14 Tom Sawyer (D)

Of Akron — Elected 1986, 6th term

Biographical Information

Born: Aug. 15, 1945, Akron, Ohio.
Education: U. of Akron, B.A. 1968, M.A. 1970.
Occupation: Teacher.
Family: Wife, Joyce Handler; one child.
Religion: Presbyterian.
Political Career: Ohio House, 1977-83; mayor of Akron, 1984-86.
Capitol Office: 1414 Longworth Bldg. 20515; 225-5231.

Committees

Commerce
Finance & Hazardous Materials; Oversight & Investigations; Telecommunications, Trade & Consumer Protection



In Washington: Sawyer's move onto the Commerce Committee at the start of the 105th Congress finally gives this diligent and detail-minded Democrat a place on a plum committee, something he had sought for a number of years.

The committee's broad legislative reach affords Sawyer the chance to weigh in on an array of issues and will broaden his campaign fundraising contacts, an important consideration for the six-term veteran, as the 1996 election marked his second straight sub-55 percent tally.

One of the foremost issues on Commerce's radar screen in the 105th — an overhaul of the nation's laws that regulate electric utilities — is of particular interest to Sawyer. Any change in those laws could have a lasting impact on the coal-burning utilities in his home state.

And in another area where Commerce legislates — health care policy — Sawyer has been active. He and fellow Ohioan David L. Hobson, a Republican, persuaded the House to add a paperwork-related provision to a broader health insurance measure in the 104th Congress. Their language seeks to speed the transmission of insurance data to doctors and hospitals by electronic means, thus eliminating paperwork and reducing opportunities for fraud.

When Democrats ran the House, Sawyer was a subcommittee chairman on the Post Office and Civil Service Committee. But in the 104th, the new GOP majority abolished that panel, and Sawyer occupied himself on two other committees: Economic and Educational Opportunities, and Transportation and Infrastructure. (In 1997 he relinquished those slots to move to Commerce, an "exclusive" committee under House Democratic rules). Also in the 104th, he was tapped to head a Democratic task force on retirement that issued a report late in 1996 on steps that should be taken to protect Americans' retirement security.

For the most part, though, Sawyer maintained a low profile during his first term in the minority. Even in his role as a member of the House ethics committee — whose leaders, Republican Nancy L. Johnson of Connecticut and Democrat Jim McDermott of Washington, and other members battled openly about the investigation of Speaker Newt Gingrich — Sawyer served quietly and stayed above the fray. It was Sawyer's thoughtful demeanor, combined with the respect he enjoys from members from both parties, that made him a logical choice in 1993 to fill a Democratic vacancy on the politically sensitive committee.

A former teacher who once chaired the Education Committee in the Ohio House, Sawyer in his freshman House term got a seat on the Education and Labor Committee, the scene of many partisan battles. Sawyer distinguished himself as a serious-minded debater not given to polarizing rhetoric. "You've got to be patient," Sawyer once said with reference to his committee work. "You get into a position where you're trusted by sufficient numbers of others in those areas where you hope to make a difference."

In 1995, Republicans renamed the committee Economic and Educational Opportunities, and it was there that Sawyer got engaged in one of the few issues that thrust him into the center of the action in the 104th. The panel moved a bill, known as the TEAM Act, that would have allowed employee-management teams in nonunion workplaces to discuss wage and employment issues. Both in committee and on the House floor, Sawyer offered an amendment that instead would have updated the nation's labor laws to specify how employers could participate in employee teams without making them forums for negotiations on wages and working conditions.

Both the committee and the House defeated Sawyer's amendment — the House vote was 221-204 — but President Clinton vetoed the legislation in 1996.

On the postal committee in the 102nd and 103rd Congresses, Sawyer carved a policy niche for himself as overseer of the decennial census, devoting his energies to issues great and small that revolved around the counting of U.S. citizens.

OHIO 14
Northeast -- Akron

The 14th is in a part of Ohio that was built on rubber — tires in particular. At one time, nearly 90 percent of America's tires were manufactured here.

Within the district's confines in Akron — once referred to as the "premier factory town in America" — are the corporate headquarters of the Goodyear and Goodrich tire companies. Bridgestone-Firestone, which once loomed as a symbol of rubber's economic dominance in the 14th, moved its corporate headquarters to Nashville in 1992.

The 14th became one of the most Democratic districts in the state on the strength of votes from the blue-collar workers who kept the rubber factories humming.

But the district's economy is changing. While the major rubber companies are still important employers, the jobs with a future are largely white-collar. The last quarter-century has seen a steady transfer of manufacturing from the old, high-wage factories in Akron to new plants in lower-wage areas of the Sun Belt. Many Akron residents have left: The city's 1990 population of 223,000 was less than it was more than a half-century ago.

But city leaders are hopeful about revitalization efforts. Akron's AA minor-league baseball team, the Akron Aeros, opened its first season in a new downtown stadium in 1997, and the city is renovating recreational areas along the Ohio & Erie Canal.

Sawyer and other Akron leaders have fought to forge a high-tech future for the city, and they have had enough success that Akron's unemployment rate in recent years has been lower than that of some other industrial centers in northern Ohio.

What has kept the city alive through these tough years is this: While the tire companies have quit manufacturing here, their headquarters and labs have remained, employing engineers, scientists and executives who work more with polymers these days than with rubber.

Population flight out of Akron has meant that the city is now smaller than its britches. It is an area with public facilities and a housing stock built to handle far more people than live here. The city is doing better than others in the area.

In the boom years of the rubber industry before World War II, Akron was a mecca for job-seeking Appalachians. The annual West Virginia Day was one of the city's most popular events, and it was said that more West Virginians lived in Akron than in Charleston.

These days, the Appalachian descendants combine with blacks, ethnics and the academic community at the University of Akron to keep the city reliably Democratic. North of Akron, suburbs and farmland in northern Summit County provide Republican votes.

Usually, they are too few to overcome the Democratic advantage in Akron and swing the 14th to the GOP. Both Jimmy Carter in 1980 and Michael S. Dukakis in 1988 won Akron by a wide enough margin to carry Summit County narrowly. Bill Clinton won the county's vote by comfortable margins in both 1992 and 1996.

1990 Population: 570,900. White 500,576 (88%), Black 62,400 (11%), Other 7,924 (1%). Hispanic origin 3,419 (1%). 18 and over 433,423 (76%), 62 and over 93,084 (16%). Median age: 34.

But with the Republican takeover of the House, Sawyer lost both the clout and even the committee assignment needed to continue in that role. The GOP decision to reorganize the House, shrinking the number of committees and subcommittees, caused a cascade of displaced Democrats, and Sawyer was a casualty. When the music stopped and the Post Office and Civil Service panel was merged into a new Government Reform and Oversight Committee, he lost his seat altogether.

Before 1995, Sawyer worked hard at policing the accuracy of the 1990 census and the calculations that followed, a task that fell to him as chairman of the panel's Subcommittee on Census and Population. When evidence pointed to an undercount with a bias against minorities, Sawyer pressed for an adjustment of the head count, but he was rebuffed by the Bush administration and in the courts.

Before yielding his gavel in the GOP takeover, Sawyer was directing his subcommittee toward the task of overseeing the Census Bureau's efforts to produce a more sophisticated and accurate census in 2000.

At Home: Sawyer has not lost an election in a political career than spans more than two decades and includes stints as mayor of Akron and as a state legislator in addition to his 10 years in the House, but his hold on the 14th District has been tested in his past two bids for re-election. He received 52 percent of the vote in 1994 and 54 percent in 1996.

In 1996, Sawyer's GOP challenger was former U.S. attorney Joyce George, an abortion rights supporter who was heavily courted for the campaign by prominent Republicans, including Speaker Gingrich. But after winning by just a four-point margin in 1994, Sawyer moved out to a 12-point victory over George, who finished with 42 percent; a Natural Law Party candidate got four percent. Sawyer had the advantage of sharing the

Democratic ballot with Clinton, who beat GOP nominee Bob Dole by 20 points in the district's presidential voting.

Previously, Sawyer's two closest calls at the polls came against the same Republican: former Summit County prosecutor Lynn Slaby, who held Sawyer to 52 percent in 1994 and 54 percent in 1986.

In his 1994 rematch with Sawyer, Slaby did his best to link Sawyer to Clinton, whose popularity was then at a low point. Slaby's attempts to appeal to labor won him the endorsement of a local union or two, but Sawyer held on despite the heavy GOP tide and his 1993 vote for NAFTA — a move that angered labor and earned him a nominal primary challenge.

Two decisive, late-campaign moves helped him prevail. The first was a bold ad he put on the air in the campaign's final days, essentially labeling Slaby a liar for an assertion he made that Sawyer wished to slash Social Security. The second was a well-honed eleventh-hour effort to appeal to the district's black voters: Hours before the polls opened, Sawyer had Martin Luther King III trolling the district in an effort to inspire black voters to come to the polls.

Sawyer first won the district in 1986 after surviving a primary battle between the new Akron and the old Akron. On one side was Sawyer, the city's young mayor and an apostle of high technology. From a white-collar background, he was the son of a prominent Akron businessman. On the other side was Democratic state Sen. Oliver Ocasek — a 60-year-old, Humphrey-style, pro-labor war horse.

When Sawyer announced his House bid, some Akron residents were upset. His election to the mayoralty in 1983 ended nearly 20 years of GOP rule, and he had promised to serve at least one full four-year term as mayor. But he was running for higher office after only three years. Sawyer, though, received a key boost when retiring Democratic Rep. John F. Seiberling endorsed his candidacy.

Sawyer proved to be the consummate media-age politician. While Ocasek was garrulous and emotional and boasted ties to old-time labor leaders, Sawyer was reserved, methodical and adept at the task of nuts-and-bolts organization. He emerged from the primary with a comfortable 49 percent to 39 percent victory.

Sawyer then had to get past Slaby, the Republicans' most prominent local officeholder. Although Slaby ran a well-funded campaign in which he emphasized his blue-collar roots, he could not get an angle on Sawyer. When Slaby called his foe a tax-and-spend liberal, Sawyer noted that Akron had not raised taxes during his mayoralty. Sawyer took the open seat with 54 percent and won re-election comfortably until 1994.

HOUSE ELECTIONS

1996 General		
Tom Sawyer (D)	124,136	(54%)
Joyce George (R)	95,307	(42%)
Terry E. Wilkinson (NL)	8,976	(4%)
1996 Primary		
Tom Sawyer (D)	32,297	(80%)
Ken Mack (D)	4,382	(11%)
John B. Nicholas (D)	3,866	(10%)
1994 General		
Tom Sawyer (D)	96,274	(52%)
Lynn Slaby (R)	89,106	(48%)

Previous Winning Percentages: **1992** (68%) **1990** (60%) **1988** (75%) **1986** (54%)

CAMPAIGN FINANCE

	Receipts	Receipts from PACs	Expenditures
1996			
Sawyer (D)	$522,163	$316,725 (61%)	$523,412
George (R)	$291,433	$23,339 (8%)	$279,210
1994			
Sawyer (D)	$563,931	$291,149 (52%)	$595,448
Slaby (R)	$282,424	$30,196 (11%)	$256,758

DISTRICT VOTE FOR PRESIDENT

1996		1992	
D	121,987 (53%)	**D**	119,144 (46%)
R	76,354 (33%)	**R**	81,603 (31%)
I	30,442 (13%)	**I**	60,338 (23%)

KEY VOTES

1997	
Ban "partial birth" abortions	N
1996	
Approve farm bill	N
Deny public education to illegal immigrants	N
Repeal ban on certain assault-style weapons	N
Increase minimum wage	Y
Freeze defense spending	N
Approve welfare overhaul	Y
1995	
Approve balanced-budget constitutional amendment	N
Relax Clean Water Act regulations	N
Oppose limits on environmental regulations	Y
Reduce projected Medicare spending	N
Approve GOP budget with tax and spending cuts	N

VOTING STUDIES

	Presidential Support		Party Unity		Conservative Coalition	
Year	**S**	**O**	**S**	**O**	**S**	**O**
1996	85	11	91	7	37	63
1995	90	10	91	9	37	63
1994	90	8	97	2	28	64
1993	87	12	96	3	30	66
1992	17	83	95	3	15	85
1991	31	69	91	6	14	86

INTEREST GROUP RATINGS

Year	ADA	AFL-CIO	CCUS	ACU
1996	90	n/a	25	0
1995	90	100	29	0
1994	90	78	50	5
1993	85	92	30	9
1992	95	83	38	4
1991	90	92	30	0

ZIP CODES

Ohio's 14th District

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