

# **Congresswoman Laura Richardson**

## *Proudly serving California's 37<sup>th</sup> District*

Congresswoman Laura Richardson's journey to Capitol Hill has been described by many as a meteoric rise to the 'American Dream.'

There is a piece of Congresswoman Richardson in most Americans. Her maternal great grandfather and great grandmother were opportunity-bound immigrants from Ireland and Germany, respectively; while her paternal great great ancestors had been enslaved. Both families eventually found their way to New York, where her mother and father were born.

Richardson's Caucasian mother and African American father were both disowned by their families for their commitment to marry, which was still illegal in more than 20 states at the time. The disapproval of the marriage influenced her father's decision to join the Army and build his family. Her parents would go on to participate in U.S.O. shows, where her father was a musician. He was later one of the few African Americans at that time to attend and graduate from Northwestern University.

The decade of the 1960s was a critical turning point for American history as racial turmoil increased, empowering the civil rights movement. In the midst of these turbulent times, Richardson's parents divorced when she was only two years old and her mother took on the challenge of raising her two African American girls on her own, which meant work during the day and school at night.

The challenging personal experiences she faced while growing up during the zenith of the civil rights movement prepared her for a lifelong commitment to public service, which for her began at just six years of age by watching Martin Luther King Jr., Robert Kennedy, Barbara Jordan, Shirley Chisholm and other trailblazers. Richardson would apply herself to the principle of working hard with limited resources, because it was the only life that she knew.

That same work ethic would eventually propel Richardson to try out for a spot on the 1980 United States Olympics women's basketball team. Meanwhile, in the classroom, her dedication paid off when she earned her first collegiate degree at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) in political science. It was during her successful 14-year stint in the private sector at the Xerox Corporation that Richardson earned her Masters degree in Business Administration from the University of Southern California (USC). Her full work history by itself details a story that is distinctly American, from cleaning toilets and working at McDonalds, the YMCA and UPS to serving as Lt. Governor Cruz Bustamante's Southern California director for five years, it is a chronicle of progression from humble to agent of change.

It did not take long for her to reaffirm the desires she had obtained as a child, to use experiences lived and learned to help others.

In 2000, Richardson was elected to the Long Beach City Council, where she served the fifth largest city in California in the second largest county in the United States. Relying on her business and financial educational background, then Councilwoman Richardson was instrumental in addressing a two-decade-old \$100 million plus budget deficit and in sticking to a four year plan for solving it.

Her impact on the Long Beach City Council was immediate. Richardson established fiscal policies, chaired the first ever Budget Oversight Committee and delivered more than \$40 million of development to traditionally underserved communities. Other significant accomplishments during her council tenure include securing the first funding for alley maintenance by the city of Long Beach and initiating the planning process for a Senior Transportation Program in the central area of Long Beach.

In 2006, she was elected to a seat in the California State Legislature, where she quickly earned the leadership position of Assistant Speaker Pro Tem, which allowed her to preside over the legislative business of more than 36 million Californians. She was the first South Bay area freshman and African American woman to hold the prestigious leadership role; she ultimately added the coveted committee assignments of Health and Human Services, Government Organization, Transportation & Infrastructure and Utilities & Commerce. During her time in the Legislature, she succeeded in having three bills signed by the Governor, laws vital to the Legislature's ability to further the initiatives of expanding access to healthcare, empowering public education and ensuring safe neighborhoods.

Early in 2007, after a brief, but effective, as evidenced by her number of bills signed by the governor, six months in the California Assembly, Richardson defeated 16 candidates in a special election to win her first term as a member of the U.S. House of Representatives, serving California's culturally and economically diverse 37<sup>th</sup> Congressional District. She is currently one of 74 women, 42 African Americans and 53 members representing California in the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress. She serves as a member of the House committees on Transportation & Infrastructure and Homeland Security and is the chair of the Homeland Security Subcommittee on Emergency Communications, Preparedness, and Response. Also under Homeland Security, she serves on the subcommittee on Emerging Threats, Cybersecurity, and Science and Technology. For Transportation and Infrastructure she is on four subcommittees those on Aviation; Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation; Highways and Transit; and Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials. She also sits more than 30 caucuses, including the Congressional Black Caucus, the New Democrats Coalition, the Congressional Progressive Caucus and the Asian Pacific American Caucus.

While in Congress, Richardson has been an active participant in creating and improving important legislation. She has worked to improve health care with the Equal Rights for Health Care Act Title 42. She has strongly focused on improving and supporting the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles and their surrounding communities with legislation like the Clean Low-Emission Authorization Nationwide (CLEAN) Ports Act of 2009 and the Harbor Maintenance Trust Reform Act. She has also been a proponent for ensuring

there is sufficient infrastructure in place to aid in national defense issues, such as with her First Line of Defense Infrastructure Improvement Act.

Congresswoman Richardson is believed to be the only individual to have served at all three major levels of government, local, state and federal, in a span of less than one year. This prompted one of the nation's oldest newspapers to hail her achievements, citing her "meteoric rise as nothing short of amazing."