

Almanac

Rep. Garret Graves (R)

Louisiana | District 6

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🖱 <http://garretgraves.house.gov>

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Biography

Elected: 2014, 1st term.

Born: January 31, 1972, Baton Rouge, LA

Home: Baton Rouge, LA

Education: Attended University of Alabama (1990-91), Louisiana Tech University (1993-95), American University (1996)

Professional Career: State coastal authority chairman, 2008-14; congressional aide

Ethnicity: White/Caucasian

Religion: Roman Catholic

Family: Married (Carissa) , 3 children

Republican Garret Graves, familiar with Washington as a former congressional aide and known statewide as Gov. Bobby Jindal's adviser on coastal restoration, defeated the 87-year-old former governor and ex-federal convict Edwin Edwards in a Dec. 6, 2014 runoff to take the open 6th District seat.

Graves is a native of Baton Rouge who has been described in media reports as both egotistic and humble, but also as a skillful politician and policy wonk. He grew up with four siblings in what he has described as a modest home. He left for Washington in his early 20s and began his political career as an intern for Democratic then-Sen. John Breaux (though he says he has been a lifelong Republican). After a couple of months, he joined GOP Rep. Billy Tauzin's office and worked his way up the ladder. While on Capitol Hill, he also worked for the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee and the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

In 2008, the newly elected Jindal selected Graves to chair the Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority and serve as his coastal adviser. Graves earned praise for a \$50 billion, 50-year master plan to promote coastal restoration and improve hurricane protection, as well as for coordinating the state's response to the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. He also was Jindal's point man against a Southeast Louisiana Flood Protection Authority-East lawsuit against more than 100 oil and gas companies which alleged that decades of drilling and extraction had contributed to wetlands destruction.

Graves stepped down in February 2014 and quickly dove into the 6th District race to fill the seat vacated by GOP Rep. Bill Cassidy, who opted to challenge Democratic U.S. Sen. Mary Landrieu. In the November blanket primary, Edwards—who had been governor for 16 years and served eight years in federal prison on corruption charges—took 30 percent and Graves took 27 percent, setting up the December runoff.

Edwards became increasingly combative as the election drew near, but Graves fought back; at a final debate before the general election runoff, Graves said he "hasn't done anything illegal, immoral, or unethical." He also maintained his stance in support of reduced government and free-market principles, and called for a halt to welfare delivery in favor of incentivized hard work. "Our future is bright here. But we've got to get the federal government out of the way," he said at a final debate.

Graves also worked to convince voters his familiarity with Washington would be a benefit but that he was not a "Washington insider." And he far outraised and outspent Edwards; in one month after the primary, he raised more than Edwards had in the entire campaign. Graves's war chest included donations from both the Environmental Defense Fund PAC and Koch Industries, managed by the conservative Koch brothers. Graves also benefited from the fact that the district is predominantly white and conservative; in 2012, 66 percent voted for GOP presidential candidate Mitt Romney.

Edwards—whose colorful past exploits led to considerable national media interest in his candidacy—ran as a self-described New Deal Democrat and "old relic" who unabashedly favored government spending to help the district. Graves, for his part, expressed repeated surprise at the voters' selection of his runoff opponent. "This was the guy that was a legend or a folklore when I was a kid," Graves told National Public Radio. "And the fact that he's still around and we were just standing here debating him is really just a surreal experience."

Before the final election, with Graves leading in the polls, House Republican leaders announced they would assign him seats on the Transportation and Natural Resources committees.

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