


STEVE COHEN (D-TN-09)**IN OFFICE**

Up for re-election in 2016


5th Term

Re-elected in 2014


CONTACT

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BGOV BIOGRAPHY

By Brian Nutting, Bloomberg News

Steve Cohen's voting record, rhetoric and legislative priorities all show him to be to the left on the political spectrum, keeping him in tune with his urban, majority-black Memphis constituency.

He's a member of the Progressive Caucus, a group of the most liberal members of Congress, and he casts a dependably Democratic vote. On his congressional website, he touts his high ratings from a long list of liberal interest groups. His website doesn't highlight the obverse: the American Conservative Union's lifetime rating for Cohen was 3 percent and his Club for Growth rating was 7 percent through 2013.

He represents the largest percentage of black constituents of any white lawmaker in Congress. In the 113th Congress, Tennessee's 9th District is 63 percent black, according to 2010 Census figures, and its median income was the lowest in the state.

Cohen, who is Jewish, has won 11 elections, at the local, state and congressional level, successfully persuading minority voters that he has their interests at heart and can best represent them. In each of his House elections, Cohen has defeated black opponents in the Democratic primary and before going on to win general elections.

He is a lifetime member of the NAACP and tried, unsuccessfully, to join the Congressional Black Caucus. In August 2008, however, he won House approval of his resolution offering a formal federal government apology for slavery and racial segregation policies.

A former criminal defense and personal injury lawyer, Cohen can be tart-tongued. In his 2006 House campaign, the Memphis Commercial Appeal described him as "pugnacious" and quoted a former state Senate colleague as saying that Cohen isn't a "buddy-buddy type of guy."

Cohen's priorities, dating back to his long tenure in local and state politics, include health care. During his term as commissioner of Shelby County, Tennessee, he voted for a measure to help a regional hospital, and he has supported

universal health care over the years.

In the House, he has been a leading champion of the 2010 health care law and in the 112th Congress complained about Republican “lies” about the law, comparing the party’s effort to gut or repeal the law to the work of Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi propagandist who famously utilized the “big lie” technique.

In 2013, when the Senate was considering gun control legislation in the aftermath of a school shooting in Connecticut, Cohen told a television interviewer that for some opponents of gun control, “I think their guns are right there next to their Bibles,” generating backlash from many conservatives. He said he’d like to see strong background checks, along with an increased focus on mental health issues. Cohen had said in 2011 after House colleague Gabrielle Giffords was shot in Tucson that he was considering applying for a handgun permit.

Cohen serves on the Judiciary Committee, where midway in the 113th Congress he took the seat as ranking Democrat on the Constitution and Civil Justice Subcommittee. His interests include criminal justice sentencing, support for the Legal Services Corp., and easing college student loans via bankruptcy.

He took an Obama administration anti-drug official to task in 2014, demanding to know why the federal government still treated marijuana as a drug in the same category as heroin. “Ask the late Philip Seymour Hoffman,” an actor who died of a heroin overdose, “if you could. Nobody dies from marijuana. People die from heroin,” he said. “Every second that we spend in this country trying to enforce marijuana laws is a second that we’re not enforcing heroin laws. And heroin and meth are the two drugs that are ravaging our country.”

He’s also on the Transportation and Infrastructure panel, where he looks out for the interests of the Memphis airport which, thanks to the presence of Federal Express, is the busiest cargo airport in the world.

In 2014, he and several other Tennessee lawmakers wrote to Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx, urging the FAA to take steps to ensure the safe handling of musicians’ instruments aboard passenger flights.

Early Years

Cohen was born in Memphis and moved around as a youngster as his father pursued his post-medical school training as a pediatrician. Cohen contracted polio when he was 5, and its effects linger. He says his legislative career has been shaped by the hardships he faced as a child.

He was interested in politics as a youth, and amassed a large collection of campaign buttons. He says he registered to vote on the same day he filed to run for office. He had just turned 21, the voting age at the time, and he filed to run for the Tennessee House. He lost that bid, in 1970, yet remained active in politics behind the scenes, including service on a state constitutional convention.

In 1978 he won a two-year term on the Shelby County Commission and in 1982 was elected to the Tennessee Senate. During Cohen’s 24 years in Tennessee’s Senate, he backed issues such as women’s and civil rights. After trying for 20 years, he was able to win approval of a state constitutional amendment to permit Tennessee to implement a lottery, with the proceeds dedicated to education.

He tried twice, unsuccessfully, to move to a higher office; he sought the Democratic nomination for governor in 1994 and for the U.S. House in 1996. The 1996 race was against Harold Ford Jr., for the seat left open when Harold Ford Sr. retired. The younger Ford won easily. Ten years later, when Ford Jr. gave up the seat to make an unsuccessful race for the Senate, Cohen tried again. Cohen finished first in a 15-candidate Democratic primary and handily won the general election in the solidly Democratic 9th District.

He emerged from a tough, racially-charged primary campaign in 2008, and has faced black opponents in the primary every two years.

Cohen was involved in an embarrassing episode in 2013, when he mistakenly sent out a public Twitter message to an attractive Texas college woman. He said that he had discovered a few years earlier that she was his daughter. In a strange twist, several months later a DNA test showed that Cohen actually wasn’t her father. He said he was “stunned and dismayed” at that news, telling the Washington Post, “for three and a half years I had a daughter and it was nice to care about somebody and share.”

Updated Sept. 23, 2014

BIO FROM REPRESENTATIVE'S WEBSITE

From the Representative's Website

Bloomberg GOVERNMENT

Congressman Steve Cohen is a fourth-generation Memphian who has dedicated his life to public service. As a child, he was stricken with polio, but through hard work, he was able to beat this debilitating disease. The challenges of living with polio as a youngster taught him early in life how to overcome obstacles through persistence and determination, values which would shape his career as a legislator. Filing to run for office on the same day he first registered to vote, Congressman Cohen stepped onto the path that has defined his life and affected the lives of people in Memphis, across Tennessee and now across America throughout his career in national, state and local politics.

During his term as a Shelby County Commissioner, Congressman Cohen cast one of the essential votes for the creation of The MED. This would be the first in a long line of votes during his career that would define his legislative philosophy- fighting to ensure the basic human rights of every American, such as access to health care.

During his 24 years in the Tennessee State Senate, Congressman Cohen amassed a strong record of passionate, honest and unselfish service. He consistently spurned special interests to stand up for the people's interests. On issues ranging from women's rights to animal welfare, Congressman Cohen was a relentless advocate in the Tennessee State Senate even in the face of overwhelming opposition. Before he was elected to Congress, he became known throughout the state as the 'Father of the Tennessee Lottery,' after leading the referendum effort that instituted arguably the most successful education initiative in Tennessee history.

Since the inception of the Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarship program in 2004, over \$2.7 billion has gone to students continuing their education at the college level. As a State Senator, Congressman Cohen fought for nearly twenty years before the State Lottery was established. Countless students have benefited from Congressman Cohen's tireless efforts to provide Tennesseans with access to affordable, quality, post-secondary education.

Upon election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2006, Congressman Cohen immediately distinguished himself on the Hill for his thoughtful legislation and quick wit. His pointed questioning of Bush Administration officials like Alberto Gonzalez, David Addington, Monica Goodling and Michael Mukasey in the highly influential Judiciary Committee quickly earned Congressman Cohen the reputation as a champion of government accountability and a fierce interrogator. Speaker Nancy Pelosi even referred to him as the 'conscience of the freshman class' in 2008. In August of 2008, he was instrumental in passing H.Res.194, a House resolution apologizing for the enslavement and racial segregation of African Americans. This historic legislation marked the first time the United States government has ever apologized for these past injustices. He has remained a steadfast leader on issues of importance to the people of the 9th District, leading the policy debate on issues like infant mortality, universal health care, the economy, crime and criminal rehabilitation, transportation and infrastructure, and of course, education.

Congressman Cohen has also dedicated himself to providing outstanding constituent service to the citizens of Memphis. The doors of his District Office in the Clifford Davis/Odell Horton Federal Building are always open for constituents, and Congressman Cohen held more than a dozen town halls around the city which often included visiting leaders such as Judiciary Chairman John Conyers (MI-14) and singer/activist Harry Belafonte. He has never faltered in fighting for those who do not have the power bestowed by wealth and advantage, and his goal is as it has always been- to ensure that everyone ^ regardless of race, class or creed ^ has the opportunity to achieve their American dream.

PERSONAL PROFILE

COMMITTEES

[House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure](#)

[House Committee on the Judiciary](#)

[Joint Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe](#)

CAUCUSES

[Congressional Azerbaijani Caucus](#)

[I-69 Congressional Caucus](#)

[Congressional Documentary Film and Book Caucus](#)

Birthdate 05/24/1949

Birthplace Memphis, TN

Political Party Democratic Party

Marital Status Single

Residence Memphis, TN

Religion Jewish

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Education

Vanderbilt University

Bachelor's Degree 1971

Univ of Memphis Schl of Law

JD 1973

1978 - 1980 Commissioner, County of Shelby TN
1982 - 2006 State Senator.

(TN)Senate 01-03-2007 - Present
Representative:Tennessee, (US)House of
Representatives