Throughout his tenure in the House, Representative Meek served on the Armed Services Committee, where he pushed to better equip troops fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. He urged the Republican Congress and the George W. Bush administration to establish a deadline to begin withdrawing troops out of Iraq. In the 108th and 109th Congresses (2003–2007), he served on the Homeland Security Committee. In 2005, he became ranking member of the Subcommittee on Management, Integration, and Oversight. The subcommittee had jurisdiction over airport and seaport security, customs operations, aid to local and state governments, and immigration inspections, detention, and enforcement policies. Meek's position gave him a hand in revamping the Immigration and Naturalization Service, U.S. Customs Service, and the Coast Guard, reorganizations that affected some of the largest employers in his district.<sup>5</sup>

When Democrats captured the House majority for the 110th Congress (2007–2009), Meek retained his seat on the Armed Services Committee and received an appointment to the prestigious Ways and Means Committee. His new assignment gave him the opportunity to oversee Social Security, Medicare, and other tax and trade policy programs. In 2007, Meek introduced the Freight Rail Infrastructure Capacity Expansion Act to provide freight

rail companies with a 25-percent tax credit for infrastructure improvements. He told his constituents he supported this effort because it would provide local jobs as well as decrease both highway traffic and oil use. The measure had support in the Senate but did not pass either chamber. Meek also introduced several bills extending tax credits to businesses that invested in reusable energy such as wind, solar, biomass, or soybean fuel. Building on his work in the Florida legislature, Meek introduced the High-Quality Education Act in his first term. The measure was designed to provide \$200 million of grants to states with class-size reduction programs such as expanding school buildings and hiring teachers. He introduced the bill two more times, but the House never voted on it.<sup>6</sup>

In the House, Meek was involved in the party's campaign and policy initiatives and helped raise money for Democratic candidates. In the 2006 and 2008 election cycles, he gave more than \$325,000 to the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. He was selected to serve as co-chair of the Democrat's "30 Something" working group, charged with making connections with young voters. He was also selected by Speaker Nancy Pelosi in the 110th Congress to serve on the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee, which makes committee assignments and helps set the party's agenda. In January 2007, Meek was appointed to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Parliamentary Assembly, an inter-parliamentary organization of legislators representing NATO Members and associate countries. Meek also served as chair of the board of directors of the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation.<sup>7</sup>

Meek's congressional district contained the largest Haitian population in the United States, and many of his constituents had relatives on the island nation. Throughout his career in the House, Meek consistently advocated for Haitian immigration and trade. He frequently visited Haiti and sought to liberalize the U.S. government's policies towards Haitian refugees. In 2006, Meek secured passage of the Haitian Hemispheric Opportunity through Partnership Encouragement Act as part of the Tax Relief and Health Care Act. The bill aimed to stimulate Haiti's textile industry by allowing garments made with materials produced in a third country such as China to enter the United States duty-free. Meek successfully worked to extend the bill's trade provisions in 2008. After the devastating earthquake that shook the island on January 12, 2010, Meek worked to raise awareness and coordinate relief efforts. He supported

President Barack Obama's decision to grant Temporary Protected Status to all Haitians residing in the United States, a policy that he had supported since his arrival in the House.<sup>8</sup>

After Republican Senator Melquiades R. "Mel" Martinez of Florida announced his retirement, Meek quickly announced he would run for the open seat in the 2010 election, citing his public service career as a trooper, state legislator, and Representative. Instead of paying the \$10,000 fee to have his name automatically placed on the Democratic primary ballot, Meek used a different option and toured the state to meet voters and collect the 112,476 petition signatures—1 percent of the total number of voters registered in the previous general election—required to appear on the ballot. "Not only will we make history by qualifying by petition statewide," he told the press, "but it will tell Florida I am interested in representing the entire state of Florida." Meek was successful both in getting his name on the ballot and in winning the primary, beating businessman Jeff Greene with 54 percent of the vote. He lost, however, in November with only 20 percent of the vote in a heated three-way race between former governor Charlie Crist—who ran as an Independent—and the eventual winner, former Florida house speaker, Marco Rubio. In 2011, President Obama nominated Meek as a United States representative to the United Nations General Assembly. The Senate confirmed his appointment in September. In 2018, he joined a law firm as a senior advisor.<sup>9</sup>

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# Barack Obama

1961–

UNITED STATES SENATOR

2005–2008

Democrat from Illinois



Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

In 2004, Barack Obama won election to the U.S. Senate from Illinois, making him only the fifth Black Senator in American history. Four years later, Obama was elected President of the United States, becoming the first African American to hold the nation's highest office. Over the course of his career, Obama challenged Americans to participate in what he called "the audacity of hope." "I'm not talking about blind optimism here," he said during a primetime speech at the 2004 Democratic National Convention. "I'm talking about something more substantial. ... Hope in the face of difficulty. Hope in the face of uncertainty. ... A belief that there are better days ahead."<sup>1</sup>

Barack Obama was born in Honolulu, Hawaii, on August 4, 1961, the son of Barack Obama Sr., an economist, and Ann Dunham Obama, an anthropologist. Obama's parents divorced when he was young, and his mother later married Lolo Soetoro, who worked for an oil company. Obama lived in Jakarta, Indonesia, with his mother and stepfather before returning to live with his grandparents in Hawaii, where he attended high school at the Punahou Academy. From 1979 to 1981, Obama attended Occidental College in Los Angeles, California, before completing a bachelor's degree in political science

and international relations at Columbia University in New York City in 1983. Two years later, Obama moved to Chicago to work for a grassroots community organizing group that sought to improve housing conditions in impoverished neighborhoods. He attended Harvard Law School, where he served as the first African-American president of the *Harvard Law Review* before earning a law degree in 1991. In 1992, he married Michelle Robinson, who was an attorney at a Chicago law firm; the couple have two daughters: Malia and Sasha.<sup>2</sup>

After law school, Obama moved back to Chicago and entered local politics as a community activist on the city's South Side. He practiced civil rights law and lectured at the University of Chicago Law School. In 1996, he won a seat in the Illinois state senate, where he pushed through a state earned income tax credit and an expansion of child care funding. In 2000, he unsuccessfully challenged four-term incumbent U.S. Representative Bobby L. Rush in the Democratic primary for a seat in the House representing most of the South Side of Chicago.<sup>3</sup>

In January 2003, Obama declared his candidacy for the U.S. Senate seat held by Republican Peter G. Fitzgerald of Illinois. Only months later, in April, Fitzgerald announced

that he planned to retire at the end of the Congress and would not stand for re-election in 2004. Obama subsequently faced a crowded field of candidates seeking the Democratic nomination for the open Senate seat. Obama won the primary with 53 percent of the vote, topping two frontrunners—state comptroller Daniel Hynes and wealthy securities trader Blair Hull. After securing the nomination, Obama emerged as a national figure in the summer of 2004, delivering a rousing keynote address on the second night of the Democratic National Convention in which he celebrated America’s diversity and championed the country’s founding principle “E pluribus unum. Out of many, one.” “It is that fundamental belief,” he said, “I am my brother’s keeper, I am my sister’s keeper that makes this country work. It’s what allows us to pursue our individual dreams and yet still come together as one American family.” On Election Day, Obama defeated Republican Alan Keyes with 70 percent of the vote.<sup>4</sup>

When Obama took his seat at the start of the 109th Congress (2005–2007), he received assignments to three committees: Foreign Relations; Environment and Public Works; and Veterans’ Affairs. In the 110th Congress (2007–2009), Obama left Environment and Public Works and gained two additional committee posts: Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs; and Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. During the 110th Congress he chaired the Foreign Relations Committee’s Subcommittee on European Affairs and oversaw confirmation hearings of United States ambassadors to European countries.<sup>5</sup>

In the 109th Congress, Obama teamed up with Senator Richard Green Lugar of Indiana, the chair of the Foreign Relations Committee, on a new nonproliferation effort. During a congressional visit to Ukraine, the pair documented weapons caches—including land mines, artillery shells, and shoulder-launch missiles—stored in industrial complexes. “Loose stocks of small arms and other weapons also help fuel civil wars in Africa and elsewhere,” Obama and Lugar wrote in the *Washington Post*, “and, as we have seen repeatedly, provide ammunition for those who attack peacekeepers and aid workers seeking to stabilize and rebuild war-torn societies.” Their joint measure, the Cooperative Proliferation Detection, Interdiction Assistance, and Conventional Threat Reduction Act—known as the Lugar–Obama initiative—designated annual State Department funds to countries that decreased stockpiles of those types of weapons. The initiative was included in the

Department of State Authorities Act and signed into law on January 11, 2007.<sup>6</sup>

Obama also sought federal aid to address deadly conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Beginning in 1998, more than 4 million people had died as the nation endured violence among warring militia groups. In late 2005, Obama introduced the Democratic Republic of the Congo Relief, Security, and Democracy Promotion Act, which designated \$52 million in 2006 and 2007 for humanitarian relief, security, and support for democratic elections. After being approved by the Senate and House, President George W. Bush signed it into law on December 22, 2006. The bill identified “the high prevalence of sexual abuse and violence” as an immediate threat to women and children in the country, and Obama urged Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to investigate and hold accountable those responsible for systematic rape and torture during the conflict.<sup>7</sup>

In 2007, Obama introduced legislation to prohibit federal agencies from selling government reserves of mercury. The Department of Energy possessed large quantities of the toxic heavy metal, leftover from hydrogen bomb manufacturing techniques that had been obsolete since the 1960s. Mercury was frequently used to mine gold in other parts of the world, and U.S. officials considered selling the stockpiles to countries that lacked environmental regulations governing its use. Prohibiting such sales and limiting the potential for pollution “means less microscopic mercury on one’s dinner plate, less mercury in our kids’ tuna fish sandwiches, and less mercury in the air we breathe,” Obama said when he introduced the bill. “A small act of international leadership by the United States government could have far reaching benefits for the health of our kids, as well as millions of low-income hardworking artisanal gold miners whom we will never meet.” President Bush signed the bill into law on October 14, 2008.<sup>8</sup>

In 2008, Obama won the Democratic presidential nomination. On November 4, 2008, he was elected President of the United States, defeating the Republican nominee, Arizona Senator John Sidney McCain III, with 53 percent of the popular vote and with 365 electoral college votes. He became the nation’s first Black President. Obama resigned from the Senate on November 16, 2008. In 2012, he was re-elected to a second term as President over Republican challenger Willard Mitt Romney with 51 percent of the popular vote and 332 Electoral College votes.<sup>9</sup>

Obama's presidency opened amid the worst financial crisis in a generation. For much of his first term, Obama focused on the nation's economic recovery, while also working to promote equality and initiate a major health care reform. The first piece of legislation Obama signed into law was the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act. Lilly Ledbetter, a manager at a tire manufacturing company, had been paid less than her male colleagues in the same position. After winning a lawsuit against her employer, an appeals court determined that the statute of limitations had passed. Ledbetter challenged the decision all the way to the Supreme Court. The Court ruled that employees could not challenge pay discrimination 180 days after the employer made the original pay adjustment. The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, signed into law on January 29, 2009, amended the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and allowed the 180-day period to reset after each paycheck rather than the initial decision.<sup>10</sup>

The next month, on February 17, 2009, Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to address the economic damage caused by the 2008 Great Recession. The law designated nearly \$800 billion in funding to government and private agencies, states, and individuals. The bill passed Congress largely on party lines: no Republicans in the House voted for it and only three Republicans supported it in the Senate.<sup>11</sup>

On March 23, 2010, Obama enacted the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, also known as the ACA or Obamacare, one of the administration's major legislative efforts. The act reformed the United States health care system and required all citizens to have health insurance. It created new tax policies for medical and pharmaceutical companies and provided federal funding for states to expand Medicaid coverage.<sup>12</sup>

In December 2010, Obama repealed the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy enacted by the William J. Clinton administration in 1994. The policy barred openly gay and bisexual men and women from serving in the military, claiming they would present an "unacceptable risk" to the efficiency of the armed services, and prohibited service members from discussing their sexuality and military officials from asking. The repeal of the discriminatory policy opened access to veterans benefits to thousands of troops who had been dismissed under the law with an "other than honorable discharge" classification. After the policy's repeal, sexuality was no longer a legal barrier to serving in the military.<sup>13</sup>

On national security and foreign policy, Obama supervised the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, directing a troop surge in Afghanistan in 2009, and also oversaw the operation that resulted in the death of Osama bin Laden, the leader of the extremist group responsible for the terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001. In 2015, Obama forged a nuclear agreement with Iran, which lifted some global sanctions in exchange for restrictions on Iran's nuclear program.<sup>14</sup>

Obama led the nation in grieving after several mass shootings during his presidency. In an effort to reform the nation's gun laws, the administration proposed expanding background checks, banning military-grade assault weapons, and funding for both gun violence research and mental health training. All major measures brought before Congress failed in the U.S. Senate.<sup>15</sup>

Obama nominated two Justices to the Supreme Court of the United States. Justice Sonia Sotomayor took her seat on August 8, 2009, followed by Justice Elena Kagan on August 7, 2010. The President attempted to nominate Merrick Garland to the Court to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Justice Antonin Scalia in 2016, but the Republican-led Senate blocked his efforts. The seat remained vacant until 2017.<sup>16</sup>

Obama's presidency ended on January 20, 2017, with the inauguration of President Donald J. Trump. He continued to support the Democratic Party in his post-presidential career by campaigning for candidates in the 2018 mid-term elections, endorsing voting rights legislation in Congress, and calling for statehood for Washington, DC, and Puerto Rico.<sup>17</sup>

## Manuscript Collection

**Barack Obama Presidential Library** (Hoffman Estates, IL). *Papers*: 1958–2021 (bulk 2007–2017), amount unspecified. The collection includes Barack Obama's presidential records including textual records, web pages, data files, moving images, artifacts, graphic materials, and sound recordings. Collections include: Electronic Records of the Office of the President; Council of Economic Advisers; White House Counsel's Office; Office of Presidential Personnel; National Economic Council; Domestic Policy Council; Office of Public Engagement and Intergovernmental Affairs; Office of Presidential Correspondence; Office of Records Management; Office of Legislative Affairs; National Security Council; Office of Scheduling and Advance; and archived White House websites and social media. The collection also includes Obama's Senate records, 2004–2008.

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## Keith Ellison

1963–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2007–2019

Democrat from Minnesota



Image courtesy of the U.S. House of Representatives Photography Office

In 2007, Keith Ellison became the first African-American lawmaker elected to Congress from Minnesota and the first Muslim to serve in either the U.S. House of Representatives or the U.S. Senate. During his time on Capitol Hill, Ellison routinely had to combat Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment and emerged as a national spokesman for progressive causes. He used his seat on the Financial Services Committee to extend protections and greater opportunity to working-class and minority Americans in the aftermath of the Great Recession. In a speech on the House Floor, Ellison explained that his progressive message was “about a lot of important things to help the quality of life for Americans, Americans of all colors, all cultures, and all faiths, Americans who serve in our Nation’s military, who serve us as public employees, Americans who are looking out for us every day to live a high quality of life, to send their kids to school and have a chance at education, to have a decent, respectable retirement, to have some health care, to be able to earn a decent living.”<sup>1</sup>

Keith Ellison was born in Detroit, Michigan, on August 4, 1963, the middle of five boys; four, including Ellison, became lawyers and one became a doctor. His parents were Leonard, a psychiatrist, and Clida Martinez Ellison, who

managed the family’s psychiatry practice and later earned a master’s degree in social work.<sup>2</sup>

Ellison’s family had long been active in the civil rights movement. In the segregated South, his maternal grandfather, Frank Martinez, braved death threats and cross burnings by the Ku Klux Klan to organize voters as head of the NAACP in Natchitoches, Louisiana. That civil rights legacy inspired Ellison, who graduated from the University of Detroit Jesuit High School and Academy in 1981. During Ellison’s years at Wayne State University in the mid-1980s, he converted from Catholicism to Islam. Years later he recalled, “It was Islam’s message of social justice and equality that affected me the most and satisfied my spiritual yearning and wondering about God, man, nature, and humanity.” Ellison became a leading campus advocate for divestment from the South African apartheid regime. He graduated from Wayne State in 1986 with a bachelor’s degree in economics and, four years later, earned a law degree from the University of Minnesota Law School in Minneapolis. He married Kim Dore, and they raised four children. The couple divorced in 2012.<sup>3</sup>

After law school, Ellison remained in Minneapolis and entered private practice. He later joined a nonprofit law firm that provided legal aid to low-income families

and served as the group's executive director. In 1998, he unsuccessfully sought the Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party (DFL) nomination for a seat in the Minnesota state house of representatives. Four years later, he ran again and won. He served in the state house from 2003 to 2006 and emerged as a sharp critic of the war in Iraq and an advocate for progressive causes.<sup>4</sup>

In 2006, Democratic U.S. Representative Martin Olav Sabo unexpectedly announced his retirement after 28 years in the House. Ellison joined a crowded race to succeed Sabo. The district encompassed Minneapolis, including affluent suburbs along the city's southwest and working-class neighborhoods on the north end. The district was diverse, with sizeable Somali, Hmong, and Latino populations as well as a growing community of Russian Jews. It was the most liberal district in the state with an ethos that one political almanac described as merging "the Yankee tradition of clean government, the Scandinavian tradition of cooperative enterprise and the industrial-labor tradition of economic redistribution."

During the primary, Ellison put forth a progressive agenda—backing proposals for universal health care, environmental justice, and the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq. He attracted allies of the late Minnesota Senator Paul David Wellstone, a national liberal leader who died in a 2002 plane crash. "I have the passion of a Wellstone and the practicality of a Sabo," Ellison said. During the primary, Ellison was questioned about his ties to the Nation of Islam and its controversial leader, Louis Farrakhan. Opposition researchers discovered comments Ellison had made in law school about Farrakhan, raising concerns among Democrats about his defense of the Nation of Islam. He was also asked about his role organizing a group of Minnesotans to attend the "Million Man March" that Farrakhan led alongside other groups in 1995. Ellison responded that he had never been a member of Farrakhan's organization and that he rejected Farrakhan's many anti-Semitic statements.

Ellison secured the DFL nomination in September, and in the general election faced Republican Alan Fine, a business consultant and lecturer at the University of Minnesota. Ellison kept the focus of his campaign on progressive issues, but Fine, who is Jewish, continued to question his association with the Nation of Islam; at one point, Ellison sent a letter to the Jewish Community Relations Council in Minneapolis rejecting Farrakhan and his followers, calling them anti-Semitic.<sup>5</sup>

On Election Day, Ellison prevailed with almost 56 percent of the vote. "I feel a tremendous sense of responsibility," Ellison said. "I feel like I've got a lot of work to do. I feel like I've got to pull people together and keep them together." Ellison won re-election to the House five times, taking between 67 and 75 percent of the vote.<sup>6</sup>

Ellison's election garnered international media attention; many Muslims viewed it as a counterbalance to negative portrayals of their faith. "I think a lot of Muslims feel highly vulnerable and feel that they are under a tremendous amount of scrutiny," Ellison told the *New York Times* shortly after his victory. When asked if he intended to be a spokesman for the larger Muslim community in the United States, Ellison replied "I'm not qualified to be that. I'm not a religious leader and I'm not a scholar." Ellison promised to focus on the needs of his district and work to solve issues in Congress "from a standpoint of improving the quality of civil and human rights for all people in America."<sup>7</sup>

Following Ellison's victory, conservative media attacked him with bigoted criticism over his faith. One radio host declared that Ellison threatened to "undermine American civilization." In a similar vein, Republican Representative Virgil H. Goode Jr. of Virginia wrote in a letter to his constituents that without restrictive immigration laws more Muslims would be elected to Congress and that they would demand to take the oath of office on the Quran. Neither attack acknowledged that Ellison had been born in the United States (on his mother's side he could trace his Louisiana roots back more than 200 years) and that Members of the House do not take the official oath of office on any text whatsoever—religious or secular. Instead, they raise their right hands and recite the oath *en masse* as it is administered by the Speaker of the House in the chamber on Opening Day. After taking the official oath Members often do use religious texts or a copy of the Constitution for optional ceremonial photographs in which they, along with family and friends, pose with the Speaker outside the chamber. For his ceremonial swearing-in, Ellison borrowed Thomas Jefferson's 1764 copy of the Quran from the Library of Congress.<sup>8</sup>

Ellison entered Congress as part of a large class of first-term Democrats who, collectively, flipped the majority for the 110th Congress (2007–2009). Democrats assigned Ellison to seats on the Financial Services Committee and the Judiciary Committee. He left the Judiciary Committee in the following Congress and picked up a seat on the Foreign

Affairs Committee, where he served a single term. After Democrats returned to the minority in the 112th Congress (2011–2013), Ellison lost his Foreign Affairs seat. For the remainder of his House career, his sole assignment was on Financial Services.<sup>9</sup>

Ellison often appeared in the media and spoke nationally on topics including environmental protection, universal health care, U.S. policy in the Middle East, and the need to create a federal department of peace. In the 112th Congress, he was co-chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus. By the end of his second term in the House, Ellison served on the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee, which makes committee assignments, and was named a national chair of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee.<sup>10</sup>

In his 12 years in the House, Ellison introduced more than 200 bills and resolutions. His primary contributions came from his work on the Financial Services Committee, where he sought to counteract predatory lending and foreclosure practices, especially those that disproportionately affected people of color. Ellison noted that even before the Great Recession hit in 2008, working-class families struggled and fell further into debt from which lenders profited. “From unfair high-interest credit cards, to payday loans and tax-refund anticipation loans, a whole industry has spawned to take advantage of working families trying to make ends meet,” he wrote in an op-ed. “Ensuring that working families are protected from credit abuse will help Americans have more money in their monthly budgets to afford healthcare, college for their children and food for their table.”<sup>11</sup>

At the height of the Great Recession, Ellison supported legislation designed to reform the banking and financial services industry. He authored a bill to prevent credit card companies from raising interest rates based on a consumer’s late payment history on other loans. The bill was included as a provision in the 2009 Credit Cardholders’ Bill of Rights that President Barack Obama signed into law in May 2009. As many home rental properties fell into foreclosure and changed ownership, Ellison introduced the Protecting Tenants at Foreclosure Act of 2009 to prevent new landlords from terminating renters’ existing leases without giving sufficient notice. Much of the bill was incorporated in the Helping Families Save Their Homes Act, which became law in May 2009.<sup>12</sup>

In August 2014, Ellison’s Money Remittances Improvement Act also became law. The bill streamlined the regulation of

money transfers and brought federal regulatory practices in line with state banking agencies. The law eased the transfer of money between the United States and other countries, particularly for immigrants in America who sent money to support families overseas. The legislation was important to Ellison’s constituents, including the large Somali population in the Minneapolis area.<sup>13</sup>

During the 115th Congress (2017–2019), Ellison’s Credit Access and Inclusion Act passed the House unanimously. The measure, which provided expanded access to affordable credit to millions of low-income and minority households, would have amended the Fair Credit Reporting Act to allow people to report certain positive consumer credit data—including rent or utility payment history—to consumer reporting agencies. The bill passed the House on a voice vote but failed to clear committee in the Senate.<sup>14</sup>

From his seat on Foreign Affairs—and even before his service on the committee—Ellison addressed the conflict between Israel and Palestine. In a March 2008 floor speech, he condemned rocket attacks from inside the Gaza Strip that hit Israeli towns, noting that “if we want to be morally consistent, we must . . . also condemn the humanitarian crisis in Gaza too.” In January 2009, Ellison was one of a group of about two dozen Democrats who voted “present” on a resolution that stated that Israel had the right to defend itself from Palestinian attacks that originated in the Gaza Strip. Later that year he became one of the first high-level U.S. officials to enter the Gaza Strip after Israel had sealed it off to conduct recurring military strikes to expose Hamas militants. Ellison also visited Israeli towns hit by rockets fired from within Gaza. Taken aback by the destruction he saw during his trip, he later told a reporter, “I’ve always believed we need to resolve this thing by diplomacy. I’m even more convinced of that now.” In 2011, Ellison joined a number of prominent American Muslims to demand that Hamas release an Israeli prisoner who had been held for five years; Hamas later included the man in a prisoner swap.<sup>15</sup>

Following the 2010 elections, conservatives with the Tea Party movement targeted Ellison’s religious background and, once again, former and current House colleagues joined the anti-Muslim chorus. Republican Allen West of Florida described Ellison in 2011 as “the antithesis of the principles upon which this country was established.” Ellison also dealt with personal attacks from Republican Representative Michele Bachmann—a member of his home state’s congressional delegation. In 2012, Bachmann accused

Ellison of being tied to the Muslim Brotherhood, an international Sunni Islamist organization linked to terrorist groups and influential in some Middle Eastern countries.<sup>16</sup>

During his career, Ellison regularly rebutted the false and discriminatory allegations that American Muslims were being radicalized. When the House Committee on Homeland Security held hearings into “the extent of radicalization in the American Muslim community” in 2011, Ellison was one of the first witnesses to appear before the panel. Fighting back tears during part of his testimony, Ellison told the committee that such an inquiry threatened to isolate American Muslims and stoke unjustified fears about their allegiance. “The best defense against extreme ideologies is social inclusion and civic engagement,” he said. Ellison told the story of Mohammad Salman Hamdani, a 23-year-old New York City police cadet and paramedic, who was one of hundreds of first responders killed on September 11, 2001. Until Hamdani’s remains were located, conspiracy theorists speculated that he had been in league with the attackers. Hamdani, Ellison concluded, “was a fellow American who gave his life for other Americans, and his life should not be identified as just a member of an ethnic group or just a member of a religion, but as an American who gave everything for his fellow Americans.”<sup>17</sup>

In November 2016, following Democrat Hillary Rodham Clinton’s defeat in the presidential election, Ellison ran to lead the Democratic National Committee (DNC). He faced Tom Perez, who had served as Labor Secretary in President Obama’s Cabinet, in a contest that many saw as a proxy battle between the progressive and establishment wings of the party. Ellison had backed Vermont Senator Bernard Sanders’s bid for the presidential nomination in 2016, and Sanders backed him for the DNC chairmanship. Perez won but immediately moved to make Ellison the DNC’s deputy chair.<sup>18</sup>

In 2018, Ellison jumped late into the race for Minnesota attorney general after the incumbent made an unsuccessful bid for governor. Just days before the primary, Ellison’s former girlfriend accused him of abuse. Ellison forcefully denied the accusations, which came amid the #MeToo movement in which women across the country spoke out about their personal experiences with harassment and assault. The allegation sparked calls for Ellison to drop out of the race. A private investigative attorney later determined that Ellison’s accuser lacked evidence, and Ellison went so far as to call for an investigation by the House Ethics

Committee. In the end, Ellison prevailed over his opponent 49 to 45 percent. Ellison, whose term will expire in early 2023, became the first African American elected to statewide office in Minnesota and the first Muslim elected to statewide office anywhere in the country.<sup>19</sup>

## Notes

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# Laura Richardson

1962–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2007–2013

Democrat from California



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 2007, Laura Richardson won a special election to the U.S. House of Representatives to fill the seat held by her late boss, Representative Juanita Millender-McDonald of California. Richardson, who had served on the Long Beach city council and in the California state assembly, spent nearly three terms in the House working to improve infrastructure around the city of Los Angeles and bolster national security.

Laura Richardson was born on April 14, 1962, in Los Angeles, California, to Lawrence J. Richardson and Maryann Fritschler. Her father, Larry, worked as an educator, and her mother, Maryann, worked for a local trucking company. Her parents divorced when she was young, and Richardson and her sister, Leslie, were raised by their mother. The family's brief time on government assistance and encounters with racism sparked Richardson's interest in using the political system to improve living conditions in California. Richardson married police officer Anthony Batts in 1997. The couple later divorced.<sup>1</sup>

Richardson attended the University of California, Santa Barbara, before transferring to the University of California, Los Angeles, where she graduated in 1984 with a bachelor's degree in political science. Richardson received a master's

in business administration from the University of Southern California in 1996. She worked a variety of private sector jobs—as a marketing director of a document managing company, the owner of a customized clothing company, and as a preschool teacher—before she became a senior staff member in Representative Juanita Millender-McDonald's Southern California district office.<sup>2</sup>

In 1996, Richardson sought the Democratic nomination for a seat in the California state assembly from the Long Beach area but lost in the primary. Four years later, in 2000, she won a spot on the Long Beach city council, narrowly defeating a popular local sports star by six votes. She served on the city council for six years while simultaneously working as an aide to California Lieutenant Governor Cruz Bustamante. In 2006 she was elected to the California state assembly.<sup>3</sup>

On April 21, 2007, Representative Millender-McDonald died after a long battle with cancer. Richardson was one of 18 candidates to run in the June 26 open primary election for the vacant House seat. The district covered low- and middle-income sections of Long Beach, Los Angeles, Compton, and Carson, including coastal areas known for shipping and manufacturing. The district was 43 percent Hispanic and 25 percent Black. In the primary, Richardson

competed with candidates from several political parties, but her main opponents were both Democrats: Millender-McDonald's daughter, Valerie McDonald; and Hispanic state senator Jenny Oropeza. On the day of the election Richardson received the most votes—37 percent—but since no candidate won a majority, a runoff between the top finishers from each party was scheduled for August 21. Richardson's support came primarily from the African-American community, organized labor, and the abortion rights group EMILY's List. In the heavily Democratic district, Richardson won the special election with 67 percent of the vote over Republican John Kanaley, a Long Beach police officer. Richardson was sworn into the 110th Congress (2007–2009) on September 4, 2007.<sup>4</sup>

Facing re-election to the full term only months later, Richardson won the 2008 Democratic primary easily with 74 percent of the vote. Richardson faced no Republican opposition in the general election and prevailed with 75 percent of the vote against several write-in candidates. In the 2010 general election, she defeated Republican Star Parker, a columnist and author, with 68 percent of the vote.<sup>5</sup>

In the House, Richardson inherited Millender-McDonald's assignment to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, where she sat for the duration of her career. She was also appointed to a seat on the Science and Technology Committee but traded that post for a seat on the Homeland Security Committee in the 111th and 112th Congresses (2009–2013). In early 2010, Richardson was appointed chair of the Homeland Security Subcommittee on Emergency Communications, Preparedness, and Response. In late 2010, she was elected to the influential House Democratic Steering and Policy Committee, which helped make committee assignments and set party strategy.<sup>6</sup>

During her service on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Richardson focused on improving the roads and ports in her district, which handled a large portion of the nation's international shipping. In April 2010, Richardson testified at an Appropriations Committee hearing, where she implored her colleagues for more infrastructure funding. She pointed to a bridge in her district, over which 10 percent of cargo entering the United States traveled. "The Gerald Desmond Bridge is the de facto trade highway gateway to the Nation," she noted. "However, the bridge is now reduced to wearing a diaper ... to catch the concrete and debris that falls daily from its underside."

The bridge eventually received federal funding for a full replacement. Richardson introduced several bills seeking to raise taxes to pay for infrastructure projects. One bill would have increased the tax on diesel fuel by 12 cents a gallon and another would have raised harbor taxes on container ships. Tax revenues in both bills would have been deposited in a trust fund dedicated to projects to improve the flow of cargo. In 2008, she passed a law to name a half-mile stretch of California's Route 91 in Los Angeles County after Millender-McDonald. The highway had been part of the late Representative's California assembly district and her House district throughout her career.<sup>7</sup>

From her position on the Homeland Security Committee—especially as chair of the Subcommittee on Emergency Communications, Preparedness, and Response—Richardson focused on port security. In 2012, two of her bills to improve security at U.S. import/export centers were included in the bipartisan SMART Port Security Act. The first measure provided funding for local and state government agencies to administer security services in ports. The second gave administrators more flexibility to use funds to repair or replace security equipment. "Ports are the first line of defense at our sea borders and serve vital national interests," she observed. The bill passed 402 to 21 in the House but died in the Senate. Richardson's subcommittee also held jurisdiction over legislation pertaining to disaster preparedness. She presided over several oversight hearings on the overhaul of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. One of her hearings revealed that FEMA's Office of Disability Integration and Coordination, tasked with ensuring that the government's disaster response procedures were effective in helping those with disabilities, had only one full time staff member. Believing that FEMA was unprepared to help vulnerable populations after natural disasters, Richardson introduced a bill that would have enabled FEMA to hire new employees in its disability integration office.<sup>8</sup>

The California House delegation faced several changes going into in the 2012 election cycle. In 2010, state voters approved Proposition 14, modifying the open primary so that the top two candidates, regardless of party affiliation, would move on to the November general election. Additionally, an independent citizens' commission was tasked with redrawing California's congressional district boundaries irrespective of an incumbent lawmaker's home

address or party affiliation. In 2012, Richardson found herself facing off with Representative Janice Hahn—a first-term Democratic incumbent—in a primary to represent a new, primarily Hispanic district stretching from San Pedro north through Carson, Compton, north Long Beach, Lynwood, and South Gate.<sup>9</sup>

Richardson also faced investigations into her personal finances by the House Ethics Committee. Shortly after her first election, journalists uncovered financial struggles Richardson had faced in the past—a bank foreclosed on a home she owned in Sacramento and then sold it back to her shortly after. The Ethics Committee investigated whether Richardson knowingly received preferential treatment from the lender on account of her status as a Member of Congress. In July 2010, an Ethics Committee report cleared her of any wrongdoing. Two years later, however, the Ethics Committee investigated allegations that Richardson compelled her congressional staff to work on her 2010 campaign and that she obstructed the committee’s investigation. In August 2012, the Ethics Committee recommended a reprimand and a fine, which the House approved.<sup>10</sup>

In the 2012 election, Hahn, who came from a storied Southern California political family, placed first in the open primary with a 20-point margin over Richardson, who placed second. In the general election, Hahn gained the official endorsement from the California Democratic Party; Richardson was backed by the Congressional Black Caucus. Hahn went on to win the general election with 60 percent of the vote.<sup>11</sup>

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## Donna F. Edwards

1958–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2008–2017

Democrat from Maryland



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 2008, Donna F. Edwards won a special election to become the first African-American woman elected to Congress from Maryland. In her nine years in the U.S. House of Representatives, Edwards earned a reputation as a leading progressive who worked to raise the minimum wage, invest in scientific research, and protect women from domestic violence. “People do want change,” she said during her primary campaign in 2008. “And the question is whether they have enough confidence and courage. Change is liberating, but it’s hard.”<sup>1</sup>

Donna Edwards was born in Yanceyville, North Carolina, on June 28, 1958, the second of six children. Her father, John Edwards, served in the United States Air Force, and her mother, Mary, was a homemaker. The family moved frequently with each new duty assignment. After attending high school in New Mexico, Edwards graduated from Thomas Stone High School in Waldorf, Maryland, and completed a bachelor’s degree in English from North Carolina’s Wake Forest University in 1980. After college, Edwards worked as an assistant director for the United Nations Development Program before moving into the private sector. She later worked as a project engineer for an aerospace company at NASA’s Goddard Space Flight

Center, in Greenbelt, Maryland. In 1989, she earned a law degree from Franklin Pierce Law Center in Concord, New Hampshire. Edwards married and had one son, Jared, before she divorced her husband. During the separation, Edwards and her son briefly experienced homelessness, relying on a food pantry for meals, before moving in with her mother.<sup>2</sup>

After law school, Edwards worked for a handful of nonprofit advocacy groups in the Washington, DC, area. “I have a passion for working in the nonprofit sector,” she recalled. In 1992, she joined Public Citizen and Congress Watch to advocate on consumer issues. Two years later, she moved to the Center for a New Democracy, where she worked on campaign finance reform and rose to the position of executive director. In 1996, she helped found and led the National Network to End Domestic Violence—an issue she confronted in her own marriage. In 2000, Edwards became the executive director of the Arca Foundation, a social equity and justice advocacy group.<sup>3</sup>

In 2006, Edwards challenged seven-term incumbent Representative Albert Russell Wynn in the Democratic primary for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives from Maryland’s Fourth Congressional District. The district, which was 57 percent Black and had a large

population of federal workers, straddled Prince George's and Montgomery Counties and bordered Washington, DC. With her well-funded campaign, Edwards challenged Wynn's support for the Iraq War and the George W. Bush administration's energy policy as well as his ties with the business community. Her campaign gained momentum when bloggers online publicized her candidacy, drawing funds and celebrity endorsements from Barbra Streisand, Danny Glover, and Gloria Steinem. But Wynn narrowly staved off Edwards's challenge that year, winning with 50 percent to her 46 percent.<sup>4</sup>

Edwards filed her candidacy for a rematch against Wynn in May 2007. By the 2008 Democratic primary, Edwards had won the endorsement of MoveOn.org, the National Organization for Women, and EMILY's List. Edwards refused to accept contributions from political action committees and criticized Wynn for accepting campaign donations from special interests. Edwards won the 2008 primary, taking 59 percent of the vote to Wynn's 37 percent. When Wynn resigned at the end of May, Maryland officials set a special election for June 17. Edwards won the special election over Republican challenger Peter James, a technology developer, 81 percent to 18 percent. She went on to win the full term later that fall and easily won re-election in all her subsequent races, even after redistricting in 2012 cut out the Montgomery County portions of her district and expanded its boundaries eastward to include Republican areas in Anne Arundel County.<sup>5</sup>

Edwards's House committee assignments reflected her constituents' interests and concerns. Not only was she a former NASA employee, but her district sat adjacent to world-renowned Goddard Space Flight Center. Her district was also home to thousands of federal workers who commuted daily to the nation's capital, often through heavy traffic. With those considerations in mind, Edwards was appointed to the Science and Technology Committee (which was renamed Science, Space, and Technology in 2011) and to the Transportation and Infrastructure. She also served on the Ethics Committee during the 112th Congress (2011–2013).<sup>6</sup>

Edwards used her seat on the Science, Space, and Technology Committee to support NASA funding and boost measures encouraging minority education in science and mathematics. On Transportation and Infrastructure, Edwards took an interest in mass transit legislation, specifically rail projects in the Washington metropolitan area. She used her seat on the committee to question

federal agencies about the lack of funding for projects in her district and Prince George's County, "making them answer questions about why there was this kind of disparity and pushing them to open up the doors of opportunity for this majority African-American county," she later said. She promoted the addition of rail service to connect the two northern ends of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority system (commonly called Metro) with a new purple line and called on officials to investigate the possibility of rail service on the Woodrow Wilson Bridge connecting Maryland to Virginia south of the District.<sup>7</sup>

On national issues, Edwards supported a resolution to withdraw U.S. forces from Afghanistan and remained critical of the pace of the troop withdrawal from Iraq. In 2008, she only voted for the financial-services bailout after a direct appeal by Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama. Edwards was a strong advocate for universal health care, having gone for nearly two years without health insurance before she started her nonprofit career. An illness during that period left her with medical debt. "It contributed greatly to the way I think about the health care system," she said of her experience. "If I had been able to [get help] early on and get \$20 worth of antibiotics, it would have saved me thousands of dollars, and it would have saved the system thousands of dollars." She cosponsored several bills to provide Medicare for all Americans and authored a provision in the Affordable Care Act that empowers state insurance commissioners to review health insurance rate increases to prevent unjustified price hikes. Two of her recurring pieces of legislation included the WAGES Act—introduced in 2009, 2011, and 2013—which sought to raise the national minimum wage for tipped employees, and her 21st Century Investment Act—introduced in the 111th through the 114th Congress (2009–2017)—which would have improved the tax incentives for conducting research and development in the United States.<sup>8</sup>

Edwards assisted in candidate recruitment for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) in 2012 before being tapped by Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi of California to lead the effort in 2014. Edwards later said she enjoyed "talking to prospective candidates to recruit them, but also identifying candidates that hadn't come through the traditional sources by calling my friends in organized labor and my friends in the nonprofit sector across the country saying, 'Who do you know?'" Alongside her campaign work, Edwards served as co-chair of the

Democratic Steering and Policy Committee, which determined committee assignments and helped drive the party's agenda in the House. "She's already achieved a status in the caucus, title or not, as a go-to person, a leader," Pelosi said of Edwards in 2014. Although she made significant inroads in her party's caucus, she failed to develop a similar rapport within the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC). "I defeated their guy," she reflected, referring to her predecessor Albert Wynn. "I think some people never really got over that."<sup>9</sup>

When Barbara Ann Mikulski announced her retirement from the U.S. Senate, Edwards declared her candidacy for the open seat in March 2015, pledging to champion "the middle-class American dream." She quickly won the endorsement of EMILY's List and other progressive groups, but the CBC refused to endorse either her or her Democratic challenger, fellow Maryland Representative Christopher Van Hollen. Edwards ended up losing to Van Hollen in the primary, 53 to 39 percent. In her concession speech, Edwards voiced a number of concerns about the future of her party, including issues she had faced in the House. "What I want to know from my Democratic Party is, when will the voices of people of color, when will the voices of women, when will the voices of labor, when will the voices of black women, when will our voices be effective, legitimate equal leaders in a big-tent party?"<sup>10</sup>

After finishing her term in the 114th Congress (2015–2017), Edwards got behind the wheel of an RV she christened "Lucille" and drove around the country, visiting national parks and spending time at historic sites, including the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama. She used the trip to connect to people and places "who are not centered around Washington," she said in an interview midway through her travels. Improving access and opportunities for underrepresented communities remained forefront during her cross-country trip. "There are 104 women who serve in the United States Congress, a very small percentage of them are Black and Brown women," she said in 2017. "We need many more women in every step of our elected office." Edwards also worked as a political commentator and newspaper columnist.<sup>11</sup>

## Manuscript Collection

Wake Forest University, Special Collections and Archives, Z. Smith Reynolds Library (Winston-Salem, NC). *Papers*: ca. 2008–2016, 6.92 linear feet. The collection includes letters, information on congressional trips, photographs, budget documents, and information about committees on which Donna F. Edwards served. An inventory is available online. The collection is open for limited research.

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# Marcia L. Fudge

1952–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2008–2021

Democrat from Ohio



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 2008, Marcia L. Fudge won election to the U.S. House of Representatives after a career as an administrator and local elected official. Representing one of the poorest districts in the country, Fudge’s legislative agenda focused on improving nutrition, education, health care, agriculture, and voting rights, and sought to ensure that the federal government provided support and protection for poor and working-class Americans. Fudge implored her colleagues in Congress to “talk more about how we lift people out of poverty.”<sup>1</sup>

Marcia L. Fudge was born in Cleveland, Ohio, on October 29, 1952. Fudge’s parents were divorced, and she lived with her mother, Marian Saffold, a lab technician and union organizer. Fudge’s first brush with politics came as a volunteer with the 1967 mayoral campaign for Carl Stokes, Cleveland’s first African-American mayor and brother of U.S. Representative Louis Stokes of Ohio. “Even as a kid, I thought I was an organizer,” Fudge said. She graduated from Shaker Heights High School in 1971 and earned a bachelor’s degree from The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio, in 1975. She earned a law degree from the Cleveland Marshall School of Law at Cleveland State University in 1983. While studying law, Fudge clerked for

municipal judge Stephanie Tubbs Jones whom she met through their membership in the same sorority.<sup>2</sup>

After law school, Fudge worked in the Cuyahoga County government as director of its budget commission and personal property tax department. In the 1990s, Fudge went back to work as finance director for Stephanie Tubbs Jones, who was serving as Cuyahoga County prosecutor at the time. When Jones was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1998, Fudge joined her in Washington as chief of staff. In 2000, Fudge returned to Ohio and was elected the first African American and the first woman to serve as mayor of Warrensville Heights. She held the mayor’s office for two terms.<sup>3</sup>

Jones died suddenly in August 2008 during her fifth term in the House, and because she had already won the Democratic nomination for the election that fall, the district’s Democratic executive committee was responsible for appointing a candidate to take her place in the general election. Fudge campaigned for the nomination, calling upon members of the committee to submit her name. On September 11, 2008, committee members selected Fudge as their candidate. Because Jones’s death also created a vacancy in the final months of the 110th Congress (2007–2009),

Fudge also declared her candidacy for the special election to serve out the remainder of the term. In October 2008, Fudge won the nomination for the special election to the 110th Congress with 67 percent of the vote. Ohio's Eleventh District was majority Black and, at the time, encompassed downtown Cleveland and its eastern suburbs. Fudge won election to the 111th Congress (2009–2011) with 85 percent of the vote, and two weeks later, she won a special election to serve out the final six weeks of the 110th Congress. Fudge won her next five re-elections with no less than 79 percent of the vote, maintaining close relationships in her district and writing a regular “Congresswoman’s Corner” column in the *Call & Post*, Cleveland’s weekly African-American newspaper.<sup>4</sup>

Upon winning election, Fudge asked Speaker Nancy Pelosi of California for assignments to the Financial Services and Education and Labor Committees. Fudge was granted the latter request alongside a seat on the Science, Space, and Technology Committee in the 111th Congress. When Democrats entered the minority in the 112th Congress (2011–2013), Fudge moved to the Committee on Agriculture and remained on Science, Space, and Technology. Fudge left the Science, Space, and Technology committee mid-Congress to fill a vacancy on the newly renamed Education and the Workforce Committee in the 112th Congress. When Democrats regained the majority in 2019, Fudge joined the Committee on House Administration and chaired its Subcommittee on Elections, as well as the Agriculture Committee’s Subcommittee on Nutrition, Oversight, and Department Operations.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout Fudge’s congressional career, she prioritized access to quality education. In 2015, as a member of the conference committee for the first reauthorization in 13 years of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Fudge worked to protect federal funding for school districts with low-income students and advocated for “the equitable allocation of resources to schools.” In the 116th Congress (2019–2021), she pushed to improve college affordability as Congress prepared to reauthorize the Higher Education Act. In 2018 and 2019, Fudge introduced the Strength in Diversity Act to distribute grants to fund local educational programs to increase diversity in schools. The first bill never received a floor vote, but a more receptive Democratic majority approved the bill in the 116th Congress, though the Republican-controlled Senate failed to vote for it.<sup>6</sup>

On the Agriculture Committee, Fudge worked to protect and expand nutrition programs and improve access to healthy foods. In the 111th Congress, she sponsored a successful resolution to designate September as Childhood Obesity Awareness Month. In 2014 and 2018, Fudge sat on the conference committee to finalize the massive farm bill. She advocated for provisions that avoided cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program—which provides federal aid for food for those in need—and expanded access to healthy foods. “Programs that affect child nutrition,” Fudge said, were “essential tools in the fight to end child hunger.” She also pushed to allow disadvantaged farmers to access to grants and loans through the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In the 116th Congress, Fudge sponsored the Farm to School Act, which sought to supply America’s schools with healthy foods grown locally by veteran and disadvantaged farmers. She also introduced the School MEALS Act to expand access to school nutrition programs. Neither bill made it out of committee.<sup>7</sup>

Fudge was elected chair of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) for the 113th Congress (2013–2015). “We call ourselves the conscience of the Congress. We focus on things that affect ‘the least of these,’ but as well, we focus on things that we think are going to move this country forward,” said Fudge. As caucus chair, Fudge challenged President Barack Obama to nominate more African Americans to his Cabinet at the start of his second term in 2013. She also pressed for more input from Black lawmakers in shaping immigration policy, citing the number of immigrants to America of African or Caribbean descent. In 2014, Fudge introduced a concurrent resolution authorizing a celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in the Capitol Rotunda. Speaking at the event, which included a posthumous presentation of Congressional Gold Medals to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King, Fudge called the 1964 bill “one of the most significant pieces of legislation in our history.” Congress had awarded the gold medals in 2004 and they were donated to the collection of the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC.<sup>8</sup>

In August 2014, Fudge led the CBC response to the killing of Michael Brown, an unarmed Black man shot six times by a uniformed police officer in the St. Louis, Missouri, suburb of Ferguson. On the House Floor, CBC members criticized the local police for suppressing protests following the incident and discussed the importance of

community policing. “The startling images we saw of the police response to civil protest in Ferguson, Missouri, were in stark contrast to the citizens exercising their constitutional right to be heard,” Fudge declared in early September. After the grand jury declined to indict Brown’s assailant in late November, Fudge condemned the decision as a “miscarriage of justice” that failed to provide “some reassurance that Black and brown boys’ lives do matter.”<sup>9</sup>

In the summer of 2016, Fudge was selected to replace Representative Debbie Wasserman-Schultz as permanent chair of the Democratic National Convention following controversy that stemmed from a batch of leaked emails. Although she had a prominent national platform, Fudge at times found herself at odds with party leadership in the House. Later in 2016, she backed fellow Ohio Democrat Timothy J. Ryan in his failed attempt to replace Nancy Pelosi as Democratic Leader. When Democrats regained the majority in the House following the 2018 midterm elections, Fudge considered challenging Pelosi for the Speakership. Fudge’s potential candidacy created concern within the CBC; many of its members felt a strong loyalty to Pelosi and Representative James E. Clyburn of South Carolina, who held the third position in House Democratic leadership. Following several meetings, Pelosi arranged for Fudge to chair the House Administration Committee’s new Subcommittee on Elections. The move assured Fudge that Black women would “have a seat at the decision-making table” and led her to drop her challenge.<sup>10</sup>

As chair of the Subcommittee on Elections, Fudge held field hearings across the country to examine the state of voting rights in America. Findings from the hearings were used to develop a Committee on House Administration report on what it called “the array of tactics used to suppress the votes of targeted communities.” Fudge dismissed claims of voter fraud as “a lie” and challenged the wave of voter identification laws passed around the country. “These laws are specifically designed to keep young people, the poor, the elderly and the disabled from voting,” she explained.<sup>11</sup>

On December 10, 2020, President-elect Joseph R. Biden Jr. nominated Fudge to serve as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in his administration. Although Fudge had originally campaigned to lead the Department of Agriculture, she accepted the HUD nomination. “If I can help this president in any way possible, I am more than happy to do it,” she said. “It’s a great honor and a privilege to be a part of something so

good.” After being confirmed by the Senate, Fudge resigned from the House on March 10, 2021, and was sworn in as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development.<sup>12</sup>

## Manuscript Collection

**The Ohio State University, Ohio Public Policy Archives** (Columbus, OH). *Papers*: ca. 2008–2021. The papers span Marcia L. Fudge’s terms in the U.S. House of Representatives and include legislative files, correspondence, speeches, audiovisual materials, and artifacts. The papers are closed until processed.

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## Roland Burris

1937–

UNITED STATES SENATOR

2009–2010

Democrat from Illinois

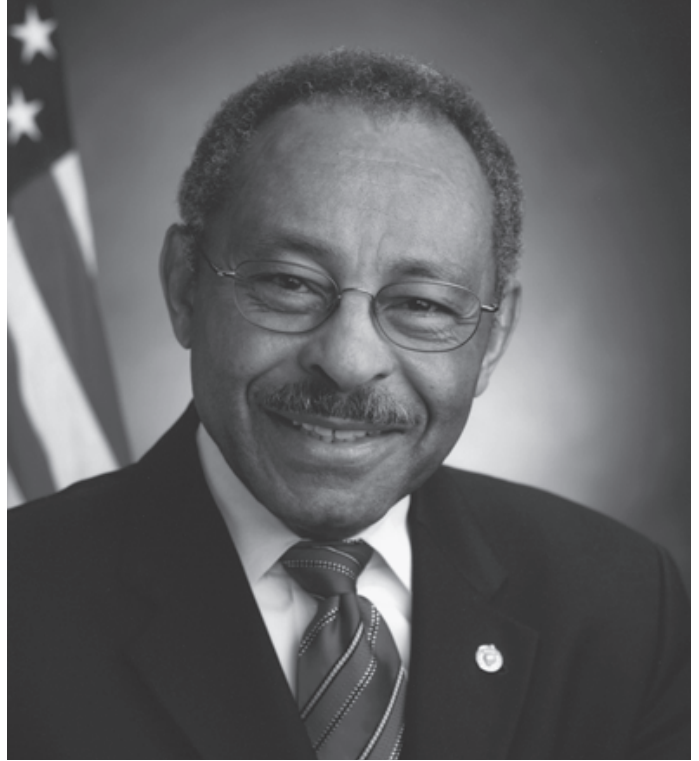


Image courtesy of the U.S. Senate Historical Office

Roland Burris, a longtime Illinois state official, was appointed to the U.S. Senate on December 31, 2008, to succeed President-elect Barack Obama, becoming the sixth African American to serve in the Senate. Before serving on Capitol Hill, Burris had spent his life focusing on law and politics. As a teenager, Burris, whose father was vice president of the local NAACP chapter near their home in Centralia, Illinois, had protested and integrated a local segregated swimming pool. That success motivated Burris to pursue public office and continue his focus on civil rights. “If we, as a race of people, are going to get anywhere in this society,” he said in 2009, “we’ve got to have lawyers and elected officials who are responsible and responsive—that’s what my dad said, and it resonated with me.”<sup>1</sup>

Roland W. Burris was born on August 3, 1937, in Centralia, Illinois, the youngest of Earl L. and Emma M. Burris’s three children. His father worked on the railroad. Burris graduated from Centralia High School and earned a bachelor’s degree in political science from Southern Illinois University in Carbondale in 1959. In 1963, Burris earned a law degree from Howard University, a historically Black university in Washington, DC. Burris worked as a federal bank examiner after law school and then as a bank

vice president. From 1973 to 1976, he was director of the Illinois state department of general services in the cabinet of Governor Daniel Walker. Burris married Berlean Miller in 1961; they raised two children: Rolanda and Roland II.<sup>2</sup>

Burris made his first bid to be Illinois’s comptroller in 1976, losing in the Democratic primary to the eventual winner, Michael Bakalis. When Bakalis sought the Illinois governorship in 1978, Burris ran to succeed him as comptroller. Burris won 52 percent of the vote and defeated Republican John W. Castle—a former local government affairs official for the state—in the November 7, 1978, general election. Burris became the first African-American candidate elected to statewide office in Illinois. He was re-elected twice and served as comptroller from January 1979 to January 1991. In 1990, Burris was elected Illinois state attorney general and served until 1995.<sup>3</sup>

In 1994, 1998, and 2002, Burris unsuccessfully sought the Democratic nomination for Illinois governor. After placing third in the 2002 Democratic gubernatorial primary, he worked as a lawyer and political consultant. Six years later, on December 31, 2008, Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich, who had defeated Burris in the 2002 primary, selected Burris to fill the unexpired term of former Senator

Obama, who had resigned after winning the presidency that fall. The appointment came just three weeks after federal law enforcement officers had arrested Blagojevich for attempting to sell the seat. Despite the controversy and heightened scrutiny, Burris denied any wrongdoing associated with Blagojevich and accepted the appointment.<sup>4</sup>

Multiple investigations at the state and federal levels followed, and Burris was never formally charged with misconduct. He arrived on Capitol Hill to be sworn in on January 6, 2009, but the Sergeant at Arms denied him access to the Senate Chamber. Because of Blagojevich's legal trouble, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid of Nevada and Assistant Majority Leader Richard Joseph Durbin of Illinois refused to seat Burris without the signature of the Illinois secretary of state, Jesse White. White initially refused to sign the necessary paperwork but approved the appointment three days later on January 9, 2009. The Senate then considered Burris's credentials to be in order, and Vice President Richard B. Cheney administered the oath of office to Burris in the Senate on January 15, 2009.<sup>5</sup>

In the Senate, Burris served on three committees: Armed Services; Veterans' Affairs; and Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs. He supported President Obama's legislative agenda, including economic stimulus legislation to combat the recession, and the repeal of "don't ask, don't tell," enabling gay military members to serve openly. He also supported representation for the District of Columbia in the Senate. At one point, Burris secured a meeting with President Obama after threatening to withhold his vote on the President's signature health care bill, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, unless it included a public insurance option. When the final version of the bill did not include a public option, Burris clarified that the legislation accomplished what he wanted without it. "I got a compromise from him that there would be cost accountability and competition," he said about his dealings with the President. A full third of Burris's sponsored legislation consisted of a flurry of bills submitted on October 30, 2009, each of which proposed single-line edits to the tariff code either suspending or extending the duty provisions on various chemicals or other goods. He introduced each bill without comment on the Senate Floor.<sup>6</sup>

Much of Burris's other legislative work involved memorializing civil rights leaders and Black pioneers in various fields of study. His resolutions included commemorations of the first African-American Marine

recruits, Senator Edward W. Brooke, abolitionist Elijah Parish Lovejoy, and scientist Benjamin Banneker. In 2009 and 2010, Burris authored resolutions, which the Senate adopted unanimously, recognizing the historical significance of Juneteenth. In one of his final floor speeches, Burris memorialized the work of recently deceased Chicago residents Margaret Burroughs, an artist and writer, and Arthur Brazier, a pastor and civil rights leader, praising them for their contributions to advancing humanitarian causes and urging his colleagues not to "forget to recognize those Americans who may not appear in our history books but whose contributions have helped write our American story."<sup>7</sup>

Blagojevich's legal issues and the circumstances of Burris's appointment to the Senate followed Burris to the Hill. The investigations into Burris and his appointment led to strained relationships with Democratic leaders. As federal officials continued to look into Blagojevich's conduct, Burris issued several contradictory statements about his knowledge and involvement. In February 2009, Senator Durbin advised Burris to resign, though Burris publicly declined. In November of that year, the Senate Ethics Committee publicly admonished him for actions that "reflected unfavorably on the Senate." Burris's office responded by claiming the committee's decision "cleared the senator of any legal wrongdoing."<sup>8</sup>

Although Burris had initially promised that he would not seek election to a full term, he filed a statement of candidacy with the Federal Election Commission soon after taking office. He struggled to raise support, however, and soon left the race. Burris was succeeded in the Senate on November 29, 2010, by Republican Representative Mark Steven Kirk of Illinois. After leaving Capitol Hill, Burris retired to his home in Chicago. When asked if he regretted taking Blagojevich's appointment, Burris said simply, "Not at all. I desired it, and I did a very good job for the people of Illinois and for America."<sup>9</sup>

### Manuscript Collection

**Southern Illinois University, Special Collections Research Center** (Carbondale, IL). *Papers*: ca. 2009–2010, approximately 100 cubic feet. Roland Burris's senatorial papers including correspondence, speeches, research files, drafts of legislation, electronic records, photographs, and artifacts. Topics include the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act, Health Care reform bill, and the Wall Street and Consumer Protection Act.

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# Hansen Clarke

1957–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2011–2013

Democrat from Michigan



Image courtesy of the U.S. House of Representatives Photography Office

In 2010, Hansen Clarke unseated a seven-term incumbent in the Democratic primary before winning election to a single term in the U.S. House of Representatives from a Detroit district. His path to the House was as unique as it was unconventional, and in 2005 the *Detroit Free Press* called his life an “underdog story,” an “up-from-the-east-side hard-luck tale.” The struggle of Clarke’s childhood shaped his political philosophy and oriented him toward policies that he hoped would help both Michigan’s disadvantaged citizens and its businesses.<sup>1</sup>

Hansen Clarke was born Molik Hashim in Detroit, Michigan, on March 2, 1957, the son of an African-American mother and a Bangladeshi father. His father, Mozaffar Ali Hashim, worked at a Detroit automobile factory but died when Clarke was only eight years old, leaving his mother, Thelma Clarke, to raise him on a school crossing guard’s salary. A gifted young artist, Clarke moved east to New Hampshire at age 14 to attend the elite Phillips Exeter Academy with the help of a nonprofit aimed at helping young students of color prepare for college. Surrounded by wealth and prestige, Clarke felt out of place and, after two years, returned home to Detroit. “All I knew was this block ... I couldn’t handle it,” he recalled during

a visit to his childhood home years later. Clarke earned a GED but sought a high school diploma before applying to college. Returning to the East Coast, he graduated from the Governor Dummer Academy in Massachusetts in 1976.<sup>2</sup>

Clarke accepted an art scholarship to Cornell University, but his studies were interrupted when his mother died during his freshman year. As he grieved, Clarke returned to Detroit and drove a taxi, eventually going on government assistance. In 1978, he changed his name to Hansen Clarke to honor his mother. Ultimately, he made it back to Cornell with the help of his godmother and graduated with a bachelor’s degree in fine arts in 1984. Three years later, Clarke earned a law degree from Georgetown University in Washington, DC.<sup>3</sup>

After law school, Clarke served as the Michigan coordinator for Missouri Representative Richard Andrew Gephardt’s unsuccessful presidential bid in 1988. Later that year, he helped organize a coordinated political campaign that ousted several incumbent members of the Detroit school board. His success in that effort led to a position on the staff of Wayne County executive Edward H. McNamara. From late 1989 to 1990, Clarke worked in Detroit as a legislative counsel and district office administrator for

Representative John Conyers Jr. of Michigan. Clarke made the jump to elective office in the early 1990s, serving in the Michigan state house of representatives from 1991 to 1992 and again from 1999 to 2002. In 2003, he began an eight-year stint in the state senate.<sup>4</sup>

In 2005, Clarke ran for mayor of Detroit, pledging to dismantle the patronage system in city hall, but finished fourth in the city primary. After the election, Clarke returned to the state senate and his seat on the appropriations committee, where he protected funding for his beleaguered city. In 2008, as Michigan reeled from the housing crisis, he introduced a popular bill to protect homeowners in foreclosure from being evicted. Later that year, he pushed the governor to overhaul the Detroit public schools as the city system struggled financially. While in the legislature, he met Choi Palms-Cohen, who worked at a legal education nonprofit. They married in 2007.<sup>5</sup>

By 2010, as term limits were about to force Clarke out of the state senate, he considered running for governor before deciding to challenge Representative Carolyn C. Kilpatrick, who had held a Detroit-area seat in the U.S. House since 1997. Kilpatrick's son had been mayor of Detroit from 2002 to 2008, when he resigned after being convicted of obstruction of justice.<sup>6</sup>

Clarke's campaign for the House harkened back to his earlier run for mayor, focusing on the emotion and power of his life story. At the heart of the Thirteenth District was his old neighborhood, which had been plagued by violence over the years. It was a struggle Clarke knew intimately. "All my life I've been afraid that I'm going to wind up on the streets," he said in 2010.<sup>7</sup>

Clarke's campaign stuck to grassroots methods to get out the vote. "I'm from the neighborhood," he reminded his local paper. "So I don't think we're going to need a lot of money for commercials." He also mobilized support in the surrounding suburbs that formed a significant part of his district. He promised to tackle Detroit's high unemployment and foreclosure rates, while also working to limit government spending. Clarke's focus on economic empowerment seemed to blur conventional party divisions, never more directly than when he described his brand of politics as equal parts "Newt Gingrich and Malcolm X."<sup>8</sup>

Clarke's House campaign received a boost shortly before the primary when the *Detroit Free Press*, the city's major newspaper, endorsed him. On August 3, Clarke won the nomination with 47 percent of the vote, which, in the

heavily Democratic Thirteenth District, was tantamount to winning the general election. "This was bigger than an opponent and not about the incumbent or a family," Clarke said the night he won. "You must be mindful that elected officials come and go, but people, not politicians, always have the power." In the general election, Clarke easily defeated his Republican opponent, John Hauler, with 79 percent of the vote.<sup>9</sup>

In the House, Clarke was assigned to two committees: Homeland Security and Science, Space, and Technology. His legislative agenda, he said, promised to focus on people as well as businesses in his district. "I've got to work for the employers as well," he observed, "because that's the only way my folks are going to get employed."<sup>10</sup>

By the fall of his first term, Clarke had sketched out an ambitious plan using a similar principle to rescue his hometown: the federal government would return to the city every single tax dollar it collected from Detroit for five years. Clarke estimated his program would be worth \$2 billion a year and believed it would balance the city's budget, cover many of Detroit's pension plans, and help pay down its debt. Detroit would also continue to receive the same Medicare and Social Security grants it had always received. To encourage people to move back into the city, Clarke wanted Detroit to slash its property taxes and abolish its personal income tax. Clarke figured Detroit could be the country's pilot program which, if it succeeded, Congress could apply to other cities.<sup>11</sup>

Having served only two years as a member of the minority party, Clarke failed to advance his rescue plan beyond the idea stage, but he was active on a number of legislative fronts. During the 112th Congress (2011–2013), he introduced 26 bills, four House Resolutions, and 12 floor amendments. Some were broad, ambitious pieces of legislation, like his Detroit Growth and Sustainability Act, which authorized \$500 million in loans to his hometown. Others were more itemized efforts, like his push to suspend the import fees on products used by the auto industry. Clarke also introduced legislation to improve the lives of disadvantaged and low-income people. He submitted bills to forgive certain student loans and to prohibit auto insurance companies from using credit scores to determine a customer's rates. He successfully offered floor amendments to appropriations bills to boost funding for certain programs, including \$5 million for the Women, Infants, and Children Farmers' Market Nutrition Program,

and \$5 million for grants to aid veterans experiencing homelessness. Clarke spoke on the floor about reducing America's debt burden, improving the educational system, and protecting labor unions. In the summer of 2011, he and Republican Representative Dan Benishek of northern Michigan toured each other's district to encourage job creation across the state.<sup>12</sup>

Following the 2010 Census, Michigan lost a seat in the House. When the state redrew its district boundaries, the mapmakers split downtown Detroit and its eastern neighborhoods among two new districts, each of which included large swaths of the city's suburbs. In August 2011, Clarke announced he would seek the seat in the new Fourteenth District, which ran northwest from Detroit into Pontiac. Clarke faced multiple candidates in the primary, including another Democratic House incumbent, Gary C. Peters, who had formerly represented the Ninth District. During the campaign, Clarke refused to participate in any of the debates after reports surfaced claiming that his mother's death certificate recorded her race as White. Clarke's campaign released a statement in late June 2012 criticizing "the use of racist rhetoric and race-baiting" during the campaign and a short while later accused his opponents of going "after my dead parents" because "they can't attack my record." Ultimately, Clarke lost the Democratic nomination to Peters, whose margin in the Detroit suburbs propelled him to victory.<sup>13</sup>

After Congress, Clarke worked as an adjunct professor at the University of Detroit Mercy School of Law. Two years later, when Peters announced he would run for the Senate, Clarke announced his candidacy for Michigan's Fourteenth District and ran on a plan to lower America's student loan debt. On Election Day, Clarke lost the primary to Southfield mayor Brenda L. Lawrence.<sup>14</sup>

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# Cedric L. Richmond

1973–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2011–2021

Democrat from Louisiana



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

After serving for a decade in the Louisiana state house, Cedric L. Richmond won election to the U.S. House of Representatives from a New Orleans district in 2010. During his 10-year congressional career, Richmond chaired both the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) and a Homeland Security subcommittee. Richmond credits his mother for instilling into him a dedication to public service. As he remembered years later, she taught him that “you have to work hard, you have to do everything twice as good as everyone else so you can make it; and two, once you make it, you have an obligation to give back.”<sup>1</sup>

Cedric Richmond was born in New Orleans, Louisiana, on September 13, 1973. His father, Sidney Richmond Sr., died when he was seven and his mother, Maple Richmond Gaines, worked as a public school teacher and union leader. Richmond graduated from Benjamin Franklin High School in 1991. He went to the historically Black Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, where he pitched and played centerfield on the school’s baseball team. He graduated with a bachelor’s degree in 1995 and then earned a law degree from Tulane University in New Orleans in 1998.<sup>2</sup>

In 1999, only a year removed from law school, Richmond won election to Louisiana’s state house of

representatives, becoming the body’s youngest lawmaker at 26 years old. In the state legislature, Richmond advocated for tax incentives for businesses to contribute to recovery efforts in the wake of the 2005 hurricanes Katrina and Rita, pushed to ban assault weapons, and supported the city’s recreation department. As a state legislator, he coached the city’s youngest baseball players. Richmond is married to Raquel Greenup and has one son.<sup>3</sup>

In 2008, Richmond sought a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives, challenging the nine-term Democrat incumbent William J. Jefferson in a district that was 64 percent Black. Jefferson lost his seat on the House Ways and Means Committee and faced federal corruption charges after being indicted by a grand jury in 2007. “After weighing it, I decided we could no longer afford to have someone representing us who had no meaningful committee assignments,” Richmond told the *Times-Picayune*. Jefferson defeated Richmond in the Democratic primary, but he lost the general election to Republican Anh “Joseph” Cao, who became the first Vietnamese American to serve in Congress. Two years later, Richmond again sought the seat and captured the Democratic nomination with 60 percent of the vote. Richmond and Cao agreed

on the need to end the drilling suspension placed in the Gulf Coast after the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill earlier in the year. But while Cao bolstered his record as the only Republican to vote for the House version of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, Richmond reminded voters that Cao ultimately voted against the final version. Citing Jefferson's legal issues and Cao's party identification, Richmond claimed the heavily Democratic district "had to have the Congressional Black Caucus basically be our congressman by default" in the most recent Congresses. In the general election, Richmond beat Cao with 64.5 percent of the vote. Republicans gained over 60 seats in the House in that election, but Richmond was one of two Democrats nationwide that beat a Republican incumbent. Richmond won his five re-elections handily, earning between 55 and 80 percent of the vote each year.<sup>4</sup>

Upon entering the House, Democratic leadership placed Richmond on the Committee on Small Business and the Committee on Homeland Security. The following Congress, Richmond left Small Business for a seat on the Judiciary Committee. He remained on Judiciary and Homeland Security until September 2020, when he traded seats on both panels for a spot on the Ways and Means Committee.

As a member of the Homeland Security Committee, Richmond worked with the Honor Flight Network—a nonprofit organization that arranged travel plans for veterans to see war memorials in Washington, DC—and introduced the Honor Flight Act in the 113th Congress (2013–2015). The act authorized the Transportation Security Administration to expedite screenings for elderly veterans in similar programs, many of whom were wounded in combat, allowing them to avoid long security lines and metal detectors. President Barack Obama signed the bill into law on December 16, 2014. At the time of the signing, the Honor Flight Network had organized flights for more than 650 veterans.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout his tenure, Richmond focused on recovery from several disasters that directly affected his district. Years after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Richmond sought aid for his constituents, including loan forgiveness for local universities that used federal money to rebuild their storm-damaged campuses and health monitoring for citizens that were placed in harmful temporary housing. In 2018, he worked with the Department of Homeland Security to ensure New Orleans kept \$2 billion of grants from the Federal Emergency Management Agency for sewage repairs.

To address the 2010 *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill, Richmond supported his Louisiana colleague Representative Steve Scalise in advancing the RESTORE Act in 2011. The measure, which passed as part of a larger transportation bill, directed 80 percent of the fines from the oil company to states impacted by the spill.<sup>6</sup>

In 2016, Richmond became chair of the CBC. During his time as chair, the CBC focused on expanding affordable housing and decriminalizing marijuana. The caucus also visited historically Black colleges and universities to encourage Black students to engage in politics. Throughout his career Richmond introduced a number of bills to recognize Black history and make federal policies more inclusive. Richmond recognized that his position in Congress was indebted to the centuries of struggle for freedom waged by Black Americans. "We walk in the footsteps of our ancestors and have not yet completed the journeys that they started when they were first forced off overcrowded slave ships onto the shores of this nation. This has been an imperfect union, but it is one that is worth fighting to preserve." In 2016, he introduced a resolution to recognize as official former Members the African-American lawmakers who were elected after the Civil War but were denied their seats in the House. In 2020, he introduced the Creating a Respective and Open World for Natural Hair—or CROWN—Act to bar discrimination in employment or federal assistance programs against people with natural hair texture or hairstyles.<sup>7</sup>

After Democrats captured the House majority for the 116th Congress (2019–2021), Richmond became chair of Homeland Security's Subcommittee on Cybersecurity, Infrastructure Protection, and Innovation. In February 2019, he held a joint hearing with the Subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security focused on protecting the nation's surface transportation systems—such as rail, road, and pipelines—from cyberattacks. In August 2020, Richmond led a hearing called "Secure, Safe, and Auditable: Protecting the Integrity of the 2020 Elections." The panel focused on voting security methods as states broadened access to mail-in ballot and early voting options amid the COVID-19 pandemic. "We must prepare Americans for the reality that elections will be administered differently this fall. We must educate voters about vote-by-mail, its related deadlines, and how expanded vote-by-mail might affect the timing of election results," Richmond said in his opening statement. As chair, Richmond introduced several homeland

security related bills, including the State and Local Cybersecurity Improvement Act, which aimed to create grants for states to assess and improve their cybersecurity. He also introduced the Protecting Critical Infrastructure Against Drones and Emerging Threats Act directing the Department of Homeland Security to evaluate the risk of drone attacks. The House passed both pieces of legislation, but the Senate did not report them out of committee.<sup>8</sup>

Around Capitol Hill, Richmond became known for his dominating performances in the Congressional Baseball Game—an annual charity event that pits Democrats and Republicans against each other on the baseball diamond. With his fastball, Richmond led Democrats to an 8 to 2 victory in his rookie game in 2011, finishing with 13 strikeouts. The Democratic team won eight of the nine games Richmond played.<sup>9</sup>

In 2020, Richmond accepted a position in President Joseph R. Biden Jr.'s administration as a senior advisor and director of the Office of Public Engagement. Richmond was an early supporter of Biden's presidential run and worked as co-chair of the campaign. He resigned from the House on January 15, 2021.<sup>10</sup>

## Notes

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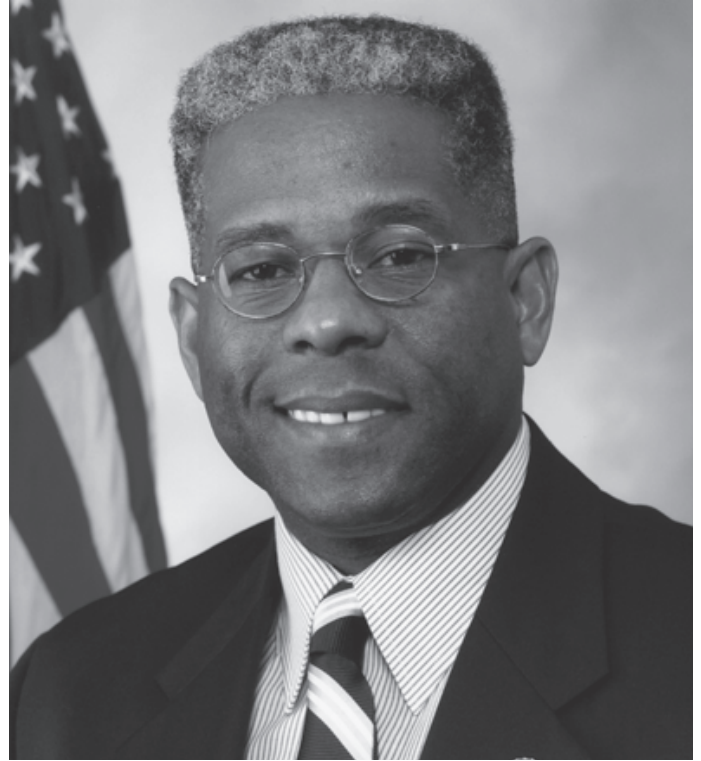
## Allen West

1961–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2011–2013

Republican from Florida



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

A decorated military veteran, Allen West entered Congress as part of the wave of energized conservative Republicans elected in 2010. During one term in the U.S. House of Representatives, West demonstrated his commitment to cutting taxes and government spending while maintaining national security. “More taxation, regulation, and litigation will not create more jobs,” he declared on the House Floor in 2011. Instead, West advocated for “free enterprise, innovation, and entrepreneurship,” which he considered the “foundation for economic growth and job creation in America.”<sup>1</sup>

Allen West was born on February 7, 1961, in Atlanta, Georgia, to Herman and Elizabeth West. West grew up in a culture of military service—his father and older brother served in combat in World War II and Vietnam, respectively. West’s mother worked as a civilian employee for the U.S. Marine Corps. He joined the Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps in the tenth grade before graduating from Henry W. Grady High School in Atlanta. West joined the Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC) while attending the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, where he graduated with a bachelor’s degree in political science and a commission as an Army officer in

1983. West trained as an artillery officer and earned two master’s degrees while on active duty: a master’s in political science from Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas, and a master of military art and science from the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. After his first marriage ended in divorce, West married Angela M. Graham, a financial planner, with whom he had two daughters: Aubrey and Austen.<sup>2</sup>

Over the course of his two-decade Army career, West deployed to Italy, South Korea, and the Middle East—including service in the Gulf War in 1991. While stateside, he served as an ROTC instructor at Kansas State University and was assigned to various leadership roles at Army bases in North Carolina and Texas. West attained the rank of lieutenant colonel and commanded 650 soldiers and officers during his final overseas deployment to Iraq in 2003. During that mission, West investigated an intelligence report of a possible plot by insurgents to attack his battalion. He interrogated an Iraqi policeman and fired a pistol near his head, an intimidation tactic that violated Army policy. West received a fine and resigned from the military with an honorable discharge in 2004. The incident generated a flurry of media attention and West received the

support of many politicians who believed that his actions were necessary to protect his troops. Ninety-five Members of Congress penned a letter to the U.S. Secretary of the Army in support of West. After leaving the military, West moved with his wife to Broward County, Florida, where he worked as a high school teacher and coach for a year before taking a position as a U.S. Department of Defense contractor advising the Afghan military in Kandahar, Afghanistan. With a national profile following his exit from the military, West returned to Florida in 2007 to seek political office for the first time.<sup>3</sup>

In May 2007, West declared his candidacy for a House seat held by first-term Democratic Representative Ron Klein, in a district that stretched across the coastal regions of Broward and Palm Beach counties. The district had been represented by a 13-term Republican Representative before Klein's upset victory in 2006, and registered Republicans still outnumbered Democrats. As the Republican nominee, West ran the first five months of his campaign from Afghanistan, before returning to the United States late in the fundraising cycle. West eventually lost to Klein, taking 45 percent of the vote. West challenged Klein again two years later during the 2010 midterm elections. With the financial support of conservative Republicans aligned with the Tea Party movement, which opposed the Barack Obama administration, West garnered national attention. During the campaign, Klein and West attacked each other with fiery rhetoric and clashed over nearly every issue. West stoked public frustration with the economy and railed against the scope of federal programs. "If we sit complacent ... we will find ourselves once again becoming slaves to a tyrannical government," he declared. Klein appealed to the districts' substantial elderly population by vowing to protect Medicare and Social Security benefits, while West rallied against the recently enacted Affordable Care Act, claiming that it would reduce Medicare funding. On Election Day, West defeated Klein in a near reverse of the 2008 results, winning by a margin of 54 to 46 percent. Along with Representative Tim Scott of South Carolina, West was one of the first African-American Republicans to serve in the House since J.C. Watts Jr. of Oklahoma left office in 2003. West was also the first Black Republican to represent Florida in Congress since 1876.<sup>4</sup>

In the 112th Congress (2011–2013), West served on the Armed Services and Small Business Committees. He reached out to groups with divergent beliefs on Capitol

Hill, joining both the conservative Tea Party Caucus and the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), which was composed of Democratic lawmakers. "I think you need to have competing voices in that body," West said of his decision to join the otherwise entirely Democratic CBC. As a Member of the CBC, West accused Black Democratic leaders of not focusing on what he considered to be the needs of Black communities. He threatened to leave the group after several caucus members criticized the Tea Party but ultimately remained a member for the rest of his term. Discussing his beliefs and bold speaking style, West said, "I think it's important to talk about conservative principles and values and not make it such a boogeyman thing." West insisted, "Character always prevails."<sup>5</sup>

Much of West's legislative agenda focused on reforming the tax code. He favored a simplified flat tax, claiming that high tax rates reduced economic growth and eliminated jobs. "You cannot help the job seeker by punishing the job creator with higher taxes," he said in a speech on the House Floor. West introduced a bill that would have allowed small businesses to earn a tax credit for hiring people receiving government unemployment benefits.<sup>6</sup>

From his seat on the Armed Services Committee, West worked to cut spending, introducing two bills to cut the Department of Defense's printing and reproduction budget. On the House Floor, West questioned the need for "expensive, high-gloss color briefing slides," adding that the information "can just as easily be conveyed using plain black-and-white copies." He served on the conference committee for the 2012 National Defense Authorization Act and ensured that his cost-cutting legislation was incorporated into the bill. When a looming January 2013 deadline threatened federal agencies with automatic across-the-board budget rescissions in the absence of congressional action on federal spending, West introduced the National Security and Job Protection Act, which would have required the President to submit an alternative plan to avoid defense cuts through sequestration. West hoped that the bill, which passed the House but faltered in the Senate, would redirect budget cuts toward discretionary spending and away from defense programs. West also submitted legislation that would have required the President to certify that any reduction in overseas military presence would not undermine national security.<sup>7</sup>

After Florida's redistricting took effect in early 2012, West's district in the Boca Raton area along the Atlantic

seaboard was drawn more favorably for Democrats. West decided to seek re-election in the neighboring coastal district to the north, which consisted of the northern tip of Palm Beach County, as well as St. Lucie and Martin counties. Local businessman and Democratic candidate Patrick Murphy had planned to challenge West in his original district, but like West, opted to run in the district to the north. On Election Day, Murphy defeated West with just more than 50 percent of the vote, a margin of less than 2,000 votes. Although the margin was not small enough to trigger an automatic recount, West's campaign filed an injunction to impound voting machines and paper ballots in Palm Beach and St. Lucie counties due to what it described as "disturbing irregularities" in the voting process. Following two weeks of legal action, West conceded on November 20, 2012.<sup>8</sup>

After leaving office in 2013, West worked as a political commentator for various media outlets and launched a political action committee dedicated to electing conservative officeholders. Two years later, he moved to Texas to lead a nonprofit think tank. On July 20, 2020, West won election as chair of the Texas Republican Party. He served in that position until July 2021.<sup>9</sup>

## Notes

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# William “Mo” Cowan

1969–

UNITED STATES SENATOR

2013

Democrat from Massachusetts



Image courtesy of the U.S. Senate Historical Office

William “Mo” Cowan was appointed to the U.S. Senate by Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick on February 1, 2013, to succeed Senator John Forbes Kerry who had resigned to become U.S. Secretary of State in the Barack Obama administration. Cowan was the first African-American Senator to serve from the commonwealth of Massachusetts since Edward W. Brooke left office in 1979. With Tim Scott of South Carolina having been appointed to the Senate a month earlier, Cowan’s appointment marked the first time in U.S. history that two African-American Senators served concurrently. Cowan reflected on his journey from North Carolina to a Senate seat representing Massachusetts, “My mother told me days like today were possible. If you work hard and treat people with respect, there is very little you cannot achieve in this great nation.”<sup>1</sup>

William Maurice “Mo” Cowan was born on April 4, 1969, in Yadkinville, North Carolina, to William H. Cowan, a machinist, and Cynthia Cowan, a seamstress. Growing up in North Carolina’s rolling foothills in the 1970s and 1980s, Cowan experienced overt acts of anti-Black racism. The Ku Klux Klan burned a cross and distributed literature in his hometown and marched on his local high school, Forbush High. In 1991, Cowan graduated

from Duke University in North Carolina with a bachelor’s degree in sociology. He moved to Boston, Massachusetts, to pursue a degree in law. “I felt I needed to get beyond North Carolina and see the rest of the world,” he said. Cowan graduated with a law degree from Northeastern University in 1994. He remained in Boston where he worked as a litigation associate at several law firms before becoming partner. Cowan and his wife, Stacy, have two sons: Miles and Grant.<sup>2</sup>

In 2009, Governor Patrick asked Cowan to join his administration as his chief legal counsel. From 2009 to 2011, Cowan advised Patrick on a host of issues including public policy, appointment of judges, and general legal matters. In 2011, he became Patrick’s chief of staff and in 2013 his senior advisor. When Senator Kerry resigned to become Secretary of State, Governor Patrick appointed Cowan to fill the vacancy on February 1, 2013. “The reason I am standing here is not because I am a person of color, an African-American,” Cowan said just before taking office. “I believe the governor, as he has indicated, has the confidence I will do the job he is sending me to do.”<sup>3</sup>

When he entered office during the 113th Congress (2013–2015), Cowan was assigned to three committees:

Agriculture; Commerce; and Small Business. He chaired the Agriculture Committee's Subcommittee on Nutrition, Specialty Crops, Food and Agricultural Research. He also co-chaired the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Military Asset and Security Strategy Task Force, a Massachusetts oversight board empaneled by Governor Patrick that included congressional members. Just two months into his Senate service, terrorists detonated two bombs at the finish line of the Boston Marathon, killing three spectators and injuring scores of others. Cowan noted the outpouring of support from his Senate colleagues: "In April I experienced the very best of this body's character ... when Members from every corner of this Nation extended their sympathies, their prayers, and pledged their assistance and support for the city of Boston and to all those affected by that tragedy."<sup>4</sup>

During his tenure in the 113th Congress, Cowan worked on several pieces of legislation. He cosponsored the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013 which passed the Senate on February 12 and the House on February 28; the President signed it into law on March 7, 2013. Cowan sponsored several unsuccessful amendments to the Agriculture Reform, Food, and Jobs Act of 2013, as well as two other noteworthy bills. The first was a bill to amend the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 "to establish a market-driven inventory system." The amendment would allow growers the option of filing for recourse loans using specific crop yields produced from 2014 through 2018 as collateral and payment. The second was a resolution designating November 28, 2013, as "National Holoprosencephaly Awareness Day." Holoprosencephaly, or HPE, is a birth defect that occurs when the developing brain fails to form two hemispheres; the condition is often fatal. Senator Cowan left office before either bill was debated on the Senate Floor.<sup>5</sup>

On June 25, 2013, Massachusetts Representative Edward John Markey won the special election to fill the remainder of Kerry's term. Cowan, who never had any intention of running for the seat, left office on July 15, 2013. "I entered the Senate at a vexing time in this body's history," he said. "As we all know, congressional approval levels are dismally low." But "what I have encountered in the Senate is not a body defined by vitriol but one more defined by congeniality and common respect." After leaving office, Cowan returned to Boston to be with his family and continue his legal and consulting career.<sup>6</sup>

## Notes

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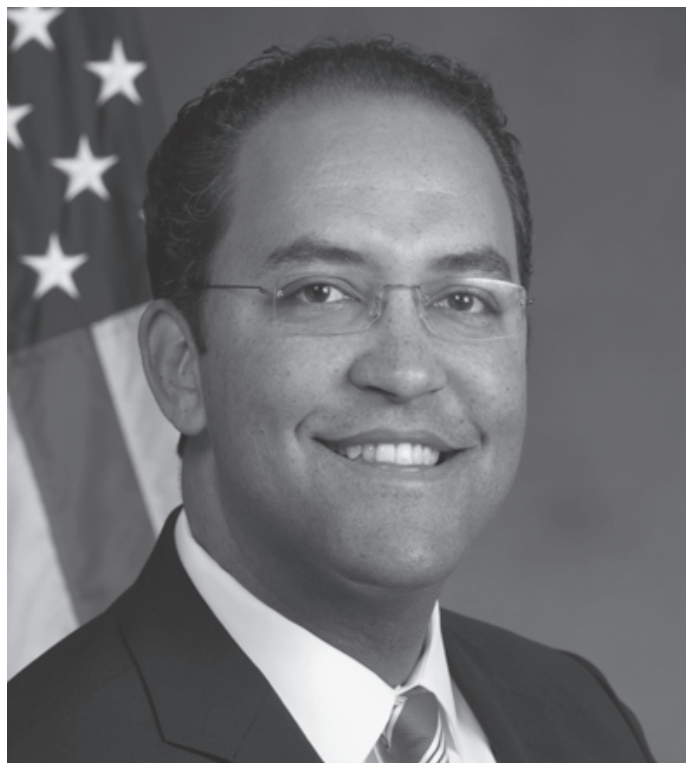
# Will Hurd

1977–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2015–2021

Republican from Texas



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

After nearly a decade working for the CIA, Will Hurd won election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2014 from a South Texas district that stretched along the largest expanse of the U.S. border with Mexico. During his three terms in the House, Hurd used his intelligence experience to work on immigration and national security issues. Touting a focus on policy over party, Hurd crafted an independent image. “The number one issue,” he claimed, “is we need someone that represents this district that is able to work with both sides of the political divide, as well as stand up to both sides of the political divide.”<sup>1</sup>

William Ballard Hurd was born on August 19, 1977, in San Antonio, Texas, to Robert and Mary Alice Hurd, the youngest of three siblings. Robert worked as a traveling textiles salesman in Los Angeles, California, where he met and married fabric buyer Mary Alice before returning to Texas. As an interracial couple, Hurd’s father, who was Black, and his mother, who was White, faced discrimination after moving from California to Texas. “When my parents moved to San Antonio in 1970,” Hurd recalled, “they couldn’t buy a house in certain neighborhoods because of the color of their skin.” Hurd attended public schools in San Antonio, graduating from John Marshall High School

in 1995. Hurd’s father once said he had been a Republican “since Lincoln freed us,” and while in college at Texas A&M University, Hurd became active in politics.<sup>2</sup>

Hurd attended Texas A&M on a full scholarship and embraced the school’s focus on public service. He majored in computer science, but classes in Mexico City led him to pursue a minor in international studies and pushed his graduation back a year so that he could finish the required coursework. In his senior year, Hurd won election as student body president in an upset. Shortly after he took office, a bonfire collapse killed 12 Texas A&M students in August 1999. Hurd’s leadership as student body president was credited with helping the school process the tragedy.<sup>3</sup>

The CIA recruited Hurd straight out of college in 2000, and during his intelligence career he served undercover in India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Hurd also held stateside positions in New York and Washington, DC. As part of his job, Hurd was tasked with briefing lawmakers on Capitol Hill. That experience proved frustrating and led to his decision to leave the CIA in 2009 to run for office himself. “I thought, ‘Hey, I can do a better job,’” Hurd recalled. Hurd took a position as a cybersecurity consultant as he prepared for his first congressional campaign.<sup>4</sup>

In 2010, Hurd entered a field of five Republicans seeking the nomination to challenge the incumbent Democrat, *Ciro D. Rodriguez*. The massive district stretched from just outside El Paso in the west to parts of Hurd's hometown of San Antonio in the east. Hurd emphasized his national security background, and although he won the most votes in the March primary he did not secure a clear majority and advanced to a runoff against attorney Francisco "Quico" Canseco. Hurd dismissed concerns by party leaders who insisted that a Hispanic candidate stood a better chance in the general election, pointing to his strong showing in the primary. Canseco won the runoff against Hurd with nearly 53 percent of the vote and went on to defeat Rodriguez in the November general election.<sup>5</sup>

Hurd launched a second campaign in 2014, challenging the incumbent Democrat *Pete P. Gallego*, who had unseated Canseco in 2012. In the Republican primary, Hurd again faced Canseco, but this time he won the nomination after securing the endorsement of his hometown newspaper. The district was majority Hispanic and stretched across 820 miles of the nation's border with Mexico. Immigration emerged as the central issue in the 2014 campaign. In the months leading up to the election, large groups of unaccompanied minors from Mexico and other central American nations tried to cross the Texas border and local and federal authorities grappled with a burgeoning humanitarian crisis. Hurd compared the problems at the border with Mexico with his experience abroad working for the CIA. "We need to start treating the *narcotraficantes*, the coyotes ... as an intelligence problem not just a law enforcement problem," Hurd insisted, emphasizing the need to understand the root causes of the drug trade and human trafficking crisis. Hurd and Gallego largely agreed that the nation needed to improve existing avenues for immigration. "If you're going to be a productive member of society, let's get you here," Hurd declared. Unlike Gallego, Hurd opposed amnesty for undocumented immigrants and vowed to empower law enforcement and the courts to deport individuals.<sup>6</sup>

On Election Day, Hurd defeated Gallego by fewer than 2,500 votes to become the first Black Republican elected from Texas. Hurd attributed his election to his interest in the issues voters cared about. "It's because I engage people where they are and talk about the topics they care about. That transcends race, it transcends gender. It transcends party."<sup>7</sup>

Upon taking his seat in the 114th Congress (2015–2017), Hurd was assigned to three committees: Homeland Security; Small Business; and Oversight and Government Reform. Hurd was selected to chair Oversight and Government Reform's Subcommittee on Information Technology, drawing on his years of intelligence work. Hurd left the Small Business Committee two months into his first term, preferring to focus on his other assignments. In the 115th Congress (2017–2019), he joined the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. In the 116th Congress (2019–2021), he dropped his assignments on Homeland Security and Oversight for a seat on the Appropriations Committee, which handles government spending issues.<sup>8</sup>

During his first term, Hurd passed more bills into law than any other freshman Representative. Three of the four laws Hurd sponsored in his first term directly benefited or celebrated the people of his district. Working with Democratic Representative *Beto O'Rourke* of El Paso, Hurd authored legislation amending the 2014 Border Patrol Agent Pay Reform Act to protect agents from overtime pay cuts. Additional legislation extended "availability pay"—compensation for tasks conducted by federal criminal investigators beyond the traditional workweek—to all law enforcement officers of the Air and Marine Operations branch of U.S. Customs and Border Protection. Hurd also proposed renaming the Tornillo border port of entry in honor of El Paso native *Marcelino Serna*, Texas's most decorated World War I veteran and the first Hispanic American to be awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.<sup>9</sup>

As chair of the Oversight Subcommittee on Information Technology, Hurd managed a July 15, 2015, hearing investigating the data breach at the Office of Personnel Management. In his opening statement, he remarked, "It is no secret that Federal agencies have a long way to go to improve their cybersecurity posture." In July 2016, he questioned FBI Director *James Comey* regarding presidential candidate *Hillary Clinton's* use of a private email server for public business while serving as U.S. Secretary of State. Hurd called the FBI's decision to not recommend prosecution "outrageous."<sup>10</sup>

In 2015, Hurd's bill directing the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to streamline its information technology (IT) systems was signed into law. Over the course of the next two years, he pushed for a major overhaul of the federal government's technological capabilities through his Modernizing Government Technology (MGT) Act. Folded

into the National Defense Authorization Act of 2018, the legislation established an IT modernization board and a \$100 million fund, addressed vulnerabilities in federal systems, and banned Russian cybersecurity products in the wake of that nation's cyberattacks during the 2016 presidential election.<sup>11</sup>

Immigration also remained a priority for Hurd during his House career. But when other Republicans, including President Donald J. Trump, called for the construction of a wall along the 2,000-plus mile southern border, Hurd opposed the idea calling it “a third century solution to a 21st-century problem.” Hurd favored what he termed a “smart wall” consisting of technological upgrades including fiber optic cable to detect and report threats remotely and provide high-speed internet in rural border regions. By 2019, Hurd was the only Republican representing a district along the southern border. He was one of 13 Republicans who joined the Democratic majority in their resolution rejecting President Trump's declaration of a national emergency to redirect funds towards construction of the wall.<sup>12</sup>

Hurd also worked to shape legislation granting permanent legal residency to immigrants brought into the country as minors. In 2018, Hurd sponsored the USA Act of 2018 in the House, pairing increased border security with new paths to citizenship. Despite bipartisan support, Republican leadership rejected the bill as lacking funding for physical wall construction along the southern border. Hurd signed a discharge petition to force a vote on a full range of immigration proposals, including his own, but the effort fell short by two votes. Hurd continued to push his compromise after Democrats regained the majority in the 116th Congress.<sup>13</sup>

Hurd occasionally broke with his party on certain issues. Although he had criticized the Affordable Care Act—the health care reform measure passed during the Barack Obama administration—and had voted for its repeal during the 114th Congress, Hurd voted against his party's alternative, the American Health Care Act, in May 2017, insisting the bill did “not address the concerns of ... my constituents.” “My boss is not the president,” he observed later in his House career. “My boss is not the speaker. My boss is not the minority leader. My bosses are those 800,000 people that I represented and sent me up here.”<sup>14</sup>

As one of two Black Republicans in the House, Hurd attracted considerable attention from his party and the press. Unlike his GOP colleague Mia B. Love of Utah, Hurd

did not join the overwhelmingly Democratic Congressional Black Caucus. “They'd have to have a meeting with me in it and then have a meeting without me,” he explained. And then I'd have to put out a dissenting opinion.” Hurd routinely demurred when asked to comment on issues of race and the Republican Party, particularly during President Trump's administration. “Have people in my party said racist things? Yes,” he said in a 2020 interview with the *New York Times*. “But that doesn't define the broader party.” Hurd sought to transcend the actions of those he called “outliers,” and worked to keep the focus on his message of empowerment. “If you do not think someone cares about your community, it's hard for you to evaluate whether they're doing something that's actually helping you.”<sup>15</sup>

In 2019, amid revelations that President Trump had pressured the government of Ukraine to prosecute Hunter Biden, the son of former Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr., at the time a potential 2020 Democratic presidential nominee, the House Democratic majority opened impeachment proceedings against the President. Hurd noted that the President's actions would lead to “long-term implications on our foreign policy.” Ultimately, Hurd voted against impeaching President Trump, saying, “Throughout this process, Americans have learned of bungling foreign policy decisions. But we have not heard evidence beyond a reasonable doubt of bribery or extortion,” the criteria for conviction in the Senate.<sup>16</sup>

Hurd routinely faced close re-elections. In 2016, more than \$12 million was spent in the district during his rematch with former Representative Pete Gallego, making it the most expensive U.S. House contest in Texas's history. That year, in a presidential election year with double the previous voter turnout, Hurd won another narrow victory over Gallego with 48 percent of the vote and a 3,000-vote margin. During the 2018 midterm elections, Hurd faced Gina Ortiz Jones, a former intelligence officer and U.S. Air Force. Spending on the race nearly rivaled 2016. On election night, media organizations initially called the race for Hurd, but the margin ultimately proved too close to call. Jones conceded two weeks later; Hurd's final margin of victory was only 926 votes out of 210,069 cast.<sup>17</sup>

On August 1, 2019, Hurd announced that he would not seek re-election in 2020. After leaving office in 2021, he joined the board of an artificial intelligence research lab and began work on a book about his experience as a CIA agent and a Member of Congress.<sup>18</sup>

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## Mia B. Love

1975–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2015–2019

Republican from Utah



Image courtesy of the U.S. House of Representatives Photography Office

In 2014, Mia B. Love won election to the U.S. House of Representatives, becoming the first African-American Republican woman in Congress and the first Black lawmaker to represent the state of Utah. Love, the daughter of Haitian immigrants, was born in New York and studied theater in Connecticut before moving to Utah, where she entered local politics, eventually serving as mayor of Saratoga Springs, Utah, during the Great Recession as a proponent of small government. “I wasn’t elected in Saratoga Springs because of my race or my gender or my heels,” she said in 2013 about her time leading the city near Provo, Utah. “I was elected by the people there because I had a plan and a vision to get us financially stable.”<sup>1</sup>

Mia Love was born Ludmya Bourdeau on December 6, 1975, in Brooklyn, New York. Her parents, Jean Maxime and Marie Bourdeau, had fled the hostile regime of Haitian dictator François “Papa Doc” Duvalier in late 1974. They did not bring their older children to America, but after Mia was born, the family applied for citizenship and brought her two siblings over from Haiti. The Bourdeaus moved to Norwalk, Connecticut, in 1981, where her mother worked as a nurse and her father took on several jobs to make ends meet. Later during her political career Love recounted

her father’s words, “Mia, your mother and I never took a handout. You will not be a burden to society. You will give back.”<sup>2</sup>

Love got involved with the theater while attending Norwalk High School, where she graduated in 1993. She went to the University of Hartford in West Hartford, Connecticut, for its fine arts program and graduated with a bachelor of fine arts degree in 1997. While in college, she met her husband Jason Love, a software engineer then on a Latter-day Saints mission. Mia Love converted from Catholicism to the Church of Latter-day Saints and moved to Utah in 1998. The couple has three children: Alessa, Abigail, and Peyton.<sup>3</sup>

Love worked as a flight attendant and call center operator after college, leaving behind her acting plans when she turned down a part in a performance that had been offered the week of her marriage. She soon got involved with local issues and jumped into public service. Love’s first involvement came at the community level, when she led an effort to pressure a local developer to treat lakefront properties in Saratoga Springs for a midge fly infestation. Shortly afterward, in 2003, Love ran for and won a seat on the Saratoga Springs city council. In November 2009, she

was elected mayor of Saratoga Springs, taking 59 percent of the vote and becoming the first African-American woman elected mayor in the state of Utah. As mayor, Love, who served during the crippling economic downturn of the Great Recession, kept the municipal government solvent and overcame a budget shortage of \$3.5 million.<sup>4</sup>

In late 2011, Love announced her intention to challenge six-term incumbent House Democrat James David “Jim” Matheson in the suburban congressional district that stretched south of Salt Lake City. The district, which had been redrawn following the 2010 Census and had begun to lean more Republican, was home to a burgeoning tech sector, including several medical technology firms and a new data center for the National Security Agency. After easily winning her primary, Love was offered a high-profile speaking slot at the 2012 Republican National Convention where Willard Mitt Romney accepted the party’s nomination for President. Love’s campaign received considerable national attention, but she ultimately fell short of unseating Matheson by a mere 768 votes; Libertarian candidate Jim Vein pulled in 6,439 votes that year.<sup>5</sup>

Love announced in June 2013 that she would seek a rematch with Matheson. “I’m better prepared, I’m a better candidate. Having gone through this, I understand the issues so much better, how campaigns work,” she said. In December, Matheson announced his retirement from Congress, and Democrats nominated Doug Owens, son of former Utah Representative Douglas Wayne Owens. Love downplayed the historic nature of her candidacy and instead focused her campaign’s message on her family’s story and her record as mayor. She opposed the medical device tax, an area of concern for tech companies in her district, and often spoke about the importance of decision-making at the local, rather than the federal, level. Love won the election with 50 percent of the vote to Owens’s 46 percent. During an interview the day after the election, Love said that neither her race nor her gender was a central issue in the campaign. “Principles had everything to do with it.” Love defeated Doug Owens again in the 2016 election with 54 percent of the vote.<sup>6</sup>

During her two terms in the House, Love served on the exclusive House Financial Services Committee, which meant that party rules prevented her from serving on any other standing committees simultaneously. In the 114th Congress (2015–2017), she sat on the Terrorism and Illicit Finance Subcommittee, and in the 115th Congress (2017–2019) she moved to the Monetary Policy and Trade Subcommittee,

and the Financial Institutions and Consumer Credit Subcommittee. From her position on Financial Services, she pushed a bill which raised the lending limit for small banks, which passed as part of a broader Senate bill removing certain financial regulations. Love also served on the House Select Investigative Panel on Infant Lives under the auspices of the Energy and Commerce Committee.<sup>7</sup>

During her two campaigns for the House, Love had been highly critical of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), accusing its members of “demagoguery” and insisting in 2012 she would “take that thing apart from the inside out.” But her rhetoric softened after she joined the caucus. She was the only Black Republican in the CBC during her House service, and regularly attended caucus meetings, including sit downs with Presidents Barack Obama and Donald J. Trump. By 2018, she had developed strong relationships with her colleagues in the caucus, called them mentors, and insisted that “if my leadership asked me to go after a member of the Congressional Black Caucus, I won’t do it.” Love worked alongside fellow CBC members Emanuel Cleaver II of Missouri and Karen Bass of California to address poverty and add legal protections for incarcerated pregnant women. In 2018 former CBC chair Marcia L. Fudge of Ohio commended Love for her role in helping shape immigration reform legislation, and defended Love’s work amid criticism from her Democratic opponent that year.<sup>8</sup>

During Love’s two terms in the House, much of Congress’s work revolved around large, last-minute legislative packages and short-term government funding deals. Although she occasionally lobbied to include her individual proposals in these omnibus bills, Love looked to pass legislation by different routes. “I tend to stay to myself—I do these things on my own,” she said. “If I can do things on my own, I know that I can control the message and I can control everything.” Love joined Democrats on certain issues, including the push for bipartisan legislation to reform how Congress handled sexual harassment, which was signed into law just before the end of the 115th Congress. Love added a provision ensuring taxpayers would no longer be liable for settlements paid by congressional offices.<sup>9</sup>

Love supported the Republican Party’s major legislative initiatives during her time in the House: she voted for the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 and to repeal the Affordable Care Act, and she backed the passage of the GOP’s replacement legislation, the American Health Care Act of 2017, which

passed the House but failed in the Senate. Love fought to delay the implementation of the Affordable Care Act's medical-device tax by two years, which, she said, would affect several medical technology companies in her district. That proposal ultimately passed as part of the funding deal following a brief government shutdown in January 2018.<sup>10</sup>

Love also drew national attention for her work on behalf of Utah resident Josh Holt, a Latter-day Saints missionary who had been imprisoned in Venezuela on suspicion of weapons charges. In September 2016, Love cosponsored a House Resolution expressing concern about the “ongoing political, economic, social and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela” and urged the release of political prisoners, including Holt. Joining Utah Senators Orrin Grant Hatch and Mike Lee, Love lobbied the Trump administration to secure Holt's release in May 2018.<sup>11</sup>

During the 2018 midterm elections, Love faced Salt Lake County's Democratic mayor Ben McAdams. Following a close election and a prolonged count of mail-in ballots, Love conceded the election on November 26, 2018. After leaving the House, Love became a political commentator for a major broadcasting company and served as an elector for the state of Utah in the 2020 Electoral College. In the fall of 2020, Georgetown University appointed Love a fellow at the McCourt School of Public Policy.<sup>12</sup>

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# Kamala D. Harris

1964–

UNITED STATES SENATOR

2017–2021

Democrat from California



Image courtesy of the U.S. Senate Historical Office

Kamala D. Harris won election to the U.S. Senate in 2016, after having served as attorney general of California. The daughter of Indian and Jamaican immigrants, Harris became the first Senator of South Asian descent and the second African-American woman to serve in the chamber. In 2020, she became the first woman elected Vice President of the United States.

Kamala Devi Harris was born on October 20, 1964, in Oakland, California. Her mother, Shyamala Gopalan, was a breast cancer researcher from southern India, and her father, Donald Harris, was an economics professor from Jamaica. After her parents divorced, Harris moved to Canada with her mother and graduated from Westmount High School in Westmount, Quebec, in 1981. As a student at Howard University, a historically Black university, in Washington, DC, she interned for California Senator Alan Cranston. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in political science and economics in 1986. Three years later, she earned a law degree from the University of California, Hastings College of the Law, in San Francisco. Harris is married to Douglas Emhoff and is the stepmother to his children, Ella and Cole.<sup>1</sup>

Harris was admitted to the California bar in 1990 and began her career as the deputy district attorney for

Alameda County. She became managing attorney for the San Francisco district attorney's office in 1998 and then became chief of the San Francisco city attorney's division on children and families. In 2004, Harris was elected as the district attorney of San Francisco. Then in November 2010, Harris was elected attorney general of California. She was the first woman, first African American, and first Indian American to serve in that position. As attorney general, Harris secured a settlement worth more than \$18 billion to provide relief to California homeowners as a result of the 2008 mortgage crisis.<sup>2</sup>

Harris declared her candidacy for the U.S. Senate a week after Senator Barbara Boxer announced her retirement in 2015. In the state's open primary in 2016, Harris's main opponent was 10-term Democratic U.S. Representative Loretta Sanchez from Orange County. Harris captured the nomination, but both she and Sanchez qualified for the general election under California's "top two" rule, which advances the first and second place candidates regardless of party. In the lead-up to the general election, Harris gained endorsements from Senator Boxer, California Governor Jerry Brown, Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr., and President Barack Obama, who had carried the state

by large margins in 2008 and 2012. In a meeting with representatives from African-American publishers and radio stations, Harris encouraged Black voters to go to the polls. “When African Americans show up and vote, we absolutely make a difference but when we don’t show up all of the gains we have made over the years are put into jeopardy,” Harris said. In November, Harris won the general election with nearly 62 percent of the vote. She was one of a record four Indian-American candidates to win a seat in the 115th Congress (2017–2019).<sup>3</sup>

After Harris was sworn into office in January 2017, she was assigned to four committees: Budget; Environment and Public Works; Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs; and Intelligence. In the 116th Congress (2019–2021), Harris retained her committee assignments with the exception of Environment and Public Works, which she left for a seat on the Judiciary Committee.<sup>4</sup>

Early in her tenure, Harris garnered national attention for her prosecutor-style questioning during Senate Intelligence Committee hearings investigating Russian interference in the 2016 elections. “I don’t just want to read a memo about threats, I want to be able to ask questions and dig down deeper,” Harris said of her work on the committee. “I see part of my responsibility . . . as helping to make sure no one is above the law.” Harris continued her incisive questioning during Supreme Court nomination hearings in 2018 and 2020.<sup>5</sup>

In the Senate, Harris’s legislative agenda focused on homeland security, the criminal justice system, and health care. The first bill she introduced, the Access to Counsel Act, sought to provide legal counsel to individuals detained while entering the United States. In 2017, she and Republican Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky introduced the Pretrial Integrity and Safety Act to move America’s courts away from the money bail system and toward a pretrial release policy based on risk assessments. She supported her California colleague Senator Dianne Feinstein in sponsoring a 2018 intelligence measure to require warrants to access citizens’ phone and email data. In 2019, Harris joined Senator Bernard Sanders of Vermont and other colleagues in introducing the Medicare for All Act, which would establish a universal health care system in the United States.<sup>6</sup>

In 2018 and 2019, Harris introduced the Justice for Victims of Lynching Act, which, if signed into law, would classify lynching as a federal offense. “With this bill, we finally have a chance to speak the truth about our past and

make clear that these hateful acts should never happen again,” Harris said on the Senate Floor, adding “and, God forbid, they do, we are making clear there will be swift, serious, and severe consequences.” The Senate passed the bill twice, but it stalled in the House. When the measure came back from the House under a different name in 2020, Senator Paul offered an amendment to narrow the definition of lynching. Harris strongly opposed the amendment and argued that her bill should pass without change, telling her colleagues, “Our country has waited too long for a reckoning on this issue of lynching, and I believe no Senator should stop the full weight of the law in its capacity to protect these human beings and human life.” Ultimately, the measure failed to pass in the Senate.<sup>7</sup>

In January 2020, the House of Representatives delivered articles of impeachment against President Donald J. Trump to the Senate. On February 5, Harris joined 47 other Senators in voting to convict the President, but lacking the two-thirds vote required for conviction, the president was acquitted. For the remainder of 2020, Harris turned her focus to recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic by proposing legislation to provide economic assistance to renters, homeowners, small businesses, and restaurants.<sup>8</sup>

In January 2019, Harris announced her candidacy for the 2020 presidential election. Although she withdrew from the race in December 2019, Joseph Biden, the Democratic nominee, chose her as his running mate in August 2020, making her the third woman to appear as the Vice Presidential candidate on a major-party ticket. The Biden–Harris ticket prevailed in the November election, making Harris the first woman, first African American, and first Asian American elected Vice President of the United States. During her victory speech, Harris said she was thinking about her mother “and about the generations of women—Black women, Asian, White, Latina, Native American women who throughout our nation’s history have paved the way for this moment tonight.” Harris was sworn in as Vice President on January 20, 2021.<sup>9</sup>

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# Brenda Jones

1959–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2018–2019

Democrat from Michigan



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 2018, Detroit city council president Brenda Jones won a special election to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of longtime Representative John Conyers Jr. of Michigan. Conyers's decision to step down midway through the 115th Congress (2017–2019) in December 2017 set off a complicated and drawn-out electoral process in which Jones won the special election for the remainder of 115th Congress but lost the general election for the 116th Congress (2019–2021) on the same day. Jones's term on Capitol Hill lasted six weeks.

Brenda Jones was born on October 24, 1959. Her family moved to Detroit, Michigan, when she was a child, and she graduated from Cass Technical High School. Jones earned a bachelor's degree and a graduate certificate from Wayne State University. Before her political career she worked with and served as president of a Detroit-area labor union.<sup>1</sup>

Jones won her first public office in 2005 capturing a seat on the Detroit city council. She served in city government for more than a decade, and in 2014 the city council elected Jones as its first president; she was re-elected city council president in January 2018. The *Detroit Free Press* credited her with running “the city’s most professional, least controversial council in recent history.”<sup>2</sup>

In December 2017, Representative John Conyers—who had represented Detroit in the House since 1965—resigned from Congress amid accusations that he had sexually harassed staff and used taxpayer money to settle harassment claims. Following Conyers's announcement, the state's Republican governor, Rick Snyder, scheduled the special election to fill the vacancy for November 6, 2018, the same day as the general election, which, he said, would save the expense of holding a separate election. This meant that the vacancy would remain for more than 10 months, almost the entire rest of the 115th Congress. In March 2018, a judge upheld Snyder's decision by dismissing a lawsuit to hold the special election earlier in the year. In the meantime, the primary elections for both the special election to fill Conyers's seat in the 115th Congress and the general election for the full term in the 116th Congress were scheduled for August.<sup>3</sup>

Jones announced her candidacy for both the special and general elections in late January 2018, gaining early endorsements from Michigan Representative Brenda L. Lawrence and Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan. “It is my intention to honor and carry on, to the best of my ability, the legacy of John Conyers,” Jones said. “It is absolutely

vital that the progress he made fighting for our human and civil rights is never forgotten.” In a crowded primary on August 7, 2018, Jones won the Democratic nomination for the special election to fill Conyers’s remaining term in the 115th Congress with 38 percent of the vote. Jones, however, narrowly lost the Democratic primary for the general election to the 116th Congress. Rashida Tlaib won with 31 percent of the vote, and Jones came in second with 30 percent.<sup>4</sup>

Because the district was heavily Democratic, winning the primary election was tantamount to winning the general election. In the immediate aftermath of the primary, Jones faced the prospect of having to resign as city council president to serve out Conyers’s remaining weeks in Congress. Article I, section 6, of the Constitution prevents Members of Congress from holding two elected offices simultaneously. But legal officials in Detroit saw no reason for Jones to resign before taking Conyers’s seat and announced that “under Michigan Law, it is permissible (under certain circumstances) for Council President Jones to hold both offices.” Detroit’s general counsel made it clear that the issue would also need to be evaluated from the federal side, and Jones immediately requested an opinion from the House Ethics Committee.<sup>5</sup>

On November 6, 2018, Brenda Jones formally won the special election to the 115th Congress with 87 percent of the vote. She also waged a last-minute write-in campaign for the general election but took less than 1 percent of the vote. In late November, Jones received informal guidance from the House Ethics Committee that she would not have to resign from the city council on two conditions: that she received no salary from Detroit and that the council stayed in recess during her Washington service. The House agreed by unanimous consent to seat Jones without requiring her to resign from the Detroit city council. On November 29, 2018, Jones was sworn in to the 115th Congress. “I am ready to roll up my sleeves in this lame-duck session and do what you expect me to do,” Jones said.<sup>6</sup>

Despite her short term in the House, Jones introduced two pieces of legislation on December 20, 2018. Her first bill, the Minimum Wage Fairness Act of 2018, penalized states that lowered their minimum-wage requirements. Her second bill, the SHELTER Act of 2018, sought to end certain federal tax breaks and to use the resulting revenue to fund affordable housing programs. With few days remaining in the Congress, the House took up neither bill.<sup>7</sup>

When the 115th Congress ended, Jones returned to her position as president of the Detroit city council. In 2020, Jones unsuccessfully challenged Representative Rashida Tlaib in the Democratic primary, garnering 34 percent of the vote. She married Bishop John Pitts Jr. later that year. In January 2021, Jones announced she would retire from the city council.<sup>8</sup>

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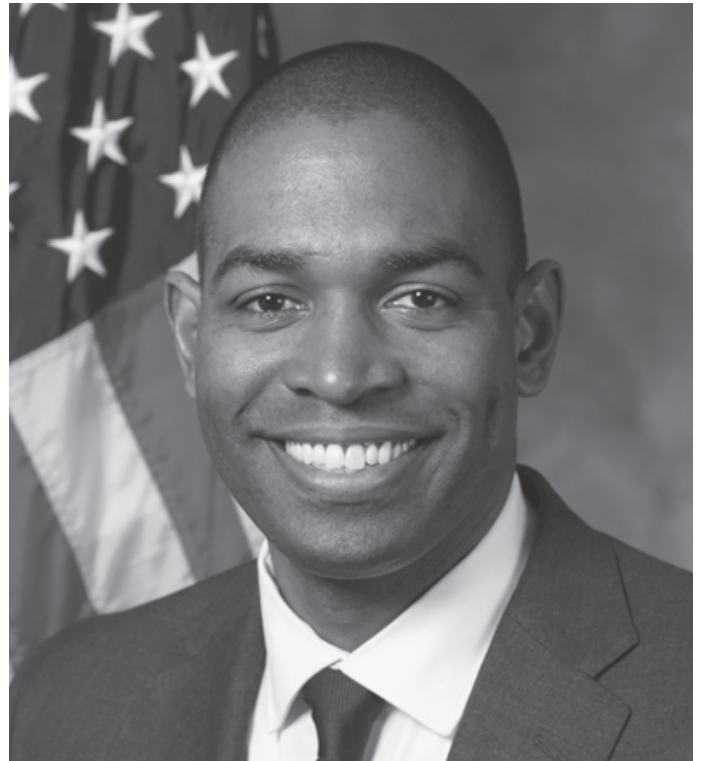
# Antonio Delgado

1977–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2019–2022

Democrat from New York



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 2018, Antonio Delgado left behind a lucrative law career to challenge an incumbent Member of the U.S. House of Representatives, becoming the first Black and Hispanic Congressman to represent a district in Upstate New York. In Congress, Delgado focused on improving infrastructure and employment opportunities in economically depressed rural areas. “Working families like the one that I come from, have been left behind,” he declared.<sup>1</sup>

Antonio Delgado was born in Schenectady, New York, on January 28, 1977, to Thelma and Anthony Delgado. Delgado’s parents divorced when he was two, and he was raised by his mother, a secretary for General Electric and the New York civil service department, and his stepfather, William Hill, a business manager. Delgado graduated from Notre Dame-Bishop Gibbons High School, a Catholic school in Schenectady, and earned a bachelor’s degree from nearby Colgate University in 1999. Upon graduation, he was awarded a prestigious Rhodes Scholarship, and spent two years studying at Oxford University in the United Kingdom, graduating with a master’s degree in 2001. He also earned a law degree from Harvard Law School in 2005. At Harvard, he met Lacey Schwartz, a documentary filmmaker whom he married in 2011; they

have two children: Maxwell and Coltrane. After law school, Delgado moved to Los Angeles, where he launched a music production company and pursued a career in hip-hop. In 2011, he moved to New Jersey to work at Akin Gump, a large New York City law firm.<sup>2</sup>

Delgado was driven to politics after the election of President Donald J. Trump in 2016. In 2017, he moved with his family to Rhinebeck in Upstate New York and soon launched an exploratory committee to challenge incumbent Republican Representative John J. Faso in the 2018 election. The district included much of the Hudson River Valley, spanning west to the Catskill Mountains. It was 85 percent White and evenly divided politically. President Barack Obama carried the district in 2012 while Trump prevailed in 2016. In the crowded Democratic primary, Delgado faced six other candidates, none of whom had held elected office. Delgado was an adept fundraiser and won the primary with a 22 percent plurality and a four-point lead over the runner-up. In the general election, Delgado faced off against Faso, a first-term Representative and formerly the Republican leader in the New York state assembly. The National Republican Congressional Committee released advertisements scrutinizing Delgado’s music career and

song lyrics in an attempt to sway voter opinion against him. Delgado, who stressed healthcare as the most important campaign issue, criticized Faso's vote to repeal the Affordable Care Act and advocated for a public option, which would allow Americans to choose between state-run and private health insurance plans. He also pledged to bring jobs back to the district after a recent exodus of large companies. In November, Delgado won with 51 percent of the vote. He won re-election in 2020 with 52 percent of the vote.<sup>3</sup>

During his two terms in the House, Delgado served in the Congressional Black Caucus, as well as on three committees: Agriculture; Small Business; and Transportation and Infrastructure. In the 117th Congress (2021–2023), he wielded the gavel as chair of the Agriculture Committee's Subcommittee on Commodity Exchanges, Energy, and Credit, which oversees agricultural markets and the development of rural infrastructure, including renewable energy sources and broadband internet.<sup>4</sup>

As a member of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Delgado introduced legislation to bolster funding for public transportation in rural areas. He worked to improve safety standards for passenger vehicles after a limousine crash in his district killed 20 people in 2018. His bill, the End the Limo Loophole Act, was incorporated into the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which became law in 2021. The legislation defines vehicles that can carry nine or more passengers as commercial vehicles and strengthens inspection requirements for passenger-carrying commercial vehicles.<sup>5</sup>

From his seat on the Agriculture Committee, Delgado focused on the development of infrastructure in rural America and on assisting the small family farms in his district. His bill, the Family Farmer Relief Act, eased the debt limits and eligibility requirements for small farmers filing for Chapter 12 bankruptcy, allowing them to reorganize their debt more easily. It was signed into law in August 2019. As chair of the Subcommittee on Commodity Exchanges, Energy, and Credit, he introduced bills to study the availability of broadband internet in rural communities by requiring data collection on internet speeds and the geographic areas serviced by internet providers.<sup>6</sup>

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Delgado sought to help small businesses facing economic hardship. His Small Business Repayment Relief Act waived Small Business Administration loan payments for six months. It became law as part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and

Economic Security (CARES) Act. Delgado's Small Business Relief Accessibility Act was included as part of the 2021 American Rescue Plan. It established a pilot program to help small businesses learn about and access available SBA relief options.<sup>7</sup>

In the spring of 2022, the House passed Delgado's One Stop Shop for Small Business Compliance Act, which directed the Small Business Administration to create and maintain a central website listing all small business compliance guides and resources to assist business owners in meeting federal standards and regulations. A month later, the House approved his VA Peer Support Enhancement for MST Survivors Act, which aimed to provide all claimants of sexual trauma in the military with a peer support specialist trained as a victims advocate.<sup>8</sup>

On May 3, 2022, New York Governor Kathy Hochul selected Delgado as her new lieutenant governor following the resignation of Brian Benjamin. Hochul praised her new running mate as a "battle-tested campaigner." Delgado resigned from the House on May 25, 2022, and was sworn in as lieutenant governor of New York later that day.<sup>9</sup>

## Notes

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- 6 Family Farmer Relief Act of 2019, H.R. 2336, 116th Cong. (2019); Family Farmer Relief Act of 2019, Public Law 116-51, 133 Stat. 1075 (2019); Community Broadband Mapping Act, H.R. 2400, 117th Cong. (2021); Broadband Speed Act, H.R. 2398, 117th Cong. (2021).
- 7 Small Business Repayment Relief Act of 2020, H.R. 6304, 116th Cong. (2020); CARES Act, Public Law 116-136, 134 Stat. 281 (2020); Small Business Relief Accessibility Act, H.R. 2360, 117th Cong. (2021); American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, Public Law 117-2, 135 Stat. 4 (2021).
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# Kwanza Hall

1971–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2020–2021

Democrat from Georgia



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 2020, Kwanza Hall won a special election to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Representative John Lewis of Georgia, the civil rights activist who held the Atlanta-based seat for more than three decades. Although he only spent one month as a Member of Congress, Hall voted on crucial government funding bills and advocated for infrastructure, justice reform, and historic preservation. On the day he was sworn in to the 116th Congress (2019–2021) Hall told the House, “We have a lot of things on the plate in front of us, and I just want to be a unifier, a person who can help us get some things done ... as Congressman Lewis would.”<sup>1</sup>

Kwanza Hall was born on May 1, 1971, in Atlanta, Georgia. His father, Leon W. Hall, joined the Southern Christian Leadership Conference when he was 17 years old and worked as a youth coordinator for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in the march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, in 1965. The Halls lived on the same street as John Lewis and knew him well. Hall graduated from Benjamin E. Mays High School in 1989 and then attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology until 1995. After founding a number of businesses, Hall turned to politics. In 2002, he won election to Atlanta’s board of education, holding that position until 2005 when he successfully ran for city

council. He served until 2017, when he resigned to run an unsuccessful campaign for mayor. Following the election, Hall returned to business pursuits and consulting.<sup>2</sup>

After serving in Congress for more than 33 years, John Lewis died of cancer on July 17, 2020. He represented the majority-Black and predominantly Democratic Fifth District, which covered most of Atlanta and some neighboring suburbs and had historically drawn Black Americans from other parts of the South who sought out new economic opportunities. Because Lewis had won the primary in June, the Georgia Democratic Party was required by state law to quickly choose a new candidate to replace him on the general election ballot in November. The party selected state senator Nikema Williams to run for the seat in the 117th Congress (2021–2023). Williams declined to run in a special election to fill the vacancy for the remainder of the 116th Congress, however.<sup>3</sup>

Five Democrats, one Independent, and one Libertarian entered the September 29 special election. Hall finished first with 32 percent of the vote, but because no candidate reached the 50 percent threshold, the race moved to a runoff election between Hall and second-place finisher Democrat Robert M. Franklin Jr., a former president

of Morehouse College, on December 1. Both Hall and Franklin maintained that they would work hard during their short time in office and told voters they would be honored to finish John Lewis's term. "I can do the equivalent of what I did in 15 years ... in 15 days," Hall told newspapers, referring to his past elected service. "I know what not to waste my time on. I know how to be effective." In December, Hall won the special election with 54 percent of the vote.<sup>4</sup>

Sworn in two days later on December 3, 2020, Hall did not receive committee assignments. But he backed the Democratic Party in critical end-of-the-year votes on military spending, government appropriations, and stimulus funds to provide relief from the COVID-19 pandemic. In total, he sponsored six bills, including a proposal directing the U.S. Secretary of Transportation to report on the possibility of new transit infrastructure projects in Atlanta. Speaking on the House Floor, Hall said it was, "an important first step to bringing economic power of transit-oriented development to often neglected areas ... without displacement of longtime residents." The bill was referred to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.<sup>5</sup>

Building off his work from the Atlanta city council, Hall focused on aspects of criminal justice reform in Congress. He introduced the Nonviolent Drug Crime Expungement Act, to remove nonviolent drug offenses from citizens' records and to review related sentences. He also wrote a bill designed to safeguard the voting rights of citizens recently released from prison. Hall called for "a comprehensive solution to end these injustices. I believe in second chances and the power of redemption. People returning from incarceration should have opportunities and pathways to succeed and contribute to society in a meaningful way without stigma." Both bills were sent to the Judiciary Committee but were not reported out.<sup>6</sup>

During his time in the House, Hall often evoked Representative Lewis's legacy. He proposed the John Lewis Prompt and Accurate Reporting of Elections Act to require states to tally ballots cast in early voting before the date of an election. Hall also advocated for the building that housed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference—where Dr. King and Lewis worked—to be designated a National Historic Site. "It is one of the greatest honors of my life to be able to complete the term for which [Representative Lewis] was last elected and take the baton and bring his service across the finish line. But I would be remiss if I

did not use my opportunity to make sure their lessons are known for other generations to come."<sup>7</sup>

Hall's term expired with the 116th Congress. He returned to Atlanta and joined a real estate investment firm.<sup>8</sup>

## Notes

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- 7 John Lewis Prompt and Accurate Reporting of Elections Act, H.R. 8925, 116th Cong. (2020); *Congressional Record*, Extensions of Remarks, 116th Cong., 2nd sess. (10 December 2020): E1176.
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