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DUTIES OF A CONGRESSMAN

BY

THE HONORABLE EDWARD R. FINNEGAN

In Extension of Remarks of

The Honorable Barratt O'Hara

January 14, 1963

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OCT 19 1971

GOVT. PUBLICATIONS DEPT.

Source: Congressional Record, 88th  
Congress, 1st Session, v. 109, pt. 1  
Jan. 14, 1963: 296. Reproduced by  
the Congressional Research Service  
August 1971.

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## Duties of a Congressman

### EXTENSION OF REMARKS

OF

### HON. BARRATT O'HARA

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, January 14, 1963

Mr. O'HARA of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I am extending my remarks to include an article by my friend and colleague, the Honorable EDWARD R. FINNEGAN, on the "Duties of a Congressman." This elucidative presentation of congressional duties, which I know will be of interest to all my colleagues, was prepared by Congressman FINNEGAN for the January meeting of the Chicago alumni chapter of the Phi Alpha Delta legal fraternity of which my son and namesake served as justice. The article follows:

#### DUTIES OF A CONGRESSMAN

The composition, powers, and duties of the Congress as a whole, and of the respective Houses of Congress, are defined in article I of the Constitution of the United States.

The duties of the individual Member are not so defined but he bears the following responsibilities of office:

1. To represent the interests of the constituents of the district which elected him.
2. To study the many and varied issues confronting the Nation as a whole.
3. To attend regularly the meetings and hearings of the committees to which he may be assigned.
4. To vote conscientiously in the best interests of the people of his district and of the country.

To carry out these responsibilities the 435 Members of the House of Representatives and the 100 Members of the Senate are constantly busy throughout a legislative session.

A Congressman's mail is heavy with thousands of letters from constituents and others interested in particular legislation, in seeking specific information about matters relating to various executive agencies of the Government, in obtaining Government employment, or the advice and assistance of various welfare agencies of the Government. Keeping current with his heavy correspondence by prompt response to the manifold inquiries is in itself a large task for every Member.

In addition, thousands of bills are introduced at each session of the Congress. It is a physical impossibility for each member to know the contents of every one of these bills.

Each Member, however, through his service on one or more of the standing committees (these are permanent as distinguished from special committees) tends to develop into a specialist in the particular field of agriculture or industry, or taxation, etc., depending upon his particular talents and interests and the character of the district he represents. For instance, a Congressman

from a district whose principal industry is shipping may seek membership on a committee dealing with rivers and harbors or the merchant marine; another, from a farming district, makes agricultural legislation his principal interest; still another from a heavily industrial section specializes in labor legislation or interstate commerce, and so forth.

This does not mean he ignores or remains uninformed on other important matters, but that he devotes himself mainly to these topics of principal interest to his district. At the same time, however, he must study the most important measures in other fields in order to be prepared to vote intelligently upon proposed laws of national significance.

In such matters it may frequently occur that a member takes a position contrary to the opinion of a substantial segment of voters in his own district; in which case a conscientious Member may risk his own reelection by putting the welfare of the country as a whole above the narrower interest in his own locality. In national affairs, the Members are also influenced by other considerations, such as:

1. The recommendations of the committee entrusted with the study and solution of a particular problem.
2. The position and policy of the political party of which he is a member and on whose platform he stood for reelection.

As U.S. Representative from the Ninth District of Illinois I represent you and some 428,000 other citizens who live on the north side of Chicago within the boundaries of the Ninth Congressional District. I was first elected to Congress in 1960 and stand for reelection every 2 years as must every Member of the House of Representatives. Senators on the other hand are elected for 6-year terms.

This means besides my regular duties as a Member of Congress, I am involved in a campaign every 2 years which consumes a great deal of time, effort, and money on my part and on the part of my friends and supporters.