

★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

Robert C. Scott

1947–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRAT FROM VIRGINIA

1993–



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

Robert Cortez Scott was born in Washington, DC, on April 30, 1947, the son of Charles Waldo Scott, a doctor, and Mae Hamlin Scott, a teacher. He was raised in Newport News, Virginia. When Virginia officials resisted court-ordered public school integration in the late 1950s, Scott's parents sent him to Groton School, a college preparatory school in Massachusetts.¹ He graduated with a B.A. in liberal arts from Harvard University in the class of 1969 and four years later earned his J.D. at Boston College Law School.² While in law school, Scott served in the Massachusetts National Guard and later in the U.S. Army Reserve. After law school, he resettled in Newport News and opened a private law practice. From 1975 to 1980, Scott served as president of the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. In 1977, he won election to the Virginia house of delegates. He served there for five years until his election to the Virginia senate, where he served for another decade. Scott is divorced and has no children. He is a member of St. Augustine's Episcopal Church in Newport News, Virginia.

Scott's first attempt to win national office took place in 1986, when he challenged two-term Republican incumbent Herbert H. Bateman for a seat in the U.S. House. The campaign garnered wide name recognition for Scott, although he lost the general election by a margin of 56 to 44 percent.³ Following the 1990 Census, Virginia underwent reapportionment that increased its congressional delegation from 10 to 11. In order to comply with the Voting Rights Act, the Virginia assembly created a majority-black district that ran from southeast Richmond into portions of Newport News and Norfolk at the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay in southeastern

Virginia. Scott, who had represented portions of the new district in the state legislature, ran for the seat. In the Democratic primary, he received two-thirds of the vote, defeating two African-American women—a house of delegates member and the chair of the state retirement system. In the general election, he prevailed handily over Republican candidate Daniel Jenkins, with 79 percent of the vote.⁴ Scott was the first black since John Mercer Langston (1890–1891) to represent the state and (because of his Filipino ancestry on his mother’s side of the family) the first American of Filipino heritage to serve as a U.S. Representative.⁵ Despite court-ordered redistricting in 1997, Scott has never been seriously challenged in his seven re-election bids. In 1998, in the reapportioned district, Scott won with a 78 percent majority. In 2006, Scott won with 96 percent of the vote against write-in candidates.⁶

When Scott was sworn in to the 103rd Congress (1993–1995), he was appointed to three committees: Judiciary; Education and Labor; and Science, Space, and Technology. He served on the Science, Space, and Technology Committee for one term (1993–1995) and continues to serve on the Judiciary Committee and the Education and Labor Committee—though he took a leave of absence from the Education and Labor Committee during the 108th Congress (2003–2005) to serve on the prestigious Budget Committee. In the 110th Congress (2007–2009), he serves on the Education and Labor, Budget, and Judiciary committees and as chairman on the Judiciary Committee’s Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security.

Representative Scott earned a reputation as a forthright progressive, opposing efforts to amend the Constitution to outlaw flag desecration and promote prayer in public schools.⁷ He is also a strong advocate of reforming the juvenile justice system and of reducing crime by using prevention and intervention strategies. Scott has consistently fought against discrimination in employment by organizations that use federal funds. In 1997, Scott was a leading proponent of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which seeks to protect the right of children with disabilities to a free, appropriate public education. He also sponsored the Death in Custody Act, signed into law in 2000, which requires states to report the death of individuals apprehended or held by police.⁸ Scott has been a proponent of business interests in his district, which include major military and shipbuilding facilities such as the army’s Fort Eustis and the Hampton Roads shipyards.

FOR FURTHER READING

“Scott, Robert Cortez,” *Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, 1774–Present*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=S000185>.

NOTES

- 1 *Politics in America, 2006* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 2005): 1058; “Official Biography of Robert C. ‘Bobby’ Scott,” <http://www.house.gov/scott/about/biography.html> (accessed 30 November 2007).
- 2 “Robert C. Scott,” *Contemporary Black Biography*, Volume 23 (Detroit, MI: Gale Group, 1999) (hereinafter referred to as *CBB*).
- 3 “Election Statistics, 1920 to Present,” available at http://clerk.house.gov/member_info/electionInfo/index.html; *Politics in America, 2006*: 1058.
- 4 “Election Statistics, 1920 to Present,” available at http://clerk.house.gov/member_info/electionInfo/index.html; “Robert C. Scott,” *CBB*.
- 5 “Official Biography of Robert C. ‘Bobby’ Scott.” More than a dozen Filipinos served as Resident Commissioner for the nearly 50 years of Philippine annexation by the United States after the Spanish–American War in 1898. None of the Resident Commissioners were American citizens.
- 6 “Election Statistics, 1920 to Present,” available at http://clerk.house.gov/member_info/electionInfo/index.html; *Politics in America, 2008* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 2007): 1044.
- 7 *Politics in America, 2006*: 1057.
- 8 “Official Biography of Robert C. ‘Bobby’ Scott”; *Congressional Record*, House, 106th Cong., 2nd sess. (24 July 2000): 6737.