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THE SENATE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE AGING*

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In recent years there have been a number of studies of congressional committees and their roles in the national legislative system. Most of these studies have dealt with the permanent or standing legislative committees. But both houses of Congress occasionally rely on other types of committees to perform their functions.

This report is a study of the Senate Special Committee on the Aging. Generally special committees, which lack the authority to report bills to the floor, are created to meet some immediate, particular purpose and then disband once this need is met. Very frequently they have been investigatory bodies, such as the Senate Special Committee to investigate the National Defense Program (popularly known as the Truman Committee) during World War II. Occasionally they have performed internal, housekeeping, functions such as the special House Committee on the conduct of Representative Adam Clayton Powell. They seldom have a long lease on life. Rarely

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1. For a review of such studies, as well as other aspects of the literature on legislative behavior, see the bibliographic essay in Ralph K. Huitt and Robert L. Peabody, Congress: Two Decades of Analysis (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), Section I.

2. For some exceptions see Donald H. Riddle, The Truman Committee: A Study in Congressional Responsibility (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1964). Vytos Vardys "Select Committees of the House of Representatives," Midwest Journal of Political Science 6 (August, 1962) pp. 247-265 and Dale Vinyard, "Congressional Committees on Small Business," Midwest Journal 10 (August, 1966) pp. 364-377.

is not changed in status to that of a permanent committee authorized to report bills to the floor. The House Committee on Un-American Activities is an exception to this general rule. But the Senate Special Committee on the Aging appears to be deviating from the usual pattern.³ First created in 1961, it has been renewed annually since that date with little opposition and appears to be acquiring a permanent lease on life. Although it lacks legislative authority, it does try to exercise some influence over legislation, at least indirectly.

The creation and continued existence of this Committee raises a number of interesting questions: Why was it created in the first place? Why has it continued in existence and secured what appears to be a permanent lease on life? What functions does it perform in the legislative process? What are its relationships with other participants in the legislative system (interest groups, administrative agencies and other Senatorial Committees)? And, finally, what insight does it provide into both the problems and opportunities the congressional arena presents to proponents of special programs for the aging.

In order to study the Committee, a number of methods were utilized. The author examined many of the published hearings, reports and studies of the Committee. In addition the files of the late Senator Pat McNamara, author of the original resolution and its first chairman, were examined.* The author conducted an extensive number

3. For another exception see Vinyard, Ibid.

* The author wishes to acknowledge his appreciation to the Labor Archives at Wayne State University where the McNamara papers are filed and its director, Professor Philip P. Mason for their cooperation.

of interviews with committee and staff members, administrators of related agencies and spokesmen for a number of interest groups concerned with the committee's work. No uniform interview schedule was prepared, but certain topics and questions were generally raised in every interview. Such an approach seemed to provide the flexibility needed to contend with the varying degrees of involvement and knowledge of the respondents.

I. History of the Committee

Early in the 1st Session of the 87th Congress (1961), the Senate⁴ created a Special Committee on the Aging. It was charged to:

make a full and complete study and investigation of any and all matters pertaining to the problem of older people, including but not limited to problems of maintaining health, of assuring adequate income, of finding employment, of engaging in productive and rewarding activity, of securing proper housing and when necessary care and assistance.

As a special committee it lacked the authority to report bills to the floor; rather it was seen primarily as a study group. In addition, the resolution creating it had a time limit, the committee was created for a single year.

The creation of this Committee was one of a number of developments at that time centering around the aged. Shortly before its creation, a White House Conference on the Problems of the Aging took place. Earlier in 1959 President Eisenhower elevated the Federal Council on Aging to a cabinet-level committee. It had been originally created in 1956 as a sub-cabinet level committee. Medicare, an issue in the 1960 presidential campaign, was continuing to occupy congressional attention. In addition, for two years prior to its creation, the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare had a standing sub-

4. See Senate Resolution 33, 87th Congress, 1st Session (1961).

Even more important, since the special committee lacked legislative authority, their recommendations would have to be reviewed by the appropriate standing committees. As a result, their activities would generally not encounter the same hostility and suspicion that would confront a legislative committee if it should appear to poach on another committee's jurisdictional domain.

The resolution creating the special committee provided for its termination as of January 31, 1962. But in the second session of the 87th Congress, a resolution was adopted to extend its life for an additional year, to January 31, 1963.⁸ And this has become the pattern: Every year a resolution, basically the same as its predecessors in form and content, is adopted without controversy or challenge providing for its continuance for another year.⁹ The text of the latest resolution (Senate Resolution 316, 91st Congress, 2nd Session) is typical:

Resolved, That the Special Committee on Aging, established by S. Res. 33, Eighty-seventh Congress, agreed to on February 13, 1961, as amended and supplemented, is hereby extended through January 31, 1971.

Sec. 2. It shall be the duty of such committee to make a full and complete study and investigation of any and all matters pertaining to problems and opportunities of older people,

8. See Senate Resolution 238, 87th Congress, 2nd Session (1962).

9. See Senate Resolution 23, 88th Congress, 1st Session (1963); Senate Resolution 260, 88th Congress, 2nd Session (1964); Senate Resolution 12, 89th Congress, 1st Session (1965); Senate Resolution 189, 89th Congress, 2nd Session (1966); Senate Resolution 20, 90th Congress, 1st Session (1967); Senate Resolution 223, 90th Congress, 2nd Session (1968); Senate Resolution 76, 91st Congress, 1st Session (1969); and Senate Resolution 316, 91st Congress, 2nd Session (1970).

including, but not limited to, problems and responsibilities of maintaining health, of securing adequate income, of finding employment, of engaging in productive and rewarding activity, of securing proper housing, and when necessary, of obtaining care or assistance. No proposed legislation shall be referred to such committee, and such committee shall not have power to report by bill or otherwise have legislative jurisdiction.

Sec. 3. The said committee, or any duly authorized subcommittee thereof, is authorized to sit and act at such places and times during the sessions, recesses, and adjourned periods of the Senate, to require by subpoena or otherwise the attendance of such witnesses and the production of such books, papers, and documents, to administer such oaths, to take such testimony, to procure such printing and binding, and to make such expenditures as it deems advisable.

Sec. 4. A majority of the members of the committee or any subcommittee thereof shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business, except that a lesser number, to be fixed by the committee, shall constitute a quorum for the purpose of taking sworn testimony.

Sec. 5. For purposes of this resolution, the committee is authorized (1) to employ on a temporary basis from February 1, 1970, through January 31, 1971, such technical, clerical, or other assistants, experts, and consultants as it deems advisable: Provided, That the minority is authorized to select one person for appointment, and the person so selected shall be appointed and his compensation shall be so fixed that his gross rate shall not be less by more than \$2,400 than the highest gross rate paid to any other employee; and (2) with the prior consent of the executive department or agency concerned and the Committee on Rules and Administration, to employ on a reimbursement basis such executive branch personnel as it deems advisable.

Sec. 6. The expenses of the committee, which shall not exceed \$215,000 from February 1, 1970, through January 31, 1971 shall be paid from the contingent fund of the Senate upon vouchers approved by the chairman of the committee.

Sec. 7. The committee shall report the results of its study and investigation, together with such recommendations as it may deem advisable, to the Senate at the earliest practicable date, but not later than January 31, 1971. The committee shall cease to exist at the close of business on January 31, 1971.

Based on past actions, it is likely that when the first session of the 91st Congress convenes in January, 1971, the Committee will be given a renewed lease on life. For despite its special status and peculiar features, the Committee appears to have become a permanent fixture of the Senate.

II. Functions of the Committee

Like other political institutions the Committee performs a number of functions which will be discussed in detail.

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A. As a Symbol

In a number of interviews it was suggested that the Committee has no real function to play other than as a symbol of senatorial recognition of and concern for the aged. Some comments are illustrative: "Everybody is for the old folks," "The senior citizens must be accorded recognition just as have the farmers, the veterans, the laboring men." "There are a lot of old folks and they, unlike the young, vote." This symbolic importance was also stressed in a report urging the creation of such a committee. The report argued that such an action would "demonstrate to the nation both the importance we attach to our sixteen million aging fellow citizens and the determination we share to develop policy and programs commensurate with the need and opportunity." It was also suggested by several

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10. For a discussion of symbolism in politics see Murray Edelman, The Symbolic Uses of Politics (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956) esp. Chapter 2.

11. See Senate Report 128 of Labor and Public Welfare Committee, 87th Congress, 1st Session (1961), p. 5.

and it was his desire for the public exposure that such activities could provide for him prior to his own re-election campaign in 1960. As it happened, McLamora was only slightly ahead of Senator John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts, in proposing such a body. Some Kennedy aides urged him to make this move on the grounds that such a body would provide exposure and demonstrate concern helpful to his 1960 Democratic presidential bid. ¹² But, since by tradition the Senator first proposing such a body is generally named chairman, the Senator from Michigan got the prize. However, the chairman was not the only one who received publicity from the work of the sub-committee. Once created, the sub-committee held public hearings in states where Democratic Senators were up for re-election. In addition, with Medicare likely to figure in the 1960 presidential campaign and the likelihood that the Republican nominee would oppose it, the sub-committee's activities could be used to build a record thus providing campaign ammunition and publicity for the Democrats. With a Republican President, Democrats lacked access to the expertise and publicity opportunities of the executive, but the sub-committee could serve to an extent as a substitute.

The special Committee itself has been seen as a vehicle enabling Senators to demonstrate concern and secure publicity. Earlier we mentioned the increase in the size of the Committee a few months after its creation to enable more Senators to serve on it. Since Senators serve on two or more standing committees, this represented an additional assignment for each of them. Indeed a number of its members held senior positions on major legislative committees which would be very time-consuming. For example, the ranking minority member, Everett

12. See Richard Harris, op. cit. p. 52.

Dirkson, was his party's floor leader. But to many of them, committee membership was seen not so much as a substantial addition to their local workload, but as something which might be politically advantageous to them at home. Membership was not accompanied in all cases by extensive involvement in or attentiveness to Committee activities. Rather it was frequently seen as a means to register their concern for and interest in the aged, to formally put them on the record, and to provide them with opportunities for publicity with a minimum of effort on the member's part. For example, the Committee has generally provided majority members with the opportunity to preside over a public hearing in their state. And in a number of cases the work of the Committee was clearly peripheral to a member's main legislative interests and concerns.

Active Committee members, such as the chairman have been accorded more substantial recognition, extending even beyond their own constituents. A notable case in point was Senator Patrick McNamara (Michigan) who authored the resolutions creating both the sub-committee and later the Special Committee. Through his activities, he became very visible, as a defender of the aged, among senior citizen groups. In turn such visibility increased his own involvement as groups brought complaints and problems to his attention, thus further increasing his visibility. Such visibility also seems to have affected McNamara's own perception of his role and brought deeper involvement in the area. Some of those interviewed suggested that McNamara began to regard himself as one of the chief legislative spokesmen for senior citizens.

Members like McNamara who wanted to do more than put themselves on the record and wanted, for example, to develop expertise in a particular policy area have such an opportunity as a committee member.

One way to legislative power and influence is to develop a reputation as a respected public person in a particular area so that colleagues turn to you. Examples abound in Congress: John Sparkman of Alabama on housing, Wilbur Mills of Arkansas on taxes, and John Stennis or Richard Russell on defense. Although no single, commanding figure has emerged in this area, (at least since the death of McNamara) some Committee members have developed a reputation in this field. The inactivity of many members also gives such activists, especially the chairman and the Committee staff, considerable autonomy to pursue their interests in the directions they prefer.

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C. The Committee as a Legislative Catalyst

Although the Committee was not given the authority to report bills to the floor, one of its functions throughout its history has been to have an influence on legislation. This has taken several forms: 1) as an originator of proposed legislation; 2) as a watchdog over legislative developments that affect the aged and 3) as an internal lobby for legislation.

This first aspect of its legislative role - as an originator - was even suggested in the arguments for originally creating such a Committee. With its broad mandate, it was argued that the Committee could outline the total dimensions of the problem by gathering a wealth of information, analyze solutions in depth and recommend priorities for action.¹⁴ However, it would still be faced with the problem of persuading the appropriate legislative committee as to the desirability of such legislation.

13. This term was borrowed from Ralph K. Huitt; see his "Congressional Organization and Operations in the Field of Money and Credit" in report of the Commission on Money and Credit, Fiscal and Debt Management Policies (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1963) pp. 476-88. For a list of Committee-claimed legislative victories, see Senate Report 79, Senate Committee on Rules, 91st Congress, 1st Session (1969), pp. 6-8.

14. See U.S. Congress, Congressional Record 87th Congress, 1st Session (1961) pp. 690-91.

While it is frequently difficult to trace the origin of a bill, since the legislative path is a tortuous one, one case where the auspices of the Aging Committee seems clear is the Older American's Act of 1965 (P.L. 89-73). This bill created the Administration on Aging within the Department of Health, Education and Welfare headed by a Commissioner on Aging, who was to be nominated by the President and confirmed by the Senate.¹⁵ This agency was to administer some federal grants to 1) promote statewide and community planning and coordination of programs for the aged, 2) to assist in the training of persons for programs related to the aged and 3) to provide grants for research and development projects in this area. Although the Committee would have preferred an independent agency, the desire for recognition of the aged through creation of some sort of executive body was of longstanding.¹⁶ On the whole, such a law itself was a minor achievement, one unlikely to attract significant opposition or controversy. But to secure such a law required that someone propose it and follow through on it, pushing and prodding it through the maze of the legislative process. Otherwise, it could stall and die at any number of points due to lack of interest. The Aging Committee and its staff, however, could shepherd it along its way.¹⁷

15. The present Commissioner is John B. Martin of Grand Rapids, Michigan, former state Republican chairman, named to that post by President Nixon.

16. See, for example, Senate Report 128 Aging Sub-Committee of Labor and Public Welfare, 87th Congress, 1st Session, (1961), p. 8. See same report for some examples of earlier recognition of aged through creation of executive bodies.

17. Indeed, on several occasions, as during consideration of amendments to the Older Americans Act in 1968 (Senate Bill 3677), the Aging Committee did most of the staff work for the Senate Labor and Public Welfare Committee.

Perhaps of greater significance has been its watchdog role: that is, trying to insure that legislation in a variety of areas does not neglect the interests of the aged. Thus, in areas of poverty, nutrition, housing, employment programs, etc., the Committee has supported amendments to proposed legislation to declare as congressional intent that such programs serve the elderly, or they have inserted specific provisions geared to special needs of the elderly.

An example occurred during Senate consideration in 1965 of amendments to the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. Following a series of public hearings by the Aging Committee¹⁸ its chairman at the time, George Smathers of Florida, proposed a number of amendments on the Senate floor.¹⁹ Although his specific proposals were largely dropped, as a result of the Committee's endeavors a provision was inserted declaring: "It is the intention of Congress that whenever possible the special problems of the elderly poor be considered in the development, conduct and administration of programs under this Act."²⁰ Subsequently, in the 1966 amendments to the Economic Opportunity Act, an amendment was inserted authorizing appointment by the President, subject to Senate confirmation of an assistant director in the Office of Economic Opportunity responsible for programs

18. See U.S. Congress, Hearings on the War on Poverty as it Affects Older Americans, Senate Special Committee on the Aging, 89th Congress, 1st Session (1965). Also Senate Report 599 for same Congress.

19. See U.S. Congress, Congressional Record 89th Congress, 1st Session (June 29, 1965), pp. 15049-050.

20. See P. L. 89-253 (Economic Opportunity Amendments of 1965) Section 610.

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 for the elderly poor. Such an office was recommended by the Aging Committee and sponsored on the floor by three of its members. Although such provisions can be dismissed as largely symbolic, devoid of tangible benefits for the aged, the Committee in its legislative oversight function, to be discussed later, has utilized them as a basis for scrutinizing the work of the agency.

There are other examples as well: Senator Smathers sponsored legislation to permit a taxpayer over sixty-five who sells his residence to exclude some of his gains from his taxable income, which was enacted.²² As a ranking member of the Finance Committee as well as the Aging Committee, Smathers was in a choice spot to secure such legislation. On a later occasion, the Committee urged increased appropriations to U.S. Employment Service to increase and improve services in local offices to older workmen. Such efforts were successful in Labor Department appropriation bills for the 1966 and 1967 fiscal years.

Its third legislative function - that of a lobbyist - is best seen in the fight in the Senate over Medicare. A year before the creation of the Special Committee, the Senate almost approved a bill to provide medical insurance under Social Security. Until its eventual enactment in 1965,²³ the Committee majority agitated for its enactment. Indeed, numerous respondents suggested that the principal reason for its creation was to agitate for Medicare.²⁴ Although its attention

21. See P. L. 89-794.

22. See Sec. 206, P.L. 88-272; Smather's bill was S-1413, 88th Congress.

23. See P.L. 89-97 .

24. For an account of its involvement see the Wall Street Journal (Oct. 29, 1963). The ranking member, Senator Dirksen, attacked the pro-medicare bias of the Committee's work and staff reports. Taken from exchange of letters between Dirksen and McNamara June 19 and 23, 1961 (in Patrick McNamara papers, Labor Archives, Wayne State University).

was never completely monopolized by the Medicare issue, it was certainly the Committee's dominant concern. The Committee majority and staff obviously regarded it as the most pressing problem of the aged. Its particular target was the Kerr-Mills Act (state assistance under a federal grant-in-aid program to indigent for medical care) arguing that the social security approach was the only method of coping with the problem.²⁵ A number of the minority Republican members, however, continually filed vigorous dissents.

In 1963, an opponent of Medicare, George Smathers of Florida, assumed the Committee chairmanship.²⁶ But this did not prevent the Committee being used as a source of ammunition for Medicare. Rather a health sub-committee chaired by an enthusiastic supporter of Medicare, Pat McNamara, was established to continue the efforts with its own funds and staff.²⁷ Thus, in a sense, the Committee served as a lobbyist within the Chamber for Medicare.

The final enactment of Medicare in 1965 (P.L. 89-97) did not end the interest of the Committee in the programs. Rather, on a number of later occasions, they recommended corrective amendments, such as in regard to standards for nursing homes, some of which were enacted into law.²⁸ But the legislative victory did mean they could

25. For one example, among many see Medical Assistance for the Aged, Kerr-Mills, 1960-1963 Committee Print 88th Congress, 1st Session (1963).

26. McNamara became chairman of the Senate Public Works Committee, an important source of pork barrel.

27. See Washington Post (April 25, 1963) p.1; also see, for example, Hearings on Blue Cross and Private Health Insurance, 88th Congress 2nd Session, 1964.

28. See P.L. 90-248, Social Security Amendments of 1967.

now shift more of their attention to other concerns.

Their lobbying efforts have taken a number of forms: Through their public hearings they have developed evidence to help make a case for and created additional publicity on the issue. Some of this, in turn, may generate a response from sectors of the public supportive of the bill's sponsors. In addition, Committee members have testified before the legislative committees and spoken on the floor. On several occasions, staff members were loaned to another Committee to help prepare the case. Finally, a member of the Aging Committee who is strategically located on a legislative committee considering committee sponsored bills or amendments can, if he wishes, facilitate their progress.

From the legislative history of Medicare, as well as others that could be cited, it is evident that the Committee, despite its formal lack of legislative authority, has attempted in a variety of ways to have some influence over legislation. Assessing their impact, however, is not an easy task: Rather, attempting to establish casual relationships in the legislative process is very complex and fraught with danger. Yet it would appear that they do have some impact. On major issues like Medicare, it would be difficult to ascribe a major role to them. They were simply one of a number of participants in the long, tortuous, complex development of support for a major piece of social legislation.²⁹ They helped to make the case for such legislation. But the role of others such as a strong President, major interest groups such as organized labor, etc. were more influential. In addition, in the sixties, the real battle in many respects over Medicare occurred

29. It is well described in Richard Harris' four part series in "Annals of Legislation" in The New Yorker, July 2, 1966, beg. p.29; July 9, 1966, beg. p. 30; July 16, 1966, beg. p. 35; July 23, 1966, beg. p. 35.

in the House of Representatives, rather than in the Senate. For example, in 1950, the Senate by only one vote defeated Medicare, but Medicare was not enacted until 1965. On the whole, the Senate was a more sympathetic arena than the House.

The Committee would appear to have a more decisive legislative impact in more circumscribed areas, particularly in its role as a watchdog and protector of the interests of the aged. In such instances, it is not so much a matter of opposition to be overcome as it is a need for someone to think of the specialized needs of this particular group. But, unless someone takes it upon themselves to look after such interests, the aged may be neglected or adversely affected, often unconsciously, by major pieces of legislation. Such interests need legislative champions to develop and propose provisions related to needs of the aged, to push and prod for them and to guide them through the legislative shoals. Otherwise they may be ignored or die somewhere along the way. This role the Aged Committee has taken upon itself. Although its record is rather a mixed bag - some victories and some defeats - it has worked in a rather single minded fashion to advance the interests of the aged.

In a sense, the Committee is handicapped by its lack of legislative authority; it must persuade the relevant committees with such authority to consider and act favorably on such proposals. Any serious attempt to give the Committee legislative authority would arouse the formidable opposition of the legislative committees affected by the changes seeking to protect their jurisdiction. Thus, its present status is about all it can hope for. And this status is not without its advantages: Its broad mandate allows it to consider a variety of matters, unencumbered by narrow jurisdictional lines. It

can look at the totality of the problem if it chooses, rather than fragments of it.

D. The Committee as a Monitor of Executive Agencies.

In addition to attempting to exert some influence over legislation, the Committee has also paid some attention to the way executive departments and agencies administer policy, a role commonly referred to as legislative oversight.³⁰ But the Aging Committee lacks some of the weapons possessed by the legislative committees to secure compliance with their wishes. Such committees normally have jurisdiction over the statutory authority and fiscal needs of agencies within their jurisdiction. But, despite such limitations, the Committee has attempted to perform this function.

A vast number of departments and agencies administer programs affecting the aged. As examples, one might cite Health, Education and Welfare (although the Administration on Aging is located here, also important is the Social Security Administration) Labor (particularly employment programs), Housing and Urban Affairs, Office of Economic Opportunity, Internal Revenue and the Veteran's Administration.

Because of their parental ties to the Administration on Aging in H.E.W., the Committee would naturally be expected to show some concern for them. The position of this body within the overall hierarchy of H.E.W. has especially concerned them. Initially they favored a body autonomous from any department, directly responsible to the President. Such a move, however, was unsuccessful. Rather the body was placed within H.E.W. The preference of the Committee was for a body close to the office of the Secretary and with some

30. For some discussion of this role see Dale Vinyard, "Congressional Checking on Executive Agencies," Business and Government Review (September-October, 1970) pp. 14-19.

independence. Thus, the appointment of the Commissioner was to be subject to senatorial confirmation. When Secretary Cohen in a 1967 departmental reorganization along functional lines shifted it further down the chain of command, by placing it under Social and Rehabilitation Services, the Committee protested but without success.³¹

Because of the limited role played by the Administration on Aging in regard to the total interests of the aged, (largely administering a number of grant programs), the Committee almost by necessity has to be concerned with other agencies. It is also evident that the Administration has not fulfilled early Committee expectations: The original hope was that it could serve as an overall coordinator of programs for the aged within the executive.³² But its influence has not really extended outside its own narrow range of programs.

As a result, the Committee's monitoring or oversight functions have extended to other departments and agencies. They strive to make an agency aware of the aged in the administration of its programs. In other cases they are seeking to have the congressional intent expressed in a statute that the programs serve the aged be more than a symbolic gesture.³³ Often what the Committee faces is not so much executive opposition as it is indifference or lack of awareness. In addition, a large agency serves a number of different clienteles and who gets served may depend on who has spokesmen to continually present their needs. Often the aged are not represented.

31. See Executive Order 11248 42 U.S.C. 3011(b), 1967.

32. Currently the Commissioner on Aging serves as special assistant to the President on aged problems and the Administration can provide staff services to a Cabinet level committee on the aging which, however, seldom meets.

33. See P.L. 89-253, Section 610.

One technique that has been utilized is a public hearing on a particular program. For example, in 1968, the Committee held hearings on the "usefulness of the model cities program to the elderly."³⁴ Earlier, a series of hearings had been held on the "war on poverty as it affects older Americans."³⁵ Such hearings provided an opportunity to put on the record the ways these programs could serve the special needs of the elderly. The hope was that the message would be received by the relevant agency officials and would affect their subsequent administration of the program. At times, less informal techniques have been utilized. Committee members and staff, along with representatives of concerned interest groups, have conferred with agency officials urging particular policies or interpretations on an agency (such as O.E.O. or Housing). But as we pointed out earlier, since the Committee lacks the authority of a regular committee over the agency involved, the Committee is handicapped. Another factor is that while the Committee has a singleness of interest and set of priorities - the protection and advancement of the special needs of the elderly, most agencies have a greater number of interests to serve and priorities to meet. About all the Committee can really do in such cases is to admonish the agency to heed the needs and interests of the elderly. In some cases, however, this may be sufficient for such claims may meet little opposition; rather the previous failure of an agency to consider them may have been more the result of neglect or lack of awareness. But in other cases, especially where such

34. See Hearings of Special Committee on the Aging Parts 1-5, 90th Congress, 2nd Session (1968).

35. See Hearings of Senate Special Committee on the Aging, 89th Congress, 1st Session (1965), 3 parts.

It has any affect strongly entrenched forces, an agency may remain indifferent or even hostile. In such cases, the Committee might recommend corrective measures to one of the legislative committees, either in the form of legislation or oversight. But, on the whole, there is little the Committee can really do.

B. As a Participant in a "Policy System"³⁶

One characteristic of policy-making in many cases is the degree of specialization necessary to exert influence. As a result, policy in a particular category of issues is often made by those who are interested in and knowledgeable about it. Ralph Huitt has suggested the concept of a "policy system" to describe this phenomenon. Such a system consists of all those who for a particular category of issues share regularly in the making, alteration and execution of policy.³⁷ The participants in such a system are drawn from a variety of sources, largely ignoring institutional boundaries and the distinction between public and private groups: members of congressional committees, committee staff members, officials of executive agencies and representatives of interest groups. Indeed, as Huitt points out there may well be almost continuous interchange among such participants "from the first glimmer of an idea to compromises in conference and to administration of the act."³⁸ A number of examples follow:

36. Term borrowed from Ralph Huitt. See his essay "Congress - the Durable Partner" in Lawmakers in a Changing World, Elkie Frank, ed., (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1966) pp. 18-19.

37. Ibid. pp. 18-19. This phenomenon has also been called a "sub-government." For example, see Douglas Cater, Power in Washington. Ernest Griffith has referred to this coalescence of interests, in a highly picturesque fashion as a "whirlpool." See his Congress: Its Contemporary Role, 3rd Edition (New York: New York University Press, 1961).

38. See Huitt, op. cit. p. 19.

the Sugar Division of the Department of Agriculture, the House Agriculture Committee and several spokesmen for the various sugar industries.

the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, House and Senate Space Committees and the aerospace contracting industry.

the U.S. Office of Education (H.E.W.) the House and Senate Committees and some of the major educational associations.³⁹

In the policy area of aging, a rudimentary policy system appears to have developed and be taking shape. Clearly the Aging Committee, the subject of this study, is an active participant in this system as reflected in its legislative and oversight activities. There are, however, a number of differences from some of the policy systems listed earlier which reduce its power and impact in policy-making:

1. Its area of interest, the aging, is fairly broad and diffused. This tends to place it at a disadvantage from more narrowly defined interests where efforts can be focused with maximum impact on a few items.
2. Programs affecting the aging are scattered among a wide array of departments and agencies possessing, in many cases, different priorities than the other participants and with whom their relations are not necessarily close or continuous. The Administration on Aging, with whom the Committee has close relations, is not too closely involved in many of the issues of direct concern to the Committee.
3. The clientele to be served by this system is extremely diverse with rather different interests and needs to be served.

39. See Eugene Eidenberg and Roy Morey An Act of Congress (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1969).

4. The Committee lacks, as we saw earlier, some of the traditional weapons of the congressional participants placing it in a weaker position than its counterparts in other policy systems.
5. Another difference is in regard to interest group participation in the system. As numerous commentators have suggested, interest groups of and for the aged have been slow to develop.⁴⁰ Although some have developed, they do not as yet have the degree of cohesion or power often found in other interest groups. Often claims of the aged are pushed by groups such as the Farmer's Union or organized labor who have a number of interests to serve - and whose clientele is largely not among the aged. In other instances, their claims are presented by professionals in the field of Aging (social workers, academicians, staff members of research institutes, etc.).⁴¹ Many of my respondents also suggested that this situation is changing and that with the development of greater group-consciousness among the aged, more powerful interest groups

40. See, for example, Fred Cottrell, "Government Functions and the Politics of the Aged" and Arnold Rose, "Impact of the Aging on Voluntary Associations" in Handbook of Social Gerontology, Clark Tibbitts, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp. 624-65 and 666-98.

41. For some comments see Cottrell's discussion of the professionalization of the field of the aging after the Social Security Act of 1935 and its effect on the post-New Deal politics of the aging in Tibbitts, op. cit. p. 638. Such individuals have constituted a large number of the witnesses before the Aging Committee.

will develop of and for the Aged. But, at present, the Committee itself may play a more autonomous role in the policy system than is customary.

P. As a Service Body.

It is a well-established tradition for congressmen to serve as a Washington agent for their constituents⁴³ - the congressional errand boy approach. All congressmen receive requests for information or assistance from their constituents. While congressmen vary in the emphasis they give to such activities, no legislator ignores them completely. Generally such work is handled by the personal staff of a congressman. But in some cases, it is turned over to a committee staff. For example, the House Small Business Committee has, among other things, done some of this work for both committee and non-committee members. A recent study concluded that on the average 10 to 15 per cent of a committee's workload is made up of such activities.⁴⁴ On the whole, the Aging Committee has not emphasized this activity. Complaints and problems are occasionally referred to the Committee by members and non-members. In addition, some elderly may complain directly to the Committee. This has occurred as the Committee has developed lines of contact with interest groups representing the aged

42. For such comments see Arnold Rose "Subculture of the Aging," in Older People and their Social World, Arnold Rose and Warren Peterson, editors (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis Co. 1965) pp. 3-16. For some reservations on the ability of the aged to become a self-conscious political interest group, see the comment of Angus Campbell in Politics of Age, Wilma Donahue and Clark Tibbitts, ed. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962) p. 98.

43. See Dale Vinyard, "Congressmen as Washington Agents for Constituents," Business and Government Review (Sept.-Oct. 1967) pp. 19-25; also Charles Clapp, The Congressman: His Work as He Sees It (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1963) pp. 50-55, 75-84.

44. Kenneth Kofmehl, Professional Staffs of Congress (Lafayette Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1962) p. 128.

or its activities in a particular field (e.g. investigating nursing homes) has given them visibility. It is possible as the government introduces additional programs for the elderly that their service function will increase. But at present, it is not a major one.

Complaints and inquiries, particularly those forming a pattern, are valuable for the Committee. They provide cues as to what is bothering the elderly. In addition they may indicate how existing governmental programs are working and the possible need for new programs or changes in existing programs. They also provide a justification for the Committee to focus on particular problems in their staff studies, investigations and hearings.

SUMMARY

In this report we have reviewed the activities of the Senate Special Committee on the Aging. Created in 1961 as a temporary committee it was primarily designed as a study group. But since its creation, the Committee has attempted to perform a number of functions. Despite its lack of legislative authority, it has sought in a variety of ways to exert influence over legislation. Although initially strongly involved in the legislative campaign to pass Medicare, its interests since then have been fairly diverse. It has been especially concerned that the special needs and interests of the aged not be ignored in a vast array of broad-gauged government programs. It has sponsored and fought for a variety of measures to protect these interests. The Committee has also attempted to oversee executive departments and agencies in their implementation of policy. Although to a great extent lacking the weapons of a legislation committee to secure

compliance with its wishes, the Committee has sought to make the agencies aware of interests that might otherwise be neglected. Its victories have been limited, but not without value. In many ways the Committee is part of a developing, yet still very rudimentary "policy system." The further developments of such a system depends to a considerable extent on the nature, direction and power of interest groups centered around the aged. The Committee has also served as a political vehicle for a number of Senators, providing them with a chance to demonstrate their sympathy and concern in the hope of reaping political dividends. Some members indeed, have derived a degree of national visibility from their Committee work. Finally, the Committee has served as a symbol - an attempt to assure the elderly of the sympathy and concern of the political institutions.

Thus, a Committee created in 1961 as a temporary body has survived, being renewed annually since that date. Indeed, it appears to have acquired an almost permanent lease on life. Its continued existence suggests that in a number of ways, despite its special features, it is meeting certain needs of the Senate. In addition, its powers and limitations, its successes and failures provide some understanding of the problems and opportunities the Congressional arena presents to proponents of special programs for the aging.