An examination of the efforts by a congressman to address the needs of his constituency: the case of U.S. Representative Harold Ford of Memphis, Tennessee

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AN EXAMINATION OF THE EFFORTS BY A CONGRESSMAN TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF HIS CONSTITUENCY: THE CASE OF U.S. REPRESENTATIVE HAROLD FORD OF MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE

A DEGREE PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ATLANTA UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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ATLANTA, GEORGIA
JULY 1981
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ABSTRACT

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

YOUNG, PAULA E. B.A., Memphis State University, 1978

An Examination of the Efforts by a Congressman to Address the Needs of His Constituency: The Case of U.S. Representative Harold Ford of Memphis, Tennessee

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Degree paper dated June 29, 1981

The primary intent of this paper is to discuss the efforts of U.S. Representative Harold Ford, to address certain problems confronting members of his constituency. These efforts involve the introduction of legislation as well as dealing with a federal agency in order to assist the constituents.

These efforts on the part of Congressman Ford are very significant for several reasons: The intervention on behalf of the elderly residents represented an attempt to address the needs of one of the most neglected segments of the American population - the elderly. The Health Care Legislation introduced by the Congressman is more comprehensive than what exists at the moment; and the National Gas Pricing Amendments Act attempted to challenge the dominant role of the oligarchic oil companies in determining the price of natural gas.

The main sources of information were Congressional Research Service Reports, and Inter-office Memoranda from Congressman
Ford's Washington office. Also a wide variety of secondary information, periodicals and books was used.
I. INTRODUCTION

Congressman Harold E. Ford, a Democrat, from Memphis, was initially elected to represent the eighth district of Tennessee in 1973, when he unseated a three-term incumbent, Dan Kuykendall, a Republican. The election of Ford, a former state representative, strongly supported by the black community and a percentage of liberal-minded whites within the district, marked an astounding historical event. Black Memphians, were now confident that their needs and demands would be of concern to and advocated by their Congressional Representative, as opposed to their needs being overlooked, which may have been the case previously. The City of Memphis was astonished over the defeat of the political "giant" Dan Kuykendall, especially by a black person.

The recent redistricting of the city, placing more blacks into the eighth district, and the light turnout of conservative white voters, confident of Ford's inability to defeat Kuykendall in the run-off, contributed significantly to Congressman Ford's victory. Therefore, the black, twenty-eight year old funeral director successfully defeated the incumbent to become the first black to represent the State of Tennessee in the United States House of Representatives.

Congressman Ford is presently serving a fourth term.
in office and continues to earn the respect and support of his constituents. The Congressman now has, along with his district and Washington offices, in which the writer interned, a branch office and a mobile office within the district in order to more effectively assist the constituents by maintaining open lines of communication between himself and them. The functions performed in the district office of a Congressman are varied and are always in coordination with those functions performed in the Washington office. Casework and legislation are two functions that especially illustrate this point. The casework function is usually handled in the district office, and legislation is normally handled in Washington; yet these functions impact heavily upon one another. Casework is similar to project work, in that, it concerns organized groups or individuals competing for money from the federal government in various forms of disbursements such as grants.¹

Nearly every member of Congress performs casework to some extent, even though it is not fully accepted by many of them. One advantage of casework is that it is a means of determining the local impact of certain agency operations. Casework does not need to be initiated. It begins with the receipt of a letter or phone call or personal interviews with a constituent requesting Congressional assistance. The staff person or caseworker assigned to the case then decides which federal agency

has jurisdiction over the situation in question, along with how
the case should be handled, either by phone, letter or in per-
son. A case handled by phone is usually done when extensive
agency research is unnecessary to obtain the needed information-
the caseworker places a call to the appropriate department or
the agency's congressional liaison office. If the case is to
be handled by letter, a photostat copy of the constituent's
letter is made and forwarded to the appropriate agency along
with either a personally written memo or letter signed by the
Representative. Similarly, a case handled in person in the
member's district office is subjected to the same procedure as
those requests that emanated from correspondence.

It is quite difficult to calculate the effectiveness
of casework due to the limited amount of empirical data on the
number of cases dealt with by congressional offices.\(^2\) The
district office, being closer to the people, acknowledges in-
creased personal contact and communication with the constituents,
as well as, allowing staff persons to better understand and
validate constituent complaints or problems. For this reason,
casework is usually more effective in the district office.

The district headquarters, which basically has more
space than the Representative's Washington office, enables
more staff persons to maintain the casework, since the Wash-
ington staff must focus on the legislative duties of the

\(^2\)Mark D. Yacker, "Casework and the Role of a Caseworker
in a Congressional Office," CRS Report (Washington, D.C.,
congressional office. The legislative function of the congressional office entails varying tasks ranging from the House floor and committee activities to legislative research within the member's office concerning issues to be later introduced on the House floor. Apart from the various legislative duties in the member's Washington office, responding to correspondence, particularly from constituents, is the most time-consuming work. Although legislative correspondence does not necessarily decide the way a member will vote, it is still treated carefully and seriously. The legislative staff must be coordinated and well prepared in order to ensure that the Representative is adequately prepared to partake in the numerous legislative forums on Capitol Hill. The staff's responsibilities include familiarizing themselves with the committee report and content of legislation on the House floor, significant lobbying efforts supporting or opposing certain bills, awareness of possible amendments fellow members may be offering along with possible "parliamentary maneuvers" by other Representatives. The legislative staff person should always keep in mind the member's personality and political philosophy in researching legislation, drafting bills, and writing speeches, as well as ensuring that the Representative is consistent on decisions made regarding a particular issue. An especially important task of the Washington staff is to ensure that the member is thoroughly familiar with subjects to be discussed in future committee hearings, including other committee members' viewpoints, the pros and cons of each issue and how a
certain position will affect the Representative's constituency.  

As stated earlier, casework or constituent service, as it is sometimes referred to, may have a significant impact upon legislative functions. For example, whether a Member favors or opposes a certain piece of legislation may largely depend upon the needs of his constituency. These needs may be determined through the casework performed in the district office. Once a constituent contacts a Member regarding a particular problem, the Member is instantly made aware of certain needs of his constituency. Through casework, the Member is not only able to personally assist his constituents, earning votes along the way, but is also familiarized with the various pieces of legislation affecting his constituents which require his support. There are, however, problem situations that a Member's staff cannot handle through casework, and legislative action may be necessary to bring forth a change in order to correct the problem. These "unsolved" casework problems are usually referred to as "Congressional oversight." The term Congressional oversight applies when constituent problems and inquiries bring to the attention of legislators situations that require investigation in order to minimize or correct the problem through some form of legislative action.

Congressional oversight results from casework correspondence that either questions a Member's position on certain issues

or expresses concern about pertinent legislation affecting them. When casework correspondence functions as an instrument of Congressional oversight, it can be quite useful, as Kenneth Gray pointed out, it helps in keeping the bureaucracy accountable and open to all the people, and preserving decentralization of power in the American Federal System.  

Therefore, Congressional oversight may be said to act as a link between casework and legislation, for the reason that, it (oversight) binds the two functions in a way that benefits the constituent by prompting legislative action for constituent problems or inquiries.

The purpose of this study is to examine the efforts made by Congressman Ford to assist his constituents in dealing with a federal agency, as well as introducing pieces of legislation in order to aid the constituents in addressing some of their concerns. In addition, the study also examined the success and failure of these efforts, and their respective impact upon the constituency.

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II. THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

The Background of the Agency

The offices of Congressman Harold Ford have only been in existence since January 1974, after being elected to represent the Eighth Congressional District of Tennessee. The Washington office is composed of an administrative assistant, press secretary, several legislative assistants and clerical workers whose main function is to undertake legislative research in order to update the Congressman on significant issues affecting his constituency, and to sometimes recommend how the Congressman should react to the proposed legislation of a colleague requesting his support. The district office is structured similar to the Washington office, in that it employs an office manager, several caseworkers or constituent assistants, and a clerical worker, all of whom focus their attention toward directly assisting constituents, and keeping the Congressman informed of the needs and demands of the constituency. The branch and mobile offices are each manned by a single constituent assistant, and are situated within the community in order to maintain open lines of communication between the Congressman and his constituency, and to assure the constituents of his concern to meet their needs and demands.
The Internship Experience

The writer served as an intern in the office of U.S. Representative Harold Ford of Memphis, Tennessee from June 1980 until August of the same year. The writer worked in the Washington office and later in the district office in Memphis. Legislative tasks were assigned in Washington, and casework functions in Memphis. Legislative tasks that were performed included researching of House legislation in order to respond to constituent demands, always bearing in mind the particular views of the Congressman and how those views will affect his constituents. Casework duties involved assisting the Congressman's constituents in their dealing with federal agencies, and with problems of various natures ranging from interpreting acts of Congress, to assisting low-income individuals in dealing with the high costs of utilities.
III. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Casework, in most instances, is handled somewhat routinely within the district office. The procedure simply involves screening of the constituent correspondence for validity and then assigning the matter to a caseworker. However, there are cases that are exceptions, and require much more attention than that of a caseworker, especially when a considerable number of constituents complain about the same problem. When this happens, the situation is brought to the attention of the Congressman to be further investigated by the legislative staff in Washington, who make recommendations to him with respect to the steps that should be taken to resolve the problem. Problems of this nature confronted staff persons in the district office of Congressman Ford during the writer's internship. The major ones being the rent increase for senior citizens, the escalating price of natural gas across the nation, and the need for Medicare coverage of certain chronically ill elderly persons.

The main problems that confronted Representative Ford in addressing the needs of his constituency were lack of legislative support from his colleagues as well as bureaucratic intransigence in adhering strictly to the letter of the law.
IV. METHODOLOGY

The case study approach was utilized in the analysis of Congressman Ford's efforts to assist members of his constituency. This method allows the writer to examine and analyze the problem, and develop alternate courses of action or recommendations that may be used by the Congressman in future attempts to assist members of his constituency.

The writer used primary and secondary data collection techniques to gather relevant data for this study. Primary data collection techniques included participant observation and interviews. The participant observation technique furnished first-hand data on the daily work patterns of the Memphis and Washington offices, along with the Congressman's methods of handling casework in the district office and legislation in the Washington office.

Interviews were utilized to ascertain the attitudes of the constituents toward Congressman Ford concerning his efforts to assist them. Questions regarding how the constituents perceived the effectiveness of the Congressman's attempts to resolve constituent problems were posed by the writer. A total of forty constituents were questioned in regard to their satisfaction with Congressman Ford's performance as their Congressional representative, as far as meeting their needs. Special
emphasis was placed on their views of the Congressman's concerns of the resolution of their problems. An extensive interview was not conducted, and questions asked were done in a subtle manner, due to the fact that certain limitations were placed upon Congressional employees, particularly during the Congressman's election campaign. The sample interviewed represented a small segment of the Congressman's district of approximately 500,000 people, which is composed of the inner-city area of Memphis, excluding the wealthier suburbs and the county. The predominantly black district is made up of lower to middle class blacks as well as lower to middle class whites. However, the sample of persons questioned represents a cross section of that segment of the district which calls more upon Congressman Ford to solicit his help in resolution of their problems, lower to moderate income blacks. Forty of the 300 constituents assisted by caseworkers during the internship were selected on the basis of assistance requested of the Congressman. The interviewees were subtly asked five open-ended questions regarding their expectations of their Congressional representative, and the extent to which those expectations had been fulfilled. Only those constituents contacting the Congressman's district office with problems concerning the lack of adequate housing, or the inability to pay unaffordable utility bills were chosen for the interview.

Three of the Congressman's six Memphis staff members were also interviewed regarding their perceptions of the confidence and support the Congressman enjoyed from his constituency.
Questions posed to constituents and staff are in Appendices A and B. The secondary data were gathered from a variety of sources; numerous newspaper and journal articles such as the "Ford Report," "CRS Reports," and "Newsweek" were used for the purpose of providing the writer with information concerning casework, and legislative activities in the Congressional office.
V. AN ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM

A large number of Congressmen generally attempt to accommodate the needs of their Congressional districts to some extent. There are certain problems, however, that for various reasons, cannot be resolved by a single Member, but require the cooperation of federal departments and support of fellow colleagues in the House.

The first example of this involved the rate increase in rent charged to senior citizens in two privately run high-rise apartments within the Congressman's district in Memphis. After being contacted by a number of constituents in regard to the problem, Congressman Ford assigned the case to a member of his Washington staff to be further investigated, and to be brought to the attention of the federal government. The problem entails the increase in monthly rent rates of the high-rises by 27 percent. The residents of these high-rises include low to moderate income senior citizens, who will be unable to afford the sudden increase in rent payments. At the moment the residents are eligible to only receive federal assistance under Section 236.\footnote{Housing and Urban Development Act of 1968, Public Law 90-448, United States Statutes at Large, 90th Congress, 2nd Session, Vol. 82, p. 477 (1968).} Under Section 236, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD):
... allows for interest subsidies to be paid to the renter to enable eligible families to live in housing that would otherwise consume more than 25 percent of their income.

Since the residents of the Memphis high-rises are presently classified to receive federal assistance only under Section 236, the rent increases would impact greatly upon the limited incomes of the elderly residents.

Upon the initial opening of the high-rises for occupancy, the residents were in the low and moderate income brackets. However, due to inflation and other economic factors, the residents are now basically in the low and poverty level brackets. These people, therefore, are qualified for Section 8 housing, which would subsidize most of the family or individual's monthly rent, according to whatever the person could afford to pay for rent, by funneling "assistance to the builder or landlord, not directly to the household." Attempts to assist the residents of the high-rises by the Congressman's office have included contacting the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development to explore the possibility of obtaining Section 8 eligibility assistance for the residents and contacting the Memphis Housing Authority to seek alternate housing for these senior citizens if Section 8 associated funds are not obtained for the high-rises.

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8 Harold E. Ford, "Inter-Office Memoranda" (Washington, D.C., 1979).
The Congressman's intervention on behalf of the elderly residents in the high-rise apartments proved unsuccessful because of the strict adherence by HUD officials to bureaucratic rules and regulations. According to the officials of HUD, since the residents are currently under the Section 236 program they cannot be transferred to another government program.

The officials of HUD are quite aware of the severe impact that increases in the rent will have upon the residents of the apartments, since the tenants' sources of income are limited. However, because of the rigidity of bureaucratic rules and regulations, they were not able to respond to the genuine need of the elderly residents. According to Robert Merton:

An effective bureaucracy demands reliability of response and strict devotion to regulations.9

He further maintains that this is a source of the structural overconformity on the part of bureaucracy because:

a) Such devotion to the rules leads to their transformation into absolutes; they are no longer conceived as relative to a given set of purposes;

b) This interferes with ready adaptation under special conditions not clearly envisaged by those who drew up the general rules;

c) Thus, the very elements which conduce toward efficiency in general produce inefficiency in special instances.

The lack of flexibility on the part of bureaucratic officials to examine the particular circumstances of cases has

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done more harm to the clientele they are supposed to serve. Several instances can be cited that have had disastrous consequences simply by strict application of bureaucratic rules. The very impersonal nature of the bureaucratic structure has contributed towards the HUD officials indifference to respond to the needs of the elderly residents in the high-rise complexes in Memphis.

Naturally, a sharp increase in rental fees of the senior citizen high-rises would have drastic financial impact upon the residents, forcing many of them to locate alternative housing. Those who would have to seek other housing would be confronted with several barriers and problems in locating adequate housing, particularly the elderly residents who are also black. In the United States, numerous barriers exist in seeking adequate housing for senior citizens, especially for black senior citizens. Barriers that prevent aged blacks from easily finding satisfactory housing include racial, political and economic problems. It is inherent in these barriers that racial factors work at placing black senior citizens at a disadvantage in the housing market.10

The barriers of racism is at the center of the problems facing black Americans in attempting to exercise their rights and freedom, and is intricately interwoven into the fabrication of other obstacles which may be extricated for examination.

Moreover, elderly blacks are not only victims of institutionalized racism, they are also hampered by various other discrimination that accompany age, poverty, and functional illiteracy.

Two forms of racial prejudice which affect housing conditions for older black Americans are individualized and institutionalized racism. Individualized racism is practiced by white individuals who attempt to maintain blacks in an inferior status, simply for the reason that the individual is black. Tactics of humiliation employed by whites to prevent blacks from buying homes in certain areas would be an example of individual racism.

Although slavery, the origin of institutionalized racism in this country toward blacks, ended over a century ago, as a legally sanctioned institution, the prevalence of stereotypes, prejudices and several other forms of discrimination continue. "Jim Crow" laws which were diligently enforced in the Southern states, and often discovered in Northern states, from 1899 until 1954, influenced the institutionalized racism in practice today. A nation that has housing policies that tend to find a large majority of blacks living in dilapidated substandard housing, represents institutionalized racism.11

In the United States, housing legislation, policy, guidelines and funding requirements, and the actual implementation of these housing practices work to bar adequate housing from aged blacks. According to W. C. Baer, for over a quarter

11 Ibid.
of a century, the federal government has shown concern for the housing problems of the aged. One of the initial pieces of housing legislation, the Housing Act of 1949, stated that there "should be a decent house and suitable environment for every American."\textsuperscript{12} However, the well-known 1954 Supreme Court decision—Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas—was still being decided upon, and therefore the housing legislation of 1949 had little impact upon blacks.

Apart from the Housing Act of 1949, Sections 236 and 8 and other developments relative to housing programs to aid the elderly are:

1. Public Housing: housing which is publicly owned and usually administered by public housing authorities.

2. Rent Supplement Program: a payment by the federal government to make up the difference between 25 percent of their income, and the cost of the housing.

3. Rental Projects:

Section 207: multi-family rental housing which consisted of the bulk of the multi-family housing insured by the FHA.

Section 231: senior citizen housing, a special mortgage insurance program for the elderly and the handicapped. It was abandoned in 1970 because of the relatively high failure rate.

Section 202: provides loans for senior citizen housing made directly by the federal government (rather than insuring privately

\textsuperscript{12} W. C. Baer, "Federal Housing Programs for the Elderly," in In-Community Planning for an Aging Society, eds. Lawton and Byerts (Stroudsburg, PA: Downs and Hutchinson, 1978), pp. 30-36.
made loans as was done for Section 231).\textsuperscript{13}

Although the federal government provides several types of housing programs for the aged, it is doubtful as to whether these programs effectively meet the needs of black senior citizens. Despite the abundant rhetoric produced by the legislative committees, the housing needs of American senior citizens are far from being met. Furthermore, until the 1970s, little focus was given to the housing problems of elderly blacks. The National Caucus on the Black Aged (NCBA) was founded in 1970 to assist in redirecting the attention of the federal government to servicing the needs of black senior citizens in regard to housing and other matters by participating and cooperating with the 1971 White House Conference on the Aging. Prior to this conference, very few studies on the housing needs of the elderly and elderly blacks existed.\textsuperscript{14}

Inflation, which has become a national disease, places additional burdens on the senior citizens' already overtaxed income, by depressing their economic status further below the minimum subsistence level. Poverty tends to increase the physical problems facing senior citizens by forcing sacrifices in physical comfort, and nutrition. These problems become exacerbated by cutbacks in critical areas such as housing and health care, as inflation tends to restrict their purchasing power.


\textsuperscript{14}Ibid.
Apart from the fixed income levels provided by Social Security and similar forms, these senior citizens rely either on private savings or pensions accrued during the employed portion of their lives. These income sources have become drastically cut, in spite of the "double digit inflation rates" that have forced many retirees to cope with detrimental changes in the precluded lifestyle of their retirement years.15

As of 1977, Americans aged sixty-five years and older amassed to nearly 23.5 million, which amounts to 10.9 percent of the population. The elderly, however, account for 13 percent of the 25 million U.S. citizens whose incomes fall below the official poverty line. An overwhelmingly large majority of elderly Americans must depend upon some form of in-kind transfers of services such as food stamps, Medicare, and subsidized housing. For a number of older Americans, these sources of income provide insufficient levels of income.16 In an article highlighting peculiar pecuniary problems of the elderly, Edward Deak and Walter Smith stated that:

As of 1976, half of the over age 65 families had incomes below $8,721 with one in seven having an income below the poverty line of $3,417 for couples and $2,720 for individuals.

In contrast, Autumn 1977 Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) budget estimates for a retired couple living at an intermediate budget standard show a need for an average $7,198 in income nationwide.17

15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
The housing situation for the elderly in the United States desperately needs significant efforts to improve it, and there is little evidence to suggest that prolonged efforts are underway to meet the needs of the aged.

Health Care Legislation

An illustration of a bill sponsored by a Congressman in an attempt to be of assistance to his constituency, is the health care legislation concerning the elderly that Congressman Ford introduced in reaction to demands made by the elderly constituents within his district regarding the financial burdens of health care in the United States. The bill attempted to amend the Social Security Act, so that dental care, eyeglasses and hearing aids will be included in Medicare coverage.

In attempting to assist the constituents, Congressmen frequently introduce or avidly support legislation that will significantly benefit their constituencies. For example, Congressman Ford sponsored the Natural Gas Pricing Amendments Act of 1979, in response to the demands from his Congressional District. The introduction of a bill, however, does not guarantee that it will reach the House floor, or even the committee floor, for debate. Each bill introduced in the House of Representatives goes through several steps prior to reaching the House floor, if in fact, it does.

Congressman Ford tried to enlist support for the health care legislation by pushing for public hearings while the bill was in committee; and through press releases to major newspapers
in order to gain support from the American public, by informing them of the necessity of the bill's passage. Congressman Ford's chances of the legislation becoming law were enhanced by the fact that one of the committees to which the legislation was referred was the Ways and Means Committee, on which the Congressman sits, along with the fact that Congressman Ford also sat on the Select Committee on Aging, chaired by Representative Claude Pepper (D.-Fla.), who avidly supported the legislation. Congressman Ford hoped that the increased pressure on the United States for a National Health Insurance program would "bring some results." However, he was doubtful that Congress would move toward increasing medical coverage under Medicare that year (1979), and rightfully so, in that his bill was killed in committee. Congressman Ford's health care legislation, which was introduced with the intention of expanding Medicare coverage to include certain chronic illnesses suffered by the elderly, died in both the Committees on Interstate and Foreign Commerce and Ways and Means. Congressman Harley Staggers, Chairman of the Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee would not allow public hearings or even committee discussion of the Health Care Legislation. This stand was taken by him due to the opposition of conservative-minded committee members who maintained that the bill was much too costly to be seriously considered. This view was also accepted by Al Ullman, then Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, who agreed that the bill called for an extensive expansion of the Medicare program and would prove to be too expensive.
Although the official reason given for the Congressman's bill being killed in committee was the cost factor involved, based upon the forces that opposed Senator Kennedy's Comprehensive Health Program, it is quite possible to assume that the same forces exerted pressures on the Congressmen that resulted in the demise of the Ford bill. This assumption is made on the basis that Congressman Ford's legislation called for the expansion of medicinal care services which was also the focal point of Senator Kennedy's bill. Therefore, strong opposing forces to Kennedy's legislation, such as the American Medical Association and the American Hospital Association which have vigorously opposed any national health bill as an attempt to introduce socialism into the United States through the back door, utilized the same argument against the Ford bill.

The attempt made by Congressman Ford did stir some controversy over the issue of health care, and dental coverage in particular, not being provided by Medicare. In three newspaper commentaries, it was cited that nearly two thirds of the people over sixty-five had lost all of their upper or lower teeth, making them more susceptible to "poor nutrition, speech difficulties, slower healing of oral wounds, greater risks of infection, (and) psychological problems. In addition, the articles acknowledged the efforts of Congressman Ford in attempting to alleviate this problem for the nation's elderly through legislative action. It is significant to note that, Medicare covered 74 percent of hospital bills for persons sixty-five and older.
in 1977, and two-thirds of the $41.3 billion in health care costs for elderly persons which were paid by Medicare did not cover any dental work. This is due to the fact that the need to include dental care under Medicare coverage in the Social Security law was looked over by Congress during the mid-sixties.\textsuperscript{18}

In a survey done several years ago, only one-fifth of older Americans with yearly incomes totaling $5,000 or less visit a dentist even once a year. Many senior citizens simply cannot afford to invest a portion of their already overtaxed income into dental care. For those senior citizens who paid their own dental bills in 1977, their expenses grossed about $1 billion. Approximately one person in ten aged sixty-five or older needs dentures, but does not have them. Nearly a third of the older Americans who do own dentures need to have them either refitted or replaced.\textsuperscript{19}

The situation is similar for elderly persons with visual difficulties, in that Medicare will only cover the costs for eyeglasses needed after cataract surgery. To further exacerbate the problem, private insurance companies rarely cover visual care. In a floor speech to the Members of the House in order to gain advocacy for his legislation, Congressman Ford stated that: "the chronic vision deficiencies are the most prevalent of ailments among the nation's aged," second only to arthritis. He


\textsuperscript{19}Ibid.
continued to emphasize the need for better visual care for senior citizens since many aged persons are "mistakenly and cruelly thought to be senile when in fact they are unable to see the necessary visual stimuli."20

A third crucial health problem suffered by the nation's elderly and included in Congressman Ford's legislation is hearing impairment. It was concluded by the American Speech and Hearing Association that the Federal Council on Aging that at least one-half of elderly Americans suffer a hearing problem, for which the answer in many instances, may require a hearing device. According to a report from the General Accounting Office, the average cost of a hearing aid would fall into the range of $350. It is unfortunate that many elderly Americans afflicted by hearing difficulties are financially unable to afford the needed hearing equipment, in that contributions these people may have to offer society are inhibited by their handicap. The hearing device would also eliminate much of the isolation and desparity that often results from their inability to communicate.21

Medicare provides no coverage for "hearing examinations or aids," and only 20 percent of the states provide audio coverage under Medicaid, the other states offer no coverage. In addition to this, private insurance policies "rarely provide

21Ibid.
coverage for hearing aid expenses."^{22}

Congressman Ford is not the first to introduce legislation on the increased demand of affordable health services for the elderly. One example would be the legislation of community social and health organizations, first introduced in 1974 by Senators Kennedy and Corman. The idea was to "develop community social and health organizations under one auspice" that would attempt to "integrate service." It was proposed to have Medicare provide the social and health services, as was attempted by Congressman Ford's legislation, but going a step farther to propose that:

Local personal care organizations be developed and funded through non-profit corporations that would purchase care for all beneficiaries within a sub-state area.^{23}

The fate of this legislation, and future legislation such as Congressman Ford's, must depend upon the passage of the National Health Insurance Program - a program that the middle income Americans have not attempted to support. Although Senator Kennedy's proposal would cost the taxpayer less than he presently pays for routine medical expenses, while insuring better medical care, and "pose no greater threat to privacy," there is much resistance to it. According to the late George Meany, this resistance is due to the fact that:


... the medical establishment has managed through its $200 billion lobbying campaign to convince the taxpayer that passage of all-inclusive national health insurance will result in costs going through the ceiling and crowds of impatient patients in every doctor's office. 24

Another reason for this resistance may be due to the indication of polls, according to Senator Russell Long, that

The overwhelming majority of the American people are not concerned about being insured against run-of-the mill hospital bills. What ... is a matter of very serious concern to them is ... catastrophic medical bills that wipe out all their savings ....25

Congressmen who usually defend the interest of the American Medical Association bitterly opposed the Kennedy bill during debate. The American Hospital Association also engaged in strenuous lobbying activities to influence legislators into supporting their stance against hospital and medical cost control. Kennedy's Health Care Program would not only place medical care on a national budget (similar to the defense budget) providing for the budget to be expanded "only in proportion with the national economy," but would also monitor physicians and hospitals each month to ensure that they do not exceed their allocations. Doctors would be paid from these budgets under fee schedules negotiated by the physicians, hospitals, insurance companies, employers, labor-union leaders, government representatives and consumers. Hospitals would be paid in accordance with the annually negotiated sub-budgets. Premiums

24 Ibid.

paid to the insurance companies by consumers, employers and the government would be utilized to pay the physicians and hospitals. Under current regulations the insurance companies and the government are allowed to treat hospitals:

... like the doting parent who tells the son (as) he's packing off to college: Let me know your expenses at the end of the year and I'll pay you back.

Senator Kennedy's Health Plan would, in contrast, say to the hospital, "here's a $2 million and that's all you get for the whole year."$26

Furthermore, the medical profession has misled a large segment of the population to believe that "providing free care or medical insurance to the elderly and the indigent has sent medical costs soaring."$27 It is this belief that has discouraged middle class Americans from supporting social health care or the expanding of present health care programs, such as the proposed expansion of Medicare coverage in Congressman Ford's Health Care Legislation.

Although Senator Kennedy's National Health Care Program did gain strong support from influential groups such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the National Council of Senior Citizens, and the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations, all of whom agreed to the necessity of a National Health Care

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26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
Program to insure quality health care, and to control hospital and medical costs for all Americans; yet, the interests of the dominant and well organized groups such as the AMA, prevailed. Interest groups such as these also agreed that "cost reimbursement is basically responsible for the escalation of medical and hospital costs. As discussed previously, cost reimbursement enables hospitals to be paid retrospectively, with hardly any limit placed on the amount of money allowed to be spent annually.

Kennedy's legislation was designed to provide medical care coverage for every U.S. citizen, through indirect payment by the government to physicians. No one would be refused medical services, regardless of minuteness or seriousness of the ailment. The plan would cost the taxpayer considerably less than he presently spends for health costs (due to deductibles and co-insurance). In addition, not only would hospitals and physicians be monitored, but the insurance companies employed by the government as budget monitors and fiscal intermediaries would also be monitored.28

Presently, Congressman Ford has reintroduced the health care legislation in the 97th Congress, and has again begun campaigning to obtain Congressional support for the bill.

The Natural Gas Pricing Amendments Act of 1979

A second example of a bill sponsored by Representative Ford in an attempt to assist his district is the Natural Gas

28 Ibid.
Pricing Amendments Act of 1979. Hundreds of Memphians had begun forming into groups in order to organize methods of protest against consistently increasing utility bills passed on to them by the Memphis Light, Gas, and Water Division. One of the methods of protest utilized by the consumers was attracting local and national attention regarding the problem of high utility rates, by alerting local officials and their Congressional Representative, Harold Ford.

The Ford bill was introduced in an attempt to reduce ceiling prices on several classes of natural gas which had previously been deregulated as a result of the 1978 Natural Gas Policy Act. Although deregulation has increased the supply of natural gas, creating a surplus, prices have sharply risen simultaneously. This contradicts the laws of supply and demand. Therefore, the Natural Gas Pricing Amendments Act of 1979 was drafted to check this inequity. The bill, however, was killed in the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce Subcommittee on Energy and Power during the first session of the 96th Congress. The intent of the Natural Gas Policy Act of 1978 was to allow natural gas prices to slowly rise to world market levels, in an effort by Congress to encourage oil producers to discover more gas. This was attempted by the lifting of ceiling prices on several classes of natural gas, and finally decontrol of gas completely in 1985. The plan backfired,


however, and American consumers were the victims. During the early part of 1979, two months after the bill went into effect, the number of wells drilled increased by 7 percent, as compared with the same period the year before. 30

Government and industry experts predicted natural gas increases of 18 percent to 25 percent in Memphis, Chicago, New York and other cities, in 1979, the year Congressman Ford drafted the Natural Gas Pricing Amendments Act. The U.S. Department of Energy expected the higher gas prices to cost American consumers $1.7 billion to $2 billion in 1979. 31

The enactment of the Natural Gas Policy Act of 1978 followed one of the most lengthy and bitter debates in the history of the U.S. Congress. The final compromise incorporated into the legislation was hardly satisfactory to gas producers or to residential users, but nearly everyone affected by the legislation felt the bill to be the only solution to the problem. Congressman Harley Staggers, Chairman of the Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee was therefore reluctant to reopen discussion on the controversial issue of natural gas deregulation. Congressman Ford's legislation was not discussed in committee, due to the intent of the bill to reopen debate on the energy issue, so recently, after the issue had been compromised in the Natural Gas Policy Act.


In addition, the Carter Administration advocated the deregulation of oil and natural gas prices. Carter's National Energy Plan package contained the controversial Natural Gas Policy Act, which called for phased deregulation. Just like the Congressman's Health Care Legislation, the official reason given for the demise of his bill in committee is incredible. Chairman Staggers' refusal to reopen discussion on the deregulation of natural gas was due to the preponderant influence and pressure exerted on the Congressmen by the unholy alliance of gas producers, such as Exxon and interstate pipelines companies and distribution companies such as Tenneco, whose best interests are served by maintaining the status quo. These companies are robbing the consumer by charging exorbitant prices for oil and gas in spite of the overabundance of the supply of these commodities. This really makes mockery of the economic principle of supply and demand.

The escalation of natural gas prices due to "phased deregulation" has negatively affected Congressman Ford's constituents. As the Congressman stated,

Something is mighty ... wrong when ... a Memphis family, which takes home only $500 per month pays $200 to heat a five-room home. And, something must be done when government asks workers to keep their pay within seven percent of last year's, although they are told by the same government that natural gas prices will rise a minimum of 14 percent.32

Senator Jim Sasser, a Democrat from Tennessee, agreed

with Congressman Ford in thinking that the rise in gas prices would worsen. The Senator assumed that relaxing the price ceilings on gas may cost U.S. consumers more than $5 billion. Senator Sasser, who chaired the Subcommittee on Intergovernmental Relations, which "looked into" the "economics of the gas industry," stated that, "The ceiling prices are becoming floor prices." The expectation of the Natural Gas Policy Act (NGPA) was that:

Residential users would be cushioned from steep price increases, because large industrial users would be charged a price equivalent to that of oil for any 'new' gas they buy - so-called incremental pricing. 33

However, contrary to the assumptions of the Natural Gas Policy Act that oil prices would increase gradually, they doubled; therefore, as far as gas producers were concerned, residential and commercial consumers would obtain gas much too cheaply. As a result, the gas producers launched a strong campaign to repeal the legislation. A conglomerate of industrial gas consumers, led by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers, attempted to influence legislators to rescind Phase II of incremental pricing that would negatively impact upon the gas industry by regulating about "3 trillion cubic feet a year of gas - more than a third of current industrial consumption." 34 The rescission of Phases I and II would extend the encumbrance of exorbitant gas prices over to

34 Ibid.
all consumers. Basically, natural gas producer and interstate
distribution and pipeline companies were only interested in
either increasing the price of gas to equal the price of oil or
in immediately decontrolling gas altogether.\textsuperscript{35} Gas producers,
such as Atlantic Richfield, and interstate pipelines companies
and distribution companies such as Tenneco, feared that the in-
troduction and passage of legislations threatened the regula-
tion of oil and natural gas prices.

In addition, a gap existed between the oil and natural
gas prices charged to residential and commercial users who were
exempt from incremental prices. Industrial consumers and gas
producers feared that as long as gas remained "cheap" for
residential and commercial consumers, gas prices would become
more difficult to deregulate.

Predictably, consumer and interest groups supporting the
regulation of natural gas prices fervently argued against the
NGPA's intention of completely decontrolling gas prices. Strong
labor coalitions opposed decontrolling oil and natural gas
prices due to their conviction that deregulation would allow
higher gas prices to be charged to consumers. Unions in the
coalition included the American Federation of State, County, and
Municipal workers, the United Auto Workers, and the United Steel-
workers. Other organizations fervently opposing the NGPA were
numerous senior citizen, consumer and public interest groups.

For instance, Douglas Fraser, president of UAW and the late

\textsuperscript{35}Ibid.
George Meany, president of the AFL-CIO, wrote letters to Congressmen opposing the legislation, for the reason that its passage would prove too costly for American consumers. William P. Winpisinger, president of the International Association of Machinists, referred to the Energy Plan as "the worst scandal on the American energy scene since the Teapot Dome Scandal of 1920."\(^{36}\)

In 1979, two percent of gas used by consumers continued to be bound under the long-term contract at 75 cents per thousand cubic feet. Many of the contracts were close to expiration. Therefore, gas received by consumers at the new prices ranging from $1.99 to $2.26 per thousand cubic feet, indicates that American consumers would gradually be hit by the drastic increases.\(^{37}\)

In an attempt to remedy some of the problems caused by the Natural Gas Policy Act, Congressman Ford introduced his Natural Gas Pricing Amendments Act. The Congressman vigorously attempted to gain support for his bill by encouraging fellow colleagues to join him in sponsoring the bill in order to gain assistance in obtaining support for the passage of the bill, and, by requesting that interested lobbyists inform House members of the relevance of the legislation upon the American consumer.

In a press release issued by Congressman Ford, in an


effort to arouse advocates for the Natural Gas Pricing Amendments Act, he remarked that:

Something is ... wrong when gas producers received about $60 billion in total revenues between 1970 and 1978; yet, for the next eight years - for substantially less gas - total revenue will probably exceed $254.2 billion as a result of (the 1978) Natural Gas Policy Act.38

In addition, the Congressman stated in a House floor speech in another effort to foster endorsement of his bill that:

I ask you how we can justify the increasing costs of natural gas, especially since, for the first time in recent history, natural gas is in a surplus? In an American system founded on justice, is it not a violation of the natural laws of supply and demand to allow this situation to continue? And, most importantly, in an American system founded on justice, I speak with neither reservation nor hesitation in appealing to your sense of fairness to rectify these inequities.39

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39 Ibid.
VI. A SUMMARY OF INTERVIEWS WITH THE CONSTITUENTS

In the light of the failure of the Congressman's effort to win passage of his bills and to intervene with the Department of Housing and Urban Development to address the needs of his constituents, the writer conducted these interviews in order to ascertain the constituents' attitudes and perceptions of their Representative. These interviews revealed that the constituents agreed that Congressman Ford is interested in assisting them. Consequently, they are very pleased with his performance as their Representative. Although many of the low income constituents were not familiar with Congressman Ford's attempts to introduce legislations impacting upon their problems, yet those interviewed were confident of the Congressman's ability to "take good care of them" in Washington; as such, they were only interested in the Congressman's ability to resolve their own individual problems. Likewise, the writer observed that the middle class constituents also expressed favorable opinions about their Representative. However, they mainly were concerned about his voting pattern or position on national issues such as busing or prayer in the schools.

Constituents responded to questions one and four concerning the Congressman's effectiveness in resolving their problems quite positively. All of the interviewees strongly
agreed that since Congressman Ford entered office a definite change had taken place within their district. Of the forty persons interviewed, all strongly agreed that the Congressman had offered hope in resolving problems that they felt would otherwise be overlooked by other local or national officials. In response to question two, the respondents disagreed with the assumption that their problem(s) could not have been resolved without the assistance of the Congressman. It may be noted that in question five, twenty-five of the persons interviewed had not made any attempt to assist themselves prior to contacting the Congressman. Of those remaining, ten had made a single effort to assist themselves, and five had made several efforts (two or more) to assist themselves. All the constituents interviewed, however, appeared to be totally dependent upon the Congressman's assistance to remedy their problem. As indicated in question three, nine of the interviewees were so dependent upon the Congressman for assistance that none would allow a caseworker to assist them, but insisted upon talking directly with the Congressman to insure that their problem would be resolved. The remaining thirty-one had no objections to the Congressman's staff assisting them, whether he (Congressman Ford) was in town or not.

Among those staff persons interviewed, (three of the six caseworkers in the district office), all felt that the Congressman was greatly supported by his constituency, even though every case accepted by them had not been resolved. It
was also noted by the staff persons that some constituents are quite dependent upon the Congressman to resolve certain problems, and their support for him may stem from that dependency. However, since most of his constituents do not depend upon him for casework assistance, district support for the Congressman was not threatened. This is due perhaps to the "deep roots" and trust established by him within the district.
VII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

One of the major problems encountered by Congressman Ford was the lack of support from legislative colleagues in attempting to pass certain legislation, specifically his Health Care Legislation, and Natural Gas Pricing Amendments Act of 1979. This problem faced by Congressman Ford, is not peculiar because it has been faced by many Congressmen throughout the history of the U.S. Congress. However, this is due to the nature of access to the corridors of power in the U.S. and the hegemonic position enjoyed by very powerful and well organized interest groups. Therefore, legislations that may seem logical, such as Congressman Ford's Natural Gas Pricing Amendments Act, may not become law, due to stronger coalitions opposing the legislation.

The following are recommendations and observations that may enhance the possibility of Congressman Ford successfully passing legislation, such as the Natural Gas Pricing Amendments Act, or his Health Care Legislation, in order to better meet the needs of his constituency:

1. The bureaucratic rules should become more flexible in order to take into consideration the peculiar circumstances of cases.

2. Interests groups such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the American Federation
of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations should educate the American consumer of the advantages of the Comprehensive Health Program; and to point out the fallacy of the propaganda put out by interest groups such as, the American Medical Association and the American Hospital Association.

3. The American taxpayers should organize themselves into well structured interest groups in order to vote out the Congressmen who are opposed to the passage of a Comprehensive Health Bill in the United States during the next elections.

4. The Federal Government should nationalize all gas and oil companies in America. This is the only way the consumers can expect any fair deal. The private companies currently controlling this market are simply interested in making more profit.
General Instructions: Please respond to the following statements concerning Congressman Ford by stating whether you strongly agree (SA); agree (A); disagree (D); strongly disagree (SD); or don't know (DK). If you wish to make any further comments, please do so.

### Interview Schedule

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<td>1. Since Congressman Ford has been your Congressional Representative significant political and social changes have taken place in the district. (In other words, the needs of the constituency are now being met.)</td>
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<td>2. The problem for which you are requesting assistance may have been resolved by yourself without the Congressman's assistance.</td>
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<td>3. The Congressman's staff should assist you while he is away in Washington</td>
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<td>4. The Congressman's efforts to assist you have significantly aided in the resolution of your problem</td>
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<td>5. Other avenues should be explored by you to resolve your problem before contacting the Congressman</td>
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General Instructions: Please respond to the following statements by indicating whether you strongly agree (SA); Agree (A); disagree (D); strongly disagree (SD); or don't know (DK). If you wish to make any further comments, please do so.

**Interview Schedule**

1. The Congressman is greatly supported by his constituency even though every case opened in the district office has not been resolved.

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2. Most of Congressman Ford's constituents do not depend upon him for casework assistance.

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