



Charles Arthur Hayes

1918–1997

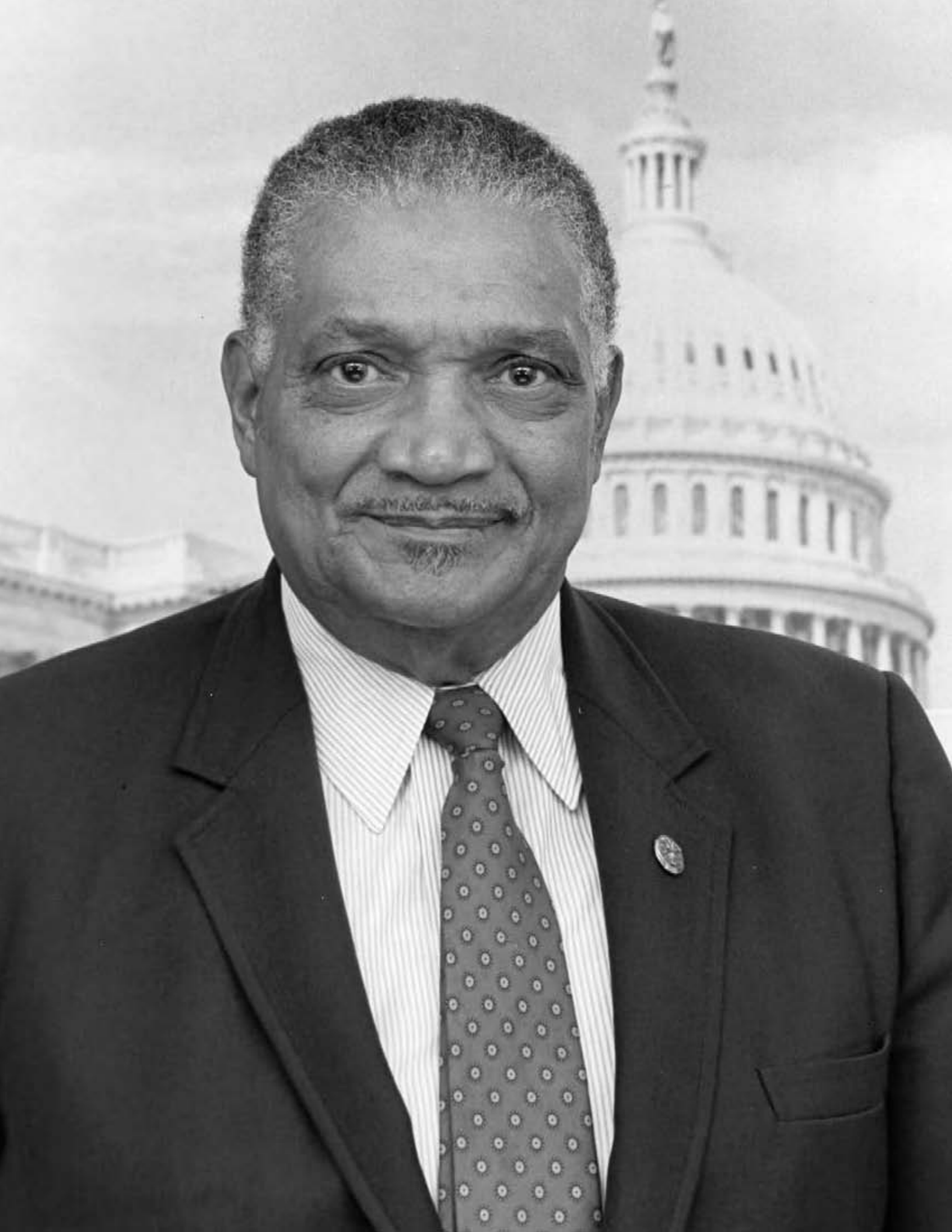
UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE ★ 1983–1993
DEMOCRAT FROM ILLINOIS

Elected in his first bid for public office, Charles Arthur Hayes succeeded Representative Harold Washington when he resigned from the 98th Congress (1983–1985) to become mayor of Chicago. During his five terms in the House, Hayes gradually sought to separate himself from the shadow of his popular predecessor when representing his South Side Chicago constituents, by combining his major interests and strengths: labor and civil rights. “Charlie Hayes was a giant in the history of the struggle for civil rights and political rights for Americans of African descent,” Senator Carol Moseley-Braun of Illinois said after Hayes died in 1997. “He was a trailblazer in the trade-union movement and to the end maintained his passionate commitment to working men and women.”¹

Born in Cairo, Illinois, on February 17, 1918, Charles Arthur Hayes graduated from Cairo’s Sumner High School in 1935. After high school, Hayes worked in Cairo as a machine operator. His long career of union activism began when he helped organize Local 1424 of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America. Hayes served as president of this organization from 1940 to 1942. In 1943, he joined the grievance committee of the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA) and became a UPWA field representative in 1949. He served as district director for the UPWA’s District One from 1954 to 1968. From 1979 until his retirement in September 1983, Hayes served as the international vice president of the United Food and Commercial Workers Union.² As a trade unionist, he promoted increased benefits and improved conditions for workers, fought to eliminate segregation and discrimination in hiring and promotion in industry, and provided African-American and women workers with opportunities to serve as leaders in the labor movement. Twice widowed and once divorced, Hayes had four children.³

Although he had no direct experience as a politician, Hayes was not a stranger to Congress. In 1959, the future Representative testified before the House Un-American Activities Committee. Questioned about his alleged ties to the Communist Party as a trade union leader, he denounced communism but declined to answer questions about any personal connections with the party.⁴ As a veteran meatpacking union lobbyist, Hayes gained valuable experience about the inner workings of Congress.⁵ Interested in politics at the local level as well, he actively supported the anti-establishment candidate Harold Washington in his bids for mayor of Chicago—his unsuccessful run in 1977 and his victorious campaign in 1983. Like Washington, Hayes opposed the powerful Chicago political machine, preferring a more independent style of governing that focused on the welfare of the city’s many impoverished black residents.⁶ The friendship of the two Chicago leaders figured prominently in Hayes’s unlikely path to Congress.

Following Washington’s resignation from the House on April 30, 1983, upon his election as Chicago’s first African-American mayor, Hayes joined 13 other candidates in the special Democratic primary to fill the vacant congressional seat. Well known in certain areas of the community because of his extensive labor activities, Hayes nonetheless faced an array of challengers with more name recognition, including Ralph Metcalfe, Jr., the son of a former Representative; civil rights leader Al Raby; and Lu Palmer, a newspaper columnist and community activist. During the campaign, the 65-year-old Hayes promised to help the many poor people living in the congressional district encompassing Chicago’s predominantly black South Side. In particular, he ran on a platform advocating federal assistance for public housing and employment programs.⁷ With the enthusiastic backing of organized labor and the newly elected Mayor





★ CHARLES ARTHUR HAYES ★

Washington, Hayes emerged victorious with 45 percent of the vote in the crowded and competitive primary on July 26, 1983.⁸ Although Washington's active campaigning on Hayes's behalf contributed to his win, Hayes assured his supporters that "I'm not going to be a mouthpiece for him." He continued, "If I can just do what he did when he was there [Congress], just do my own thing as a representative, I'll be all right."⁹ One month later, Hayes easily defeated his Republican opponent, community newspaper columnist Diane Precely, in the special election with 94 percent of the vote.¹⁰

Hayes began his second career when he took his seat in Congress on September 12, 1983, to complete the remainder of Washington's term. During his tenure in the House he served on the Education and Labor, Small Business, and Post Office and Civil Service committees. As a member of the Education and Labor Committee, Hayes authored one of his most significant pieces of legislation: the Dropout Prevention and Reentry Act. Concerned about the high dropout rate among students in Chicago, which far exceeded the national average, Hayes successfully proposed that the federal government allocate \$500 million to state and local government officials to alleviate the problem. In 1986, the Illinois Representative remarked, "The greatest security our Nation can have is to have our children properly educated."¹¹ Echoing many of his African-American colleagues in the House, Hayes questioned the Ronald W. Reagan administration's commitment to education. He criticized President Reagan's proposed budget cuts of the mid-1980s, labeling the federal spending reduction "a callous disregard for the dreams and aspirations of millions of poor and disadvantaged children and young adults."¹²

During his congressional career, Hayes attempted to follow through on his campaign promise to help the unemployed in his district and nationwide. He sponsored bills to reduce high unemployment rates, to provide disadvantaged youth with job training, and to create public works programs to rebuild the infrastructures of cities like Chicago. Alarmed by the rising unemployment

in his district that was precipitated by the economic recession of the early 1980s, Hayes urged lawmakers to support legislation to assist workers laid off in the massive plant closings in Chicago.¹³ He frequently expressed a determination to strengthen the 1978 Humphrey–Hawkins Full Employment and Balanced Growth Act, which was crafted to promote employment opportunities in accordance with a growth in productivity.¹⁴ Hayes sponsored the Income and Jobs Action Act of 1985 to reinforce the principles outlined in the 1978 measure and to "focus attention and find solutions to the problem of unemployment and stop acting as though the problem does not exist."¹⁵ Drawing on his experience as a labor leader, Hayes consistently supported legislation to protect American workers through higher wages, restrictions on imports, and more-comprehensive benefits for children and health care.¹⁶

Hayes boasted a strong record of civil rights activism spanning four decades. He joined Martin Luther King, Jr., in the 1955 Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott, and worked closely with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Operation PUSH (People United to Save Humanity).¹⁷ Once elected to the House, he viewed the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) as an important tool for advancing the rights of African Americans. Hayes once remarked, "to say that a person can just go (to Congress) and change it all—it doesn't work that way." He believed that working cooperatively with the CBC would help him to achieve one of his primary legislative goals: the endorsement of racial equality in Chicago and in the nation.¹⁸ A consistent opponent of South Africa's white-minority government, Hayes introduced legislation to impose economic and diplomatic sanctions against the African nation as a means of ending apartheid.¹⁹ In November 1984, he protested at the South African Embassy in Washington, DC. As one of several Members arrested during the staged protests, Hayes defended the demonstrations, remarking "these acts should force the South African Government to stop oppressing, jailing, and killing its black citizens who are only seeking justice."²⁰



★ CHARLES ARTHUR HAYES ★

Throughout his time in the House, Hayes faced little opposition in his re-election bids, typically winning more than 90 percent of the vote.²¹ In the 1992 Democratic primary, however, several factors contributed to an unusually difficult campaign for the five-term incumbent. Partially because of a decline in population during the 1980s in Hayes's impoverished urban district, the boundaries were redrawn, changing the composition of the constituency. Although the district still included the predominantly African-American South Side, it also picked up several white neighborhoods and suburban areas of southwest Chicago.²² Hayes had a formidable challenger in the primary—Bobby Rush, a Chicago alderman and a former member of the Black Panther Party. During the campaign, Rush accused Hayes of making many promises to his constituents but failing to secure enough substantial legislative victories.²³ Despite the potential obstacles to his re-election, Hayes seemed to be on his way to securing another term in Congress until his name was linked to a breaking Capitol Hill scandal just days before the March 18 primary. A Government Accounting Office study indicated that many Members consistently overdrew

their accounts in the House “Bank,” an informal service provided by the House Sergeant at Arms. The ensuing investigation by the House Ethics Committee revealed that Hayes wrote 716 checks exceeding his account balance in a 39-month period.²⁴ He had the dubious distinction of being identified as one of the roughly two dozen “abusers” (the Members with the worst records of bouncing checks).²⁵ “I believe the whole thing is a personal matter,” Hayes commented after his overdrafts became public. “It did not cost the taxpayers a dime and is a side issue when our nation is in a serious crisis.”²⁶ Reluctant to accept blame or apologize to his constituents, Hayes lost to Rush 42 to 39 percent.²⁷ In 1993, the Justice Department cleared Hayes of any criminal wrongdoing for bouncing checks while he was a Member of the House.²⁸

Hayes remained active in labor and community affairs after his congressional career.²⁹ Stricken with cancer, he died in Chicago on April 8, 1997.³⁰ In 1999, the Charles A. Hayes Family Investment Center, a nonprofit technology center for disadvantaged Chicago residents that was named for the former Representative, opened in a historic building previously used by the UPWA.³¹

FOR FURTHER READING

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NOTES

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CONCERNED ABOUT THE
HIGH DROPOUT RATE AMONG
STUDENTS IN CHICAGO,
WHICH FAR EXCEEDED THE
NATIONAL AVERAGE, HAYES
SUCCESSFULLY PROPOSED THAT
THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT
ALLOCATE \$500 MILLION TO
STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT
OFFICIALS TO ALLEVIATE THE
PROBLEM. IN 1986, THE ILLINOIS
REPRESENTATIVE REMARKED,
“THE GREATEST SECURITY OUR
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