

### III Social background of the United States Congress 2009

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This note provides an introduction to the demographics of the Members of the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress of the United States (2009-2010), including age, ethnicity, gender, length of service, military veteran status, and occupational and educational background. Data is drawn from a forthcoming Congressional Research Service report, *Membership of the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress: a Profile*, unless otherwise indicated, and is current as of Dec. 30, 2008.<sup>1</sup>

#### A. Introduction

The United States Congress convened its 111<sup>th</sup> two-year Congress on January 6, 2009. The membership of Congress consists of 541 persons:

- 100 Senators serving six -year terms. One third of the Senate seats are up for election at each regularly scheduled election (held in November of even-numbered years).
- 435 Members of the House of Representatives serving two year terms. The entire House is up for election at each regularly scheduled election.
- Six Delegates to the House of Representatives, representing American Samoa, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico,

the United States Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. Puerto Rico's Delegate is officially called the "Resident Commissioner", and serves a four-year term; the other Delegates serve two-year terms. The 111<sup>th</sup> Congress will be the first time the Northern Mariana Islands will be represented in Congress.

The statistics which follow include the six Delegates, unless otherwise indicated.

At the time of writing, the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress is expected to convene with two vacant Senate seats representing the states of Illinois and Minnesota, and a vacant House seat for Illinois. In addition, shortly after the opening day of Congress, several Members are expected to resign and move to Cabinet positions and the Vice-Presidency. (The United States Constitution prohibits Members of Congress from holding other positions in the federal government.) However, this note assumes only the two Senate and one House vacancies.

#### B. Age

The average age of Members of the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress, 58.2 years, is among the highest in any Congress in U.S. history. The average age of Senators is currently 63.1 years; the average age of House Members is 57.0 years.

The average age of newly-elected Members of the House (also know as "freshmen") is 49.7 years; the average age of the Senate freshmen is 57.1 years.

The United States Constitution requires Representatives to be at least 25 years old when they take office. The youngest House Member is 27; the oldest is 85. Senators are required to be 30 years old upon taking office. The youngest Senator is 45, while the oldest is 91.

**C. Gender**

A record number of 95 women serve in the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress: 78 (17.6% of the total House) in the House and 17 (17% of the total Senate) in the Senate. Women were first elected to Congress in 1917.

The first woman elected to Congress was Representative Jeanette Rankin (1917-1919, 1941-1943). The first woman to serve in the Senate was Rebecca Latimer Felton. She was appointed in 1922 and served for only one day.

**Table 1 Women in Congress, 1979 to 2009**

Congress	Dates	Women in House	Women in Senate	Total women in Congress
96 <sup>th</sup>	1979-1980	16	1	17
101 <sup>st</sup>	1989-1991	29	2	31
106 <sup>th</sup>	1999-2000	58	9	67
110 <sup>th</sup>	2007-2008	75	16	91
111 <sup>th</sup>	2009-2010	78	17	95

**D. Occupational Background**

Congressional Quarterly, Inc., a Washington, D.C. publisher, surveys Members of Congress on an ongoing basis about their backgrounds. Their results show that, for the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress, law is the dominant declared profession of Senators, followed by public service/politics. For House Members, public service/politics is the most common profession, followed by business and law.<sup>ii</sup> Overall, 214 Members of Congress—almost half the membership—list public service/politics as their occupation, 204 Members indicate law, 201 list business, and 94 list education.

The 111<sup>th</sup> Congress also includes 16 medical doctors, two dentists, four ministers, thirteen former state governors, at least 112 former Congressional staffers, three physicists and five accountants. Other more unusual occupational backgrounds include an astronaut, a professional football (American football) player, a mortician, two vintners, and a river boat captain.

**E. Ethnicity**

There are 41 African American Members of the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress, all serving in the House (9.3% of the House).<sup>iii</sup>

A record number of 31 Hispanic/Latino Members currently serve in Congress: Twenty-eight in the House (6.3% of House Members) and three in the Senate (3% of Senators). The eleven Members of Congress who are of Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander heritage is also a record.

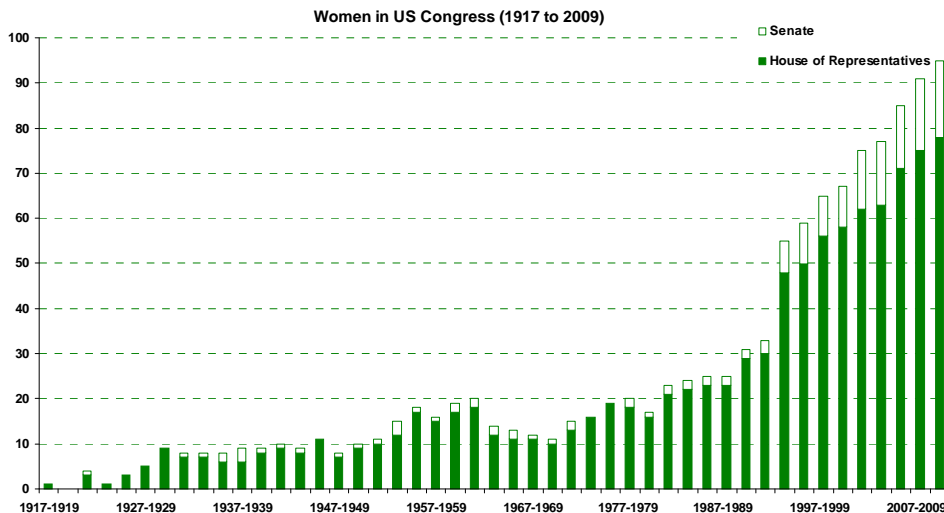


Table 1 opposite shows the number of women Members at the beginning of recent Congresses.

Nine are House Members (2% of the House) and two are Senators (2% of the Senate). One of these Members is of African American as well as Filipino heritage, and is also included in the numbers above.

The first African American Member of Congress was Hiram Rhodes Revels who served in the Senate in the 41st Congress (1870). The first African American Member of the House was Joseph H. Rainey who also served in the 41st Congress.

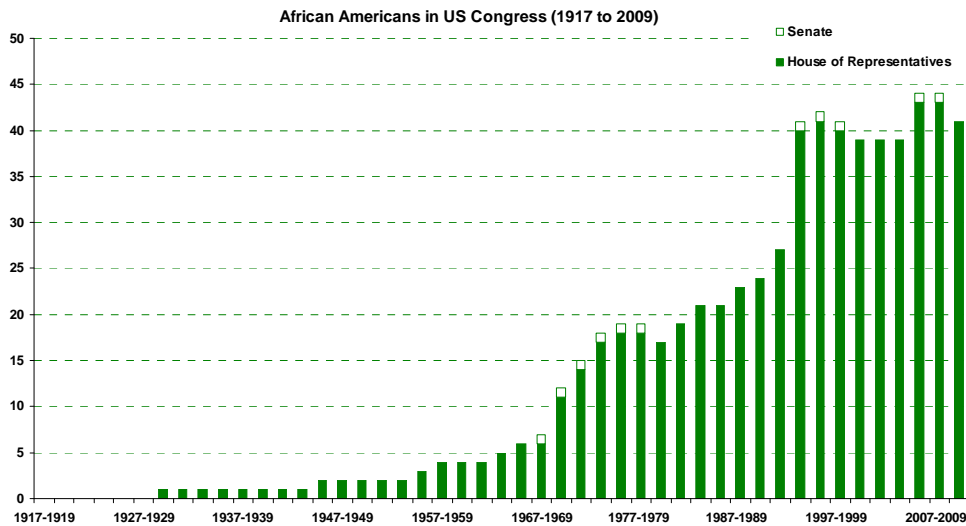


Table 2 opposite shows how ethnic groups were represented at the start of recent Congresses.

Table 2 Ethnic Groups in Congress, 1979 to 2009

Congress	House	Percentage of total House	Senate	Percentage of total Senate	Total
<b>96<sup>th</sup> (1979-1980)</b>					
African-Americans	17	3.9	0	0	17
Hispanic/Latinos	7	1.5	0	0	7
Asian/Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islanders	4	.9	3	3	7
Native Americans:	0	0	0	0	0
<b>101<sup>st</sup> (1989-1990)</b>					
African-Americans	24	5.5	0	0	24
Hispanic/Latinos	13	2.9	0	0	13
Asian/Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islanders	6	1.4	2	2	8
Native Americans	0	0	1	1	1
<b>106<sup>th</sup> (1999-2000)</b>					
African-Americans:	39	8.9	0	0	39
Hispanic/Latinos:	21	4.8	0	0	21
Asian/Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islanders	6	1.4	2	2	8
Native Americans	0	0	1	1	1
<b>110<sup>th</sup> (2007-2008)</b>					
African-Americans	41	9.2	1	1	42
Hispanic/Latinos	24	5.5	3	3	27
Asian/Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islanders	7	1.5	2	2	9
Native Americans	1	.2	0	0	1
<b>111<sup>th</sup> (2009-2010)</b>					
African-Americans	41	9.3	0	0	41
Hispanic/Latinos	28	6.3	3	3	31
Asian/Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islanders	9	2	2	2	11
Native Americans	1	.2	0	0	1

The 111<sup>th</sup> Congress includes the first Vietnamese American to serve in history. There is also one Native American (American Indian)—a member of the Chickasaw tribe—serving in the House<sup>iv</sup>. Thirteen Members (twelve Representatives, one Senator), of varying ethnicities, were born outside of the United States. Their places of birth include Canada, Cuba, Japan, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Peru, Taiwan and Vietnam.

## F. Educational Background

Continuing an upward trend in recent Congresses, the vast majority (95%) of Members of the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress hold university degrees. Congressional Research Service research indicates that 27 Members of the House and one Senator have no educational degree beyond a high school (secondary school) diploma. On the other extreme, twenty-three Representatives (but no Senators) have doctoral (Ph.D.) degrees, and 17 House Members and three Senators have a medical degree.

By comparison, 30 years ago in the 96<sup>th</sup> Congress (1979-80), at least 48 Members of the House (10% of the House) and 7 Senators (7% of the Senate) had no degree beyond a high school diploma.

## G. Religious Affiliation

According to the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, only five members (0.9%) of the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress do not cite a religious affiliation.<sup>v</sup> Protestants (Episcopalians, Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and others) constitute the majority religious affiliation of Members. Roman Catholics, however, account for the largest single denomination. Other affiliations represented in Congress include Christian Scientist, Greek Orthodox, Jewish, Quaker, Unitarian and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormon). There are also two Buddhists and two Muslims, all serving in the House. Buddhists and Muslims were first represented in Congress in the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress (2007-2008).

## H. Military Service

In the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress there are 121 Members who have served in the military, five fewer than in the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress.<sup>vi</sup> The House has 96 military veterans; the Senate 25. These Members served in World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Persian Gulf War, Afghanistan, Iraq, Kosovo, and during times of peace. Several Members are still serving as military reservists. The number of veterans in the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress reflects the trend of a steady decline in the number of Members with military service. Thirty years ago, there were 298 veterans in the 96<sup>th</sup>

Congress(1979-80); and forty years ago, 398 veterans served in the 91<sup>st</sup> Congress (1969-70).

## I. Service in Congress

The 111<sup>th</sup> Congress will begin with 68 “freshmen” Members who have never previously served; 10 Senators (10% of the Senate) and 58 House Members (13.2% of the House). (12.6% of the total Members of Congress)

The average length of service of House Members at the beginning of the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress is 11 years (5.5 House terms), almost a year longer than that of the previous Congress. The currently longest serving Representative was first sworn into Congress on December 13, 1955. The average length of service of Senators at the beginning of the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress is 12.9 years (2.2 Senate terms), slightly longer than that of the previous Congress. The currently longest serving Senator was first sworn in on January 3, 1959, and is the longest serving Senator in history.

<sup>i</sup> Historic data in the charts in this paper are taken from CRS reports *Women in the United States Congress: 1917-2008* (July 2008), *African American Members of the United States Congress: 1870-2008* (Nov 2008).

<sup>ii</sup> “111<sup>th</sup> Congress: Statistically Speaking,” *CQ Today*, vol. 44, no. 138 (November 6, 2008), p. 72, supplemented by CRS. Members often list more than one profession when surveyed by Congressional Quarterly, Inc.

<sup>iii</sup> The lone African American Senator in the previous Congress, Sen. Barack Obama of Illinois, is now the United States President-elect.

<sup>iv</sup> One Senator is of both Asian and Native Hawaiian ancestry.

<sup>v</sup> The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, “Faith on the Hill: the Religious Affiliations of Members of Congress,” <http://pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=379>

<sup>vi</sup> Congressional Quarterly, Inc. and the Military Officers Association of America, unpublished data supplied to CRS.