



UNITED STATES SENATOR ★ ILLINOIS

RICHARD J. DURBIN

BIOGRAPHY

Senator Dick Durbin was elected by his fellow Democratic Senators in December 2004 to the Senate's second highest ranking Democratic leadership post. Durbin's election as Assistant Minority Leader, also known as Democratic Whip, will mark only the fifth time in history that an Illinois senator has served as a Senate leader.

Durbin, a Democrat from Springfield, is the 47th U.S. Senator from the State of Illinois and the first Illinois senator to serve on the U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee in more than a quarter of a century. He is the state's senior senator and convener of the bipartisan Illinois delegation.

Elected to the U.S. Senate on November 5, 1996 and re-elected in 2002, Durbin fills the seat left vacant by the retirement of his long-time friend and mentor, U.S. Senator Paul Simon.

In 1999, Senate Democratic Leader Tom Daschle (D-SD) appointed Durbin to the Senate's leadership team, Assistant Democratic Floor Leader. In 2000, Durbin served as Co-Chairman of the Democratic Platform Committee and also was Co-Chairman of the Atlantic Conference sponsored by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations. He is a founding member of the Senate Global AIDS Caucus.

Improving Health Care: The House author of landmark legislation to ban smoking on commercial airline flights, Durbin has worked in the Senate to protect children from the harm caused by tobacco. For his work, he was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award by the American Lung Association.

Among his other health achievements, Durbin has worked successfully for increased federal funding to prevent childhood asthma, increase immunizations and expand medical research. He has successfully fought to increase the share of federal funding dedicated to combating AIDS worldwide. He has also been a leader in promoting organ and tissue donation. In the spring of 2004, Durbin put forth a plan to give small businesses affordable choices among private health insurance plans and expand access to coverage for their employees.

Biographical Facts

Name

Richard J. Durbin

Born

November 21, 1944 in East St. Louis, IL

Parents

William Durbin and Ann Durbin (née Kutkin)

Family

Married to Loretta Schaefer Durbin
Three children and one grandchild

Education

Assumption High School, East St. Louis, IL
Georgetown University, B.S., 1966
Georgetown University, J.D., 1969

Occupation

Attorney/Legislator

Honorary Degrees

Millikin University, 1994
Lincoln College, 1997
Illinois Institute of Technology, 2003

Public Office

Jan. 1983 – Jan. 1997, U.S. House of Representatives
Jan. 1997 – Present, U.S. Senate

In 1999, Durbin was honored as the American Public Health Association's "Legislator of the Year," and in 2001 he received the American Medical Association's Dr. Nathan Davis Award for Outstanding Government Service.

Protecting Consumers: Consumer protection is high on Durbin's list of priorities. Continuing an effort spurred by a meeting with the mother of a Chicago six-year-old who died after eating contaminated hamburger, Durbin led the effort to modernize the fragmented federal food safety system under a single food-safety agency.

Durbin also led the effort to ban ephedra, a dangerous product sold as a nutritional supplement and has introduced legislation to require manufacturers of other dietary supplements to ensure their products are safe before they are sold. He secured \$2.8 million for the implementation of new safety standards to protect patients from injuries related to re-use of medical devices that are intended to be used only once.

Leading Gun Safety Efforts: Durbin has worked for gun safety legislation to keep guns out of the hands of children. He introduced bipartisan legislation to hold adults responsible if they fail to lock up their firearms and the weapons are subsequently taken by a child and used to kill or injure another person.

He also teamed up with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) and local law enforcement agencies to launch an initiative to help Illinois become the first state to voluntarily trace every crime gun recovered from a crime scene. It was the first comprehensive statewide effort in Illinois to encourage all local law enforcement agencies to work with the ATF to better use crime-gun tracing information to reduce gun trafficking and other criminal endeavors.

Fighting for Farmers: Durbin has been a champion of Illinois farmers and has worked to promote ethanol use. In 1998, he secured passage of a provision extending the ethanol tax incentive to 2007. In 2000, he worked with other members of the Illinois delegation for funding for the construction of an ethanol research pilot plant near the Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville campus, a project he has promoted since the early 1990s. The full deductibility of health insurance costs for the self-employed – including farmers – has been a career-long battle for Durbin, ending in a victory in 2003.

Farm organizations across the state have recognized his consistent leadership and the Illinois Farm Bureau awarded him its "Friend of Agriculture" Award in 2000.

Working for a Fair Tax Code: Durbin's tax cut agenda includes tax credits for small businesses buying health insurance for their low-income workers, estate tax relief for family-owned small businesses and farms, tax incentives to promote charitable giving, and tax credits for long-term care insurance, child care and college tuition.