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Bringing the Constituents Back In: The Politics of Social Security in the 1950s

Abstract: This article argues that scholars' current understanding of Social Security policy making in the 1950s is missing a crucial component: massive letter-writing campaigns by ordinary Americans. Americans' letters to Congress—and the responses of members and their aides in public debates and constituent correspondence—reflect a more vibrant, more democratic, and messier policy-making process than scholars have previously recognized. In the 1950s, Congress voted to amend the Social Security Act of 1935 repeatedly, expanding both the number of occupations covered by the Old Age and Survivors Insurance program and the level of benefits individuals received. Scholars have depicted this expansion as the work of planners within the Social Security bureaucracy. Yet, the letters in congressional records reveal that the process of amending Social Security resulted from—and helped create—constituencies of Americans who felt entitled to make claims on the federal state apparatus.

Keywords: Social Security Act of 1935, 1950s politics, congressional constituents, Congress, the state, women, gray lobby, U.S. Welfare policy

In the 1950s, the prospect of improving Social Security moved many Americans to write to Congress for the first time. "I read in the newspaper of the

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increase passed by the House in Social Security and Old Age benefits,” William Ruitenbeck of Salt Lake City told Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee Walter George in May 1950. “From that time on, everyday I looked in the newspaper for something concerning Social Security.” Ruitenbeck did “not wish to be classed as poor or needy,” but he was watching to make sure senators “remember ‘The Forgotten Man.’”¹ The Depression-era trope recalled letters that desperate people had written to Franklin Roosevelt nearly 20 years earlier, but there was also something new in his and other Americans’ letters about Social Security. As Ellen Patten of Havertown, PA, explained it to George in January 1950, “As an American housewife—a working one—I have reached the point where I guess it is up to me to sit down and use up my precious evenings writing to tell you and other senators how I feel and where I stand.”² More than desperation drove writers like Ruitenbeck and Patten. They had come to understand themselves as constituents and members of an interest group with the right, and capacity, to influence policy.

The constant stream of letters between members of Congress and ordinary Americans about old-age benefits after World War II belies a simplistic narrative about Social Security in American life: that the Old-Age and Survivors Insurance (OASI) program, born in 1935, was apolitically managed by unseen bureaucrats until economic problems and resurgent conservatives took aim at it in the 1970s.³ Social Security’s dramatic expansion to cover most American workers in the 1950s, claims its most influential analyst, political scientist Martha Derthick, was the result of undemocratic, autonomous policy making by technocratic insiders. But this was a claim arrived at by Derthick’s method more than by the accrual of evidence. The Social Security story centers on policy makers because its leading chronicler was primarily concerned with policy makers. Indeed, Derthick excuses the absence of Social Security’s recipients in her 1979 classic, *Policymaking for Social Security*, by asserting that “it is possible to appraise the making of public choices without detailed knowledge of the subjects of choice.” Further, Derthick asserts categorically that “public opinion directly expressed has not had much influence on policy.”⁴

The absence of the public in Social Security politics was furthered by the pioneering social policy scholarship of institutionalists in the 1980s and early 1990s, all of whom rely on Derthick’s bureaucrat-driven narrative for the basics of Social Security’s development and functioning.⁵ As these scholars were “bringing the state back in” to the history of American political development, few of the constituents of elected officials came along.⁶ Political scientist Christine L. Day’s book on aging policy interest groups—the

so-called gray lobby—takes just two pages to dismiss constituent action regarding aging policy between 1940 and 1960 as simply “dormant.”⁷ The Social Security Administration’s own archivists note that their material from the 1950s is thin (one box) because they view the period as simply less significant than the founding era in the 1930s.⁸ Public opinion scholars repeatedly note that even pollsters grew bored of Social Security after World War II—not because constituents did not care about the program but simply because they liked it too much.⁹ Questions about what they liked, how they expressed that affection, what the program meant to their political and personal outlooks, and what their support meant for Social Security policy making are usually left unexamined. This is not entirely surprising because other scholarship on social policy has excluded constituent voices also. Welfare state scholar Marisa Chappell has noted recently that the foundational study of United States social policy, Theda Skocpol’s 1992 *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*, “ironically had little room for the voices and perspectives of either soldiers or mothers—that is, the presumed objects of welfare state policies.”¹⁰

This article focuses on Social Security’s old-age insurance program—and those who saw themselves as beneficiaries—to return the politics behind policy making in the 1950s. It argues that a constituent-sensitive Congress was bombarded with constituent demands that significantly shaped Social Security policy and how ordinary Americans interacted with policy making in the 1950s. In other words, despite the power and authority of social policy experts, legislating Social Security’s dramatic expansion in this era was not simply the work of planners. Amendments between 1950 and 1956 raised benefit payments substantially and added some 30 million Americans to the federal retirement program’s rolls, ultimately covering 92 out of 100 jobs by 1957.¹¹ Recipients played a role in these dramatic changes.

This is not a simple argument about causation. I cannot point to a specific constituent letter that led a specific member of Congress to change a determinative vote on a specific legislative provision. Legislation is always the product of myriad forces, big and small. Legislators certainly said that constituent letters influenced their votes, but they had other considerations too. However, I do raise a simple question: what happens to our understanding of policy making when we consider constituent letters as part of the process? Scholars of Social Security have not done enough to answer this question. They have relied too often on foundational scholarship that consciously focused on policy makers, raising up experts like Wilbur Cohen and Robert

Ball as singular players in US policy making, while consciously or unconsciously sidelining the politics generated by constituent demands.

Turning our gaze to the flow of mail to Congress during this period changes the picture in three fundamental ways: First, preoccupation with technocratic planning can undersell how important these amendments were to ordinary Americans. Only by hearing the energy (and often the desperation) in the letters of constituents can we assess the politics surrounding Social Security after World War II—and thereby understand ordinary Americans' persistent attachment to the program, even as other pieces of the New-Deal-era welfare state disappeared. Second, a tautological line between policy planning and lawmaking imposes a sense of inevitability on the 1950s reforms. There was nothing inevitable about Social Security expansion: it required an enormous amount of legislative and political work, and the details of the reforms—who was brought under the system, when, and under what terms—were political and never reflected the wishes of technocrats alone.¹²

Finally, even if constituent letters are essentially “case work” for representatives' offices, it is a mistake to imagine constituent service as entirely separate from policy making. As anyone who has ever worked in a congressional district office can tell you, members of Congress are keenly aware of policy constituencies, the coalescing of constituents around specific policy issues.¹³ Scholars of American political development have noted the importance of what political scientist Daniel Carpenter calls “democracy by petition.” That is, the relationship between lawmaking and those who have made direct demands on the state through petitioning or letter writing rather than (or alongside) voting.¹⁴ Letters might not “make” policy directly or immediately, but as constitutionally protected ways of communicating with the legislature, they have a history of influencing the agendas of policy makers.¹⁵

Social Security helped create such constituencies, and letter writing helped shape policy agendas. Although constituent letters are not quite the same as formal petitions in terms of how legislatures handle them procedurally, they have a similar capacity to influence lawmaking by making space for ordinary members of the public to speak directly to elected officials.¹⁶ As political scientist Andrea Louise Campbell has noted, Social Security's growth “incorporated seniors into the highest level of democratic citizenship.”¹⁷ Constituent letters in the 1950s, I argue, reveal how seniors, and even those not yet senior, helped to fuel that growth by forming an active constituency earlier and more effectively than typically assumed. The work of listening and responding to these new constituencies for Social Security in the 1950s deepened and expanded the connection between constituent case work, politics, and social policy.

In the late 1940s, Americans pushed universal Old Age and Survivors Insurance to the center of US social policy, generating a new politics around Social Security generally.¹⁸ As the prospect of expanding coverage after World War II grew, those excluded from the original law usually advocated for inclusion—and those already in wanted higher benefits and protection for the program in the long term. But even those who wished to remain outside the national system also made themselves heard.¹⁹ Through their letter-writing campaigns—through their participation in policy making—Americans conjured new political constituencies and identities such as the professionals, farmers, and, crucially, the white women who now sought to reshape the federal policies affecting their retirements. General agreement in American political life that Social Security was a good thing did not take the wind out of politicking around the program: on the contrary, ordinary Americans' interest in the program supercharged that political activity.

This is not to deny the power of institutions or the ways that political structures, history, and context shape policy beyond the wishes of American voters. Growing executive agencies—what historian Joanna L. Grisinger and others have called “the administrative state”—combined with insulated and powerful congressional committees seemingly confirmed the fears of those who warned of a rising “managerial class.” The growth of the federal state and its involvement in the daily lives of mid-twentieth-century Americans was real, even if distributive agencies such as Social Security tended to raise fewer alarms than regulatory agencies.²⁰ To be sure, visionary scholars, lobbyists, and congressional staffers such as Ball, Cohen, Elizabeth Wickenden, and Fedele Fauri, among many, not only managed the technical aspects of writing legislation to meet the demands of Americans; they were skilled political operators. Bringing constituents back in does not mean diminishing the careers of those who might be deemed “technocrats.”²¹ Yet, it does build a more complete picture of the political world in which these planners operated.

Nor does bringing constituents back into the history of policy making require overlooking the sexist and racist foundations of American democracy in this era. On the contrary, taking politics seriously aligns with scholars' ongoing work of accounting for the influence and evolution of such structures. Not every constituent was viewed equally by Congress, or even viewed as a constituent at all. Congress, with an eye toward advancing male breadwinners, built Social Security in the 1930s with sexist assumptions about how to finance the program and who should benefit from it, defining women as primarily dependants, not workers.²² Furthermore, racist suppression of much of the American electorate in the South into the 1960s ensured the national power of

white Democrats who held a narrow view of “legitimate” constituents. This may explain, in part, why congressional records contain so few letters from Black-identified constituents.²³ Still, gradual changes toward a more universal retirement program in the 1950s came *within* US politics and Congress, not just from the actions of technocrats who hoped for such changes, as political scientist Robert Leiber has shown in his analysis of race and social policy.²⁴ Including constituents and their direct pleas to Congress in policy history does not imply a perfect American democracy. Rather, it reveals how the realities of American democracy have shaped both the limits and possibilities of policy making.²⁵

When we look at the legislative records of the House Committee on Ways and Means and the Senate Committee on Finance, the committees responsible for leading changes to the Social Security program, we find committee chairs not only discussing the details of pending legislation but also corresponding with ordinary Americans about its financial ramifications for them.²⁶ This was a quotidian task committee chairs would perform hundreds of times during their terms. Even their less powerful colleagues, those not perched in a committee chair, would dedicate hours every week of their congressional terms to Social Security. Thousands upon thousands of letters about Social Security in the files of members of Congress provide a remarkable view of this complex democratic bureaucracy.²⁷ Surely most members saw these letters as ordinary case work and constituent service or as special pleading, but they also understood them as informal polls and signs of political winds. And Congress responded.

WRITING FOR SOCIAL SECURITY

From the program’s inception, Social Security’s administrators pushed the policy inquiries they received to beneficiaries’ congressional representatives, to some extent democratizing the bureaucracy of the old-age program.²⁸ Yes, district and regional offices of the Social Security Administration handled much of the face-to-face work through regional offices, and a formal appeals process (repeatedly revised by Congress), established pathways for hearings and determinations about coverage and benefits.²⁹ But congressional representatives were the recipients of policy-level complaints and demands, and not without reason: Congress was eager to assert its role in postwar government and to please constituents.³⁰ Congress’s near constant tinkering with Social Security told constituents that complaints might yield real changes. “I called at the Social Security Field Office here and received some information that

doesn't sound right to me," Mrs. Leroy C. Arnold of Madison, Wisconsin, told George in 1950.³¹ Those who thought the administrators were wrong—or needed to be *made* wrong by policy changes—regularly wrote lawmakers directly.

Who *were* these letter writers? Examination of files from district congressional offices to the files of heavyweight lions of the Senate to the files of key congressional committees reveals a wide array of correspondants. Letters came from men and women—and from every corner of the country. Format ranged from dictated, typewritten letters on corporate stationery to scraps of paper with ungrammatical, penciled pleas for help. When news spread that amendments to the program were being considered in Congress, letters and postcards poured in even faster and committee files were organized to collect “for” and “against” letters from various occupations and policy positions—for example, “Social Security: Coverage-Lawyers (Favor) Folder 1 of 2.”³²

Typical writers explained their age and their spouse's age, their employment and health history (usually filled with difficulty), and either their wish for inclusion in the contributory retirement system (OASI) or their need for higher monthly benefits. Most letter writers already considered themselves “beneficiaries” of Social Security in some form. Even those working in occupations not covered by the contributory insurance program (or not working at all) often received Old Age Assistance (OAA), Social Security's federal-state block-grant welfare program. Indeed, until 1952, expenditures in the direct old-age-assistance program were greater than in the insurance program.³³ Letter writers might be asking lawmakers for higher Social Security benefits when, in fact, what they needed was to be covered by OASI, which had higher benefits than the state-managed assistance programs. Thus, whether through receiving insurance benefits or assistance payments—or simply understanding that their elected representatives in Congress were in charge of the program—Americans were ready and willing to make claims on the federal state. They took pen to paper because Social Security created a constituency that believed it was entitled to influence the federal retirement program.

Letters were startlingly personal and detailed, as constituents not only relied on their representatives to write and explain law but also to offer recognition of hard work and deserving character. Many writers took the reader through specific costs of living and how simply buying potatoes and butter wiped out monthly checks in the postwar economy.³⁴ That constituents regularly included their Social Security numbers in their letters testifies to the ways in which the number, in the words of historian Sarah Igo, “bound personal data to social entitlements.”³⁵ Others reflected their “entitlement”

through expressions of worthiness, such as Eleanor Strong who explained that she wrote “in behalf of my mother. ... She is an old-line American, 9th generation of family in Massachusetts since 1628.”³⁶ As one constituent reminded the Senate Finance Committee in 1950, “Social Security is not wholly a matter of dollars and cents, as it seeks to also add recognition of the dignity of labor in all forms of occupation.”³⁷

Sometimes letters and postcards were identical, as writers organized to write and share language.³⁸ And themes among people who did not know each other were also remarkably consistent. Letters to rural, white Virginia Congressman A. Willis Robertson even in 1935 look very similar to letters to urban, Black Michigan Congressman Charles C. Diggs, Jr. in 1960.³⁹ Some of the consistency among constituent letters reflected the fact that many responded to the same news reports and magazine articles. In a typical letter, Miss J. Snyder explained to Walter George that she was writing “because I read ‘A Plan of Action for Retirement’ in the *Journal of Living*.”⁴⁰

Although it is hard to quantify the policy results of this kind of watchfulness, it is overwhelmingly clear that Americans were paying attention. The precise policy questions of financing and distributing federal retirement benefits could be complex or confusing. Yet, some absolutely understood the Keynesian roots of New Deal welfare policy and argued that those roots should continue to ground Social Security after the Great Depression. “When an Old Ager is certain of a living income he will not have to reverse collars or put patches on old shirts and trousers, instead he will buy a new shirt and trousers,” wrote Floyd Snyder of New York City in April 1948. “This produces prosperity.”⁴¹

Even thousands of less-philosophical letters attest not to misunderstanding of policy but rather to a clear understanding of what their writers *wanted* from policy. For example, policy makers never intended for OASI to fully fund retirement. There was always a “space” for private insurance and pension plans to win the support of insurance companies and reassure those who liked their private pensions. But recipients, led by public discussions of “livable” retirements, *did* expect to live on monthly Social Security checks and made clear in great detail the difficulty of doing so on minimal payments.⁴²

Letters to Congress regarding Social Security were clearly a part of the lawmaking process, even if they were also district “case work.” Letters were carefully marked up by congressional staffers (nearly every letter contains red underlinings) who responded promptly.⁴³ The responses were, of course, standard procedure, even for letters that were sure to be ignored, but they were also a crucial part of a democratic process.⁴⁴ Letters were regularly passed

from member to member—especially to committee members.⁴⁵ They could also be introduced directly into committee hearings by legislators seeking to make a point. Individual letters were inserted into the record, or merely logs of representative letters could be brought to hearings.⁴⁶ The Ways and Means files for the 1954 amendments, for example, contain a document with illustrative quotes from constituent letters for each beneficiary situation, such as “single vs. married” or “working women discriminated against.”⁴⁷ Whether as genuine gauges of public opinion or cherry-picked examples for a particular side, the letters were part of the process.

Finally, letters were also repeatedly referenced during floor debates. “Every day I receive letters from the needy aged of my State setting forth the terrible conditions under which they must try to live on \$20 per month,” explained Alabama Representative Carl Elliot.⁴⁸ Senator Claude Pepper of Florida read into the *Congressional Record* the lengthy details of constituents’ cases.⁴⁹ Walter George believed all were receiving pleas reflecting “the apparent injustice of the present system.”⁵⁰ Letters could also be used by conservatives against proposed amendments, as when Ohio Senator Robert Taft noted that he had “received some letters from farmers for [coverage], and some letters against.”⁵¹

Not every American’s opinion counted, and taking constituent letters into account should not lead to ignoring profoundly undemocratic structures of American life in the 1950s. In fact, part of Congress’s divergence from the plans of social policy advisors was to ensure that white supremacy and Cold War fears were written into social programs. Mexican and West Indian contract farmers were specifically excluded, for example, in keeping with the New Deal’s exclusion of short-term, immigrant, and contract farm laborers.⁵² All noncitizen agricultural workers were excluded in 1956, not just those from Mexico and the West Indies, as were those employed by Communist organizations. Planners were rarely the source of these exclusions. Suspicion about connections between social programs and “un-American activities” was strong enough to land leading social welfare expert Wilbur Cohen on the FBI’s watch list.⁵³

Congress’s guiding principles for who counted as an “American” and who was entitled to be “heard” by their representatives in the 1950s were never quite as liberal as leaders’ rhetoric about Social Security expansion.⁵⁴ And, similarly, constituents could be counted on to reflect the racism and hatefulness within the American public. “The provisions for bringing household servants under social security would ... create an intolerable situation by making our [N]egro servants more arrogant, impudent and no count than

they already are,” Walter George was informed by “a native of GA.”⁵⁵ Domestic workers were made eligible, but constituent-sensitive southern congressmen ensured employers could refuse to enroll their domestic employees. Constituent involvement and responsiveness to policy making in the 1950s was far broader than typically imagined, but such participation did not necessarily produce equitable or democratic policies.

CONGRESS’S SOCIAL SECURITY

Some Americans began writing for national old-age insurance just as the plans were coming together in 1933. Indeed, Americans wrote the Roosevelts, Eleanor and Franklin, more than any other White House occupants before them.⁵⁶ The desperation was clear, as was the expectation that the US government ought to do something. The demand was great enough to propel Dr. Francis E. Townsend’s plan for the federal government to pay all retirees over 60 a monthly stipend of \$200 into a national club movement of 2.2 million members by 1936 that was capable of changing cultural and political expectations of social policies.⁵⁷ A constituency for old-age insurance was born in the 1930s, but Social Security’s formal implementation and need for revision would expand it dramatically in the 1950s.

Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act on August 14, 1935. The huge legislation chartered seven different programs and contained ten major sections, including grants to states for numerous welfare assistance programs as well as the federal old-age benefits system. At the time of the bill’s signing, the old-age benefits insurance program was not yet a focal point for politicians or constituents.⁵⁸ Social Security’s designers in the Roosevelt administration saw the insurance program as central to the legislation, but Congress thought otherwise.⁵⁹ Congressional representatives most wanted credit for the flow of immediate social welfare relief, and the initial effect of the Social Security Act was an influx of cash to state welfare programs through the old-age assistance programs in the bill. Moreover, only about half of American workers, including only two-fifths of Black workers and less than one-half of working women, were covered by the contributory program. Eligibility restrictions revealed that the new social programs were, in the words of welfare scholar Jill Quadagno, “politically negotiable” from the start.⁶⁰

The pivotal Social Security Act Amendments of 1950 originated as two bills written by the Truman administration in August 1949, one for the expansion of the federal-state old-age assistance welfare program and one for the expansion of contributory Old Age and Survivors Insurance.

Expansion in both cases meant broadening eligibility and increasing benefits to cover the cost of living. These were the technocrats' bills, reflecting 1940s reports written by a collection of experts led by Elizabeth Wickenden of the American Public Welfare Association, Wilbur Cohen and Arthur Altmeyer of the Social Security Board, and Robert Ball of the Social Security Advisory Council.⁶¹ The House Committee on Ways and Means merged the two bills into one: HR 6000.

The planners' wish list and HR 6000 were never identical because Congress was hearing from ordinary Americans, not just Social Security experts.⁶² "This is not a bill drawn up by the Social Security Administration," declared Arkansas representative Wilbur Mills.⁶³ Colorado senator Eugene Millikin, a Republican, took pains to make the same point: Congress was not "fooled by a technical staff."⁶⁴ It was natural for congressional leaders to be defensive about being "fooled," but it was true that Congress balanced constituents demands against the wishes of planners. In the spring of 1949, the "technical staff" called for extending OASI coverage to nearly every employee, increasing benefit levels, adding disability coverage, reducing the retirement age for women, and increasing the annual wage on which payroll taxes would be based from \$3,000 a year to \$4,800 (income over that "wage base" is not calculated in the payroll tax).⁶⁵ The legislation Truman signed in August 1950 did make 10 million more American workers eligible for OASI and did increase benefit levels and the wage base (though to \$3,600, not \$4,800). That the 1950 amendments did *not* make *every* American employee eligible for OASI, did *not* lower the retirement age of women, and did *not* establish federal disability insurance reflected the broad politics of Social Security.

Both the House Ways and Means and the Senate Finance committees conducted extensive hearings on HR 6000. As the Ways and Means report detailed, the committee collected 1,471 pages of testimony.⁶⁶ Congress was as moved by public support as by curated testimony. As Wilbur Cohen recounted, "Wherever there was strong support for coverage from the groups affected, the Committees readily assented to coverage and where there was opposition to coverage the Committees readily assented to exclusion."⁶⁷ This process could lead to exasperating contradictions for planners who sought a national, standardized, and universal retirement program. "The contradictory action of excluding the teachers, policemen, firemen, and other public employees under a retirement system but including the transit workers even when they have a separate public retirement system illustrates how the important factor of organized group opinion works in the legislative process," Cohen commented in a footnote to his legislative history.⁶⁸

Such contradictions and policy outcomes reflected what Congress's members and staffers were reading in their mail. What they heard most often was that Social Security benefits were too low to meet the inflation in the hot postwar economy.⁶⁹ Constituents sought to be precise about their needs. H. W. Duckworth of Pinckneyville, Illinois, sent his congressman a detailed listing of his monthly budget and what he got from Social Security. Expenses left Duckworth with almost nothing. "Yours in distress, or I wouldn't write," he wrote.⁷⁰ Congressional staffers took such pleas seriously. Ways and Means clerk Charles W. Davis replied to Duckworth with a careful accounting of exactly how much his benefits would increase under the pending legislation, creating a policy feedback loop in which constituents in need were informed of how new policy would affect them, even before representatives were done legislating the changes.⁷¹

Constituents' demands also reflected postwar politics. For example, references to large Cold War foreign aid budgets were common. "They tell us this is the richest and best country in the world," K. S. Mummert of York, Pennsylvania, told his congressman, but while Congress was providing for "all the world" it should also consider "our own people."⁷² This theme, too, found its way into congressional debates. "If we can send \$40,000,000,000 to one country, a little island off the coast of Europe, England, why can we not have a proper old-age-pension system?" wondered Representative Compton I. White (D-ID).⁷³

Embedded in nearly all of the letters to Congress was a developing sense of older Americans as a coherent constituency—a definable interest group with actionable political power. As Texan Glen Stegall warned Representative Lyndon Johnson (D-TX) in June 1949: "Remember there are now 10,000,000 of us old folks and we will be a pawn in the next election."⁷⁴ Those "old folks" did not necessarily see themselves as represented by the social welfare experts. Once the Senate Finance Committee was done hearing from "several pension leaders and other authorities on Social Security," one writer asked Walter George, would it "be kind enough to respect the opinion of an older worker, who has worked and is still working under the Federal Old Age and Survivors Insurance set up?"⁷⁵ Moreover, as John Burke of Christiansburg, Virginia, sought to remind George in January 1950, many more would someday join the constituency of the aged. "And, Senator, WE SHALL ALL BE OLD SOME DAY, IF WE LIVE LONG ENOUGH."⁷⁶

That Social Security itself had created this self-acknowledged constituency was indicated by the number of writers who noted that concern about the program had inspired their first-ever letter to Congress.⁷⁷ Social Security

created a tie between constituents and the state, but that connection went beyond simply receiving federal retirement checks. It alerted many ordinary Americans to their stake in policy making.

The new constituencies of those seeking coverage or higher benefits were sometimes matched by new constituencies seeking to make sure they remained *outside* the federal retirement system. Doctors feared that their inclusion in Social Security was a step toward socialized medicine, leading to “a flood of letters and telegrams to Congress,” according to Wilbur Cohen. Their howls pushed Ways and Means to exclude most professional occupations from OASI coverage, helping to create a category of “professional” that some were eager to join.⁷⁸ When the bill came to the Senate, funeral directors and accountants “petitioned the Senate Finance Committee to be excluded so they could be considered a ‘professional’ group,” Cohen explained with evident bafflement. “The desire to obtain indirectly a ‘professional’ status by Federal statute was more compelling than the value of social security protection.”⁷⁹ The lesson of the letters to Congress is not so much that Americans wanted or did not want Social Security (even if most *did* want it); rather, the lesson is the way the peculiarities of policy reflected and constituted these streams of constituent correspondence and, more broadly, the meaning of Social Security policy to ordinary Americans.

THE WIDENING CONSTITUENCY

Amendments in 1952 illustrated both the consensus and contentious politics around Social Security. On one hand, the legislation traveled from proposal in committee to passage in both houses in a lightning-quick eight weeks. Rising costs of living were threatening to wash out the benefit increases in the 1950 amendments, so Congress sought to increase benefits further. Overall payroll tax revenue increases (based on rising wages nationally) made it easy to pay for the increases without raising tax rates.⁸⁰ Still, there was plenty of time for politics to intervene and shape even this legislation.

Increasing benefits was enormously popular with the public in 1952.⁸¹ Even still, Daniel Reed (R-NY), leader of the minority on Ways and Means, insisted that “there is no such thing as non-controversial social-security legislation.” Indeed, the original House bill included a “disability freeze,” ensuring that workers who became physically unable to work would not be penalized by the overall reduction of their covered earnings (and therefore their contributions to OASI) in their monthly checks.⁸² Dismissing HR 7800 as a “political bill,” by which he meant it would please constituents, Reed said

the minority had no problem with increasing benefits and eligibility, but they viewed the disability freeze as “socialized medicine” because it would be government employees, not private doctors, who determined eligibility. The American Medical Association objected via urgent telegrams, and Reed insisted the AMA’s objections were “an indication of the flood of protests which is coming in all over the country.”⁸³ Republicans charged that benefit increases and eligibility expansion were so popular with the public that they were being used to cover over other more controversial, and more complex, social provisions in the 1952 amendments.⁸⁴

House Republicans had heard enough from constituents demanding higher benefits that plenty did vote for the bill, even with the disability provisions, but private insurers, the AMA, individual doctors, and employer organizations such as the National Association of Manufacturers bombarded senators with protest letters.⁸⁵ Conferees from the House and Senate felt the political necessity of increasing benefits quickly because of constituent pressure, but lobbyists squashed the will to advance a disability insurance program. Benefits went up, but disability insurance was not part of the 1952 amendments.⁸⁶ This was not how the technocrats had drawn up their plans, but Congress believed “the people,” however narrowly defined, had spoken.

The story for farmers, however, was different. Opposition to their inclusion was in the process of fading, though they were a more difficult constituency to take the measure of than organized professionals. Farmers had largely been excluded from the program in 1935 for a host of reasons, from logistical concerns about accounting for farmworker hours and wages to an evidently racist intention to exclude Black southerners from earning benefits.⁸⁷ The Social Security Board believed that logistical problems could be overcome almost immediately, but Congress continued to debate whether farmers actually *wanted* inclusion—albeit often in terms that did not carefully distinguish differences of power, capital, and race among farm owners, farm laborers, and sharecroppers. In 1949, the House excluded farmers, despite the recommendation of expert advisors, because Ways & Means “did not receive sufficient evidence that they wanted to be included,” according to Tennessee representative Jere Cooper.⁸⁸ Letters and testimony to Congress did testify to many farmers’ and regularly employed farmworkers’ desire to be included. Ultimately, the Senate modified the House’s exclusion of agricultural labor, and the final 1950 amendments included “regularly employed” farm laborers, adding roughly 650,000 beneficiaries.⁸⁹ The vast majority of people working on farms still did not meet Congress’s definition of “regularly employed” in 1950.

Yet, farmers were increasingly awake to the needs and possibilities of Social Security.⁹⁰ “Step into a crowd of congregated old folks,” J. P. Warrick of Millerton, Oklahoma, told his congressman, “and listen just one minute and you will most always hear, did you get a raise this mo. yes they raised my [assistance] check a \$ and another mine too and pretty soon some old fellow will say they cut mine four \$.” Warrick’s complaint was that poor farmers, excluded from the contributory benefits system, were forced to rely on means-tested, state-based OAA. The result was a lot of “worrying because of instability and not getting enough to live a standard life.”⁹¹ Congress continued to debate including farmers in OASI, and farmer eligibility remained hit and miss depending on the terms of their labor. So, farmers continued to write for Social Security.

Dwight Eisenhower’s presidential platform in 1952 called for expanding eligibility for OASI to farmers and others, and the elections brought a Republican sweep of both houses of Congress and the White House. Some in the Social Security world worried Eisenhower’s administration was less open to ongoing work to universalize OASI and maintain federal support for welfare assistance. Concern was heightened by Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare Oveta Culp Hobby’s naming of an OASI advisory group that included many corporate and private insurance leaders—and by the secretary’s own anti-New Deal politics that had just recently driven her from the Democratic Party and would make her a controversial figure until her resignation in 1955.⁹²

The American Federation of Labor (AFL), a crucial player in organizing American support for Social Security, dispatched its Social Security lobbyist Nelson Cruikshank to Nebraska, the home district of the new chair of the Social Security subcommittee of Ways and Means, Republican Carl T. Curtis. Curtis was a known foe of Social Security, and Cruikshank worked to drum up constituent concern about what Curtis might do to the program.⁹³

In addition to organized labor’s demands, Congress continued to receive immense pressure directly from constituents. Rising living costs led to a push for higher benefits and expanded coverage, but beneficiaries also wanted Congress to increase the “retirement test”—how much a beneficiary was allowed to earn in paid employment between ages 65 and 75 and still collect a full benefit.⁹⁴ News of New York Congressman Norman Ostertag’s proposals to increase the test were picked up by the Associated Press wire service and appeared in papers around the country in 1953. Americans responded, often sending in the news clippings. Edwin D. Wertzler of Kalamazoo, Michigan, sought to remind Ostertag that limiting the earnings of the elderly

violated demand-side economic principles. “The more people earning and spending, the more earning possibilities for everyone.”⁹⁵ L. V. Hughes of Decatur, Georgia, made a more political argument. The Republican Ostertag’s proposals might just break the Democrats’ hold on the white South, Hughes forecasted.⁹⁶ Presumably to buttress support for his bill to increase the earnings limit, Ostertag passed those and dozens of other letters on to Ways and Means. They also provided fodder for his speech in favor of the amendments during congressional debates.⁹⁷

By 1954, the wishes of Americans, especially farmers, were clear to Congress. With the political blowback against Hobby’s dalliance with private insurers and Republicans’ recognition of the politics, the threat to Social Security passed and the 1954 amendments followed the pattern of expansion of OASI. Ten million more Americans were now in covered positions, benefits were increased, the wage basis was increased, and the retirement test was liberalized—just as Ostertag’s correspondants had asked. The issue of including farm workers was overcome by the wishes of farmers themselves.⁹⁸

WOMEN AND THE 1956 AMENDMENTS

The more inclusive and reliable the Old Age and Survivors Insurance program became, the more constituencies developed and mobilized to press perceived inequities in it. In 1955, these constituencies had a particularly receptive audience because Democrats retook the House of Representatives in the 1954 elections, bringing with them a mandate to expand the social safety net. The party changeover also installed Tennessee’s Jere Cooper, a strong proponent of Social Security, as chair of Ways and Means. Almost immediately, Cooper’s committee began work on what would become the 1956 amendments, even as some felt that the full effect of the 1954 amendments had not yet taken hold. Congress wound up adding 900,000 more Americans to OASI, and OASI became OASDI, as “permanently and totally disabled workers” over age 50 were brought under the insurance program. The letters of potential beneficiaries and lobbying from disability advocates finally overcame the AMA’s and the insurance industry’s lobbyists, though the new coverage was limited to older Americans, a reflection of that constituency’s now special place in social policy making.⁹⁹

The 1956 amendments also saw an important change for women: the reduction of their retirement age to 62. Women were eligible for OASI benefits at 65 as workers but, thanks to amendments in 1939, also as wives and widows, and many had long argued that they should be eligible at a younger age under

any of those circumstances. Some women sought to benefit from or challenge sexist assumptions about their “eligibility” as workers, sometimes quite successfully.¹⁰⁰ Most were white women, and nearly all expressed an economic citizenship that went beyond the dependence on state-level assistance programs implied by most New Deal and welfare programs.¹⁰¹ The ways in which women advocated for change—their letters and their reasoning—once again, reveal crucial elements of the era’s politics, including the active engagement of Americans in federal policy making, the compromises Congress made for constituents, and the cultural assumptions baked into the era’s politics.¹⁰²

Social Security became a political accelerant for many women in the 1950s. And although plenty of conservative women stood against the liberalization of Social Security and made their voices heard, the ultimate policy outcomes reflected a different, majority will.¹⁰³ As with letters from men, most women who wrote to Congress about OASI sought higher benefits and expanded eligibility. And soon, the most important issue was the retirement age. An amendment to lower the retirement age of some women in 1950 failed because it was deemed too expensive by both Congress and the Social Security Board.¹⁰⁴ A stream of protest letters from women arrived immediately. “It’s a very peculiar thing but widows under 65 and without minor children still have a habit of eating,” Bess Norton Cobb told Texas Congressman Wright Patman.¹⁰⁵ Congress did not change the retirement age in the next two rounds of amendments, but this only fed the coalescing of a women’s OASI constituency.

Advocates for decreasing women’s retirement age made a two-pronged argument: First, they noted that wives tended to be younger than their husbands. Their husband’s retirement at 65 would entitle *him* to his benefits, but his wife’s spousal benefit (the additional amount he was entitled to to support his wife under Social Security’s “family” ethic) would only come due when *she* was 65. If the husband died at or after 65, the widow’s eligibility for survivor benefits also had to wait until she turned 65. But that might be years later, and in the meantime, the family was expected to lose the husband’s wage but not reap his full survivor’s benefit.¹⁰⁶ The second argument was that the whole system was premised on the idea that women should and could work to age 65, like men. But, women argued, the job market was biased against older women. They were either forced out of the job market well before 65 or it would be impossible for a woman who did not have a paying job (three-quarters of all women) to suddenly pick one up when her husband turned 65.

As Jere Cooper opened the door to new amendments in 1955, legislators were besieged by carefully worded demands from women to decrease their

retirement age this time around. Some women wrote out of desperation, having followed the legislation for years.¹⁰⁷ Irene Wiggins attached her hospital bill to her letter in the hope that Congress would do something to “relieve the distress and mental anguish of so little to get by with.”¹⁰⁸ Hazel Hayden of Seattle taped 24 job ads from her local newspaper, all of which sought women under 40 only—with one specifying “a big grin and attractiveness more important than experience.”¹⁰⁹ Some writers responded to general calls to pressure Congress, such as when Mrs. Fred Pulver of Burlington, Washington, placed a letter to the editor in at least two local papers encouraging women to write Cooper. Dozens of letters arrived from the northwest corner of Washington State.¹¹⁰

Lowering women’s retirement age was popular in the House. But Hobby’s opposition, and that of her successor in the Eisenhower administration, Eastman Kodak executive Marion Folsom, nearly swayed the Senate.¹¹¹ The Senate Finance Committee, now under the leadership of Virginia’s Harry Flood Byrd, one of the few Democratic foes of Social Security, scaled back the decreased retirement age to widows only. Byrd’s “widow compromise” only seemed to make things worse. Women who were carefully watching the legislation responded, this time with arguments more political than policy based: Madeline Denton of Lexington, Kentucky, implied that Byrd’s position was a particular betrayal: “My grandfather was a Doctor (Dr. James P. Turner) surgeon in the Confederate Army and I have been a Democrat all of my life.”¹¹² Edna Kraft of Belding, Michigan, noted, like many others, that no high-powered lobby groups spoke for America’s older women.¹¹³ Yet, Lillian J. Brady promised that she and her friends in Titusville, Pennsylvania, would remember how their representatives voted. “My people are all staunch Republicans, but from now [o]n, I know of several friends and people that if the Democrats favor this bill they will vote for the politician that helps them.”¹¹⁴

Women’s strong objections led to a first in Social Security policy making: the Senate went against its own Finance Committee. An amendment by Oklahoma Senator Robert Kerr in the full Senate allowed “for working women, wives, and dependent mothers” to retire at 62 with adjusted benefits. (The Senate also overruled Byrd’s committee on disability, granting recipients full benefits at 50). The Finance Committee’s positions reflected Byrd’s more conservative chairmanship, but Byrd and other conservative Virginia congressmen were out of step with the broader American public—perhaps because Jim-Crow-era Virginia went even further than most southern states in restricting its electorate to a few select white voters. Though, like most members of Congress, Virginia’s conservative Democrats were responsive in

case work, ensuring that their constituents received all benefits to which they were entitled, even as they railed against such entitlements in Congress.¹¹⁵ Those more politically sensitive ran toward liberalization. Even after the Senate amended the bill, Byrd's perfidy would not be forgotten. "It gives me great pleasure again to correspond with you and to let you know how thoroughly I detest you and your despicable actions concerning the social security legislation which you tried so hard to defeat," thundered Mary T. Collins from San Francisco. "I sincerely hope that the women of your district will see to it that you are retired to oblivion in the very near future."¹¹⁶ As in other amendment cycles, the letters to Congress found their way to the legislative floor. South Carolina Senator Olin DeWitt Talmadge Johnston read letters from women directly into the *Congressional Record*.¹¹⁷ Republican Congressman Thomas E. Martin said Democrats looking to decrease women's eligibility age were merely playing politics in an election year. Congress needed little more convincing.¹¹⁸

In their review of the 1956 amendments that year, Wilbur Cohen and Fedele Fauri noted that disability insurance and a lower women's retirement age represented the fulfillment of the Social Security Board's plans dating back to the 1940s. From a distance, this box-checking appears to fit Derthick's model of technocrats working unencumbered by more democratic forces. But these two policy makers did not sense such inevitability at the time. "No one in the fall of 1954 or the spring of 1955 would have predicted that social security legislation would have been enacted in 1956 of such scope and importance," recounted Cohen and Fauri. Legislating was messier than easy predictions allow, and it took more than policy makers to make policy. "Social legislation is the product of the consciousness of social needs, conflicting points of view, cooperation among various groups, compromise and timing," they observed.¹¹⁹ The 1954 election had changed the calculus of elected officials, empowering pro-Social Security constituencies. The records of Congress tell a story of a watchful American public. In 1956, it was women under 65 who were clearly paying attention, belying any simplistic notion that social policy in the 1950s was conducted separately from the political system.

CONCLUSION

Well after its formation in the late 1930s, Social Security was a critical issue on which Americans engaged the state, their representatives, and the government's duty to their well-being. They were not simply collecting checks and paying little attention to policy making before the 1970s. They wrote—and

wrote and wrote—for Social Security. None of this is to suggest that the Social Security’s administrators—and their allied social welfare experts and consultants—did not shape policy. Their studies, reports, and presentations had a strong influence over the laws Congress ultimately passed.¹²⁰ However, historians should not mistake a lot of managerial paper for evidence that managerial thinking controlled all lawmaking. Social Security never looked precisely as the experts had drawn it up—and the time it took to bring their vision close to fruition was not a linear push toward a universally accepted goal.

Including more voices in the history of policy making for Social Security expands how we understand the policy making and political universe of the 1950s. If we take the full measure of constituent engagement with the 1950s amendments to Old Age and Survivors Insurance, then the politics that emerged in 1957 over national medical insurance seem less like a sudden eruption. Rather, Rhode Island Congressman Aime Forand’s bill that year, which launched the eight-year battle for Medicare, appears more clearly as it was: neither a liberal flourish nor technocratic gambit but a reflection of the engagement of aging Americans who were gaining more and more practice at making their voices heard on Capitol Hill. As social scientist Arnold M. Rose concluded in 1965, “the elderly seem to be on their way to becoming a voting bloc with a leadership that acts as a political pressure group.”¹²¹ Rose was right about the bloc’s coherence in 1965, but a peek into congressional records beginning in the late 1940s would have revealed the presence of this pressure group many years earlier.

Recognizing that the “gray lobby” emerged earlier and with greater influence on policy making than previously understood also raises new questions about its dimensions and demographics. Even at its most expansive, after 1956, OASI was never a universal social insurance program. Eligibility required a certain kind of work history that continued to disadvantage single white women and people of color.¹²² These were also the people whose letters were least likely to appear in the files of members of Congress. Certainly, single women and Black people *did* write to Congress about Social Security, but their voices were overshadowed by those of married white workers whom Congress tended to recognize as the program’s recipients and their “real” constituents. The results can be seen in the policy making, results that show that, whatever the inequities, program recipients must still be understood as a crucial part of policy history. Congressional correspondence reveals an active if profoundly limited American constituency—a democracy hobbled by racism and sexism. The changes made to Social Security in the 1950s did not simply reflect the

universalist wishes and plans of bureaucrats; they reflected, for better and for worse, the politics and the emerging political constituencies of 1950s America.

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NOTES

1. William Ruitenbeck to Walter George, May 18, 1950, RG46, US Senate, 81st Congress, SEN 81A-E7, Committee on Finance, box 35, National Archives Building, Washington, DC (Hereafter NAB).

2. Ellen S. Patten to Walter George, January 18, 1950, RG46, US Senate, 81st Congress, SEN 81A-E, Committee on Finance, box 15, NAB.

3. Edward D. Berkowitz, *America's Welfare State: From Roosevelt to Reagan* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 66–87; Martha Derthick, *Agency under Stress: The Social Security Administration in American Government* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1990); Kevin M. Kruse and Julian E. Zelizer, *Fault Lines: A History of the United States since 1974* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2019), 114–16; Andrea Louise Campbell, *How Policies Make Citizens: Senior Political Activism and the American Welfare State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 79, 84–85.

4. Martha Derthick, *Policymaking for Social Security* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1979), 12, 183, 202n26, 239–40; Sam Roberts, “Martha A. Derthick, Analyst Who Untangled Public Policy, Dies at 81,” *New York Times*, January 29, 2015.

5. Edward Berkowitz’s “Note on the Sources” instructs readers interested in Social Security to “start and finish” with Derthick. Berkowitz, *America's Welfare State*, 200. Theda Skocpol and John Ikenberry, “The Political Formation of the American Welfare State in Historical and Comparative Perspective,” in *Comparative Social Research: The Welfare State, 1883–1983*, vol. 6, ed. Richard F. Tomasson (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1983), 87–148; John Ikenberry and Theda Skocpol, “Expanding Social Benefits: The Role of Social Security,” *Political Science Quarterly* 102, no. 3 (1987): 389–416; Gary P. Freeman, “Voters, Bureaucrats, and the State: On the Autonomy of Social Security Policymaking,” in *Social Security: The First Half-Century*, ed. Gerald D. Nash *et al.* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988), 145–79; Jill S. Quadagno, *The Color of Welfare* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

6. Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

7. Henry Pratt’s 1976 work on the “gray lobby” offers a similar assessment of organized social action, quoted and affirmed in 2003 by Campbell. Pratt does acknowledge that “less structured” mobilization occurred among seniors but locates even those rumblings in the late 1950s. Christine L. Day, *What Older Americans Think: Interest Group and Aging Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 22–24; Henry J. Pratt, *The Gray Lobby* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 26, 49; Campbell, 84–85.

8. Author discussion with archivist Eric DeLisle, May 22, 2019, Social Security History Archives, Social Security Administration, Baltimore, MD (Hereafter SSA).

9. Robert Y. Shapiro and Tom W. Smith, "The Polls: Social Security," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 49, no. 4 (Winter 1985): 561; Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro, *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trend in Americans' Policy Preferences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 118–19. See also, Michael E. Schiltz, *Public Attitudes toward Social Security 1935–1965* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1970).

10. Marisa Chappell, "Protecting Soldiers and Mothers Twenty-Five Years Later: Theda Skocpol's Legacy and American Welfare State Historiography, 1992–2017," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 17 (2018): 562; See also, W. Andrew Achenbaum, "The History of Federal Policies toward the Aged," in *Federal Social Policy: The Historical Dimension*, ed. Donald T. Critchlow and Ellis W. Hawley (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988), 47.

11. Wilbur J. Cohen and Fedele F. Fauri, "The Social Security Amendments of 1956," *Public Welfare* (October 1956), 16.

12. As political scientist John Kingdon has argued, elected officials, including members of Congress, have typically been the crucial policy "agenda setters," not bureaucrats. John W. Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies* (Boston: Longman, 2011), 21–44.

13. As Campbell puts it, "Letters inform Congress about constituent concerns and prompt casework (where members try to solve constituent problems), both of which contribute to members' reelection efforts." Campbell, 26.

14. On the long history of petitions and letters to elected officials, and systematic analysis showing that Congress has taken them seriously, particularly in the nineteenth century; see Maggie Blackhawk et al., "Congressional Representation by Petition: Assessing the Voices of the Voteless in a Comprehensive New Database, 1789–1949," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (July 2021), 817–49. Daniel Carpenter's subject is the first century of US politics, but his basic insights that petitioning is more democratic than it may appear and that it has shaped American government are useful here too. Daniel Carpenter, *Democracy by Petition: Popular Politics in Transformation, 1790–1870* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021).

15. Here, I mean "agenda" in the terms of Kingdon's classic definition: "the list of subjects or problems to which government officials, and people outside of government closely associated with those officials, are paying some serious attention at any given time." Kingdon, 3.

16. For an analysis arguing that constituent mail reflects public opinion and "political awareness," see Taeku Lee's examination of letters to US presidents during the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. Taeku Lee, *Mobilizing Public Opinion: Black Insurgency and Racial Attitudes in the Civil Rights Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), chap. 4–6.

17. In many ways, my findings about the importance of contacting elected officials in Social Security policy making echo Campbell's, but my study diverges in two critical ways: First, I looked at constituent letters in congressional files—Campbell uses mass polling to show that people reported contacting elected officials. Second, I argue that letter-writing activity was meaningful in the 1950s, even before the 1970s, when Campbell locates an effective "participation-policy cycle." Campbell, 2, 79, 87–92.

18. Robert C. Lieberman, *Shifting the Color Line: Race and the American Welfare State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 109.

19. Cong. Rec. S8895 (daily ed. June 20, 1950).

20. Joanna L. Grisinger, *The Unwieldy American State: Administrative Politics since the New Deal* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 79; Louis Menand, *The Free World: Art and Thought in the Cold War* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2021), 43–54; Julian Zelizer, ed., *The American Congress: The Building of American Democracy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2004), 120, 312–18.

21. The most thorough accounting of the pivotal careers of social welfare policy makers can be found in the work of public policy scholar Edward D. Berkowitz, including *Mr. Social Security: The Life of Wilbur J. Cohen* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995) and *Robert Ball and the Politics of Social Security* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003). For the career of an unusually technocratic politician, see Julian Zelizer, *Taxing America: Wilbur D. Mills, Congress, and the State, 1945–1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

22. Carpenter notes that “petition democracy was always partial,” never granting “equal voice.” Blanche D. Coll, *Safety Net: Welfare and Social Security 1929–1979* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 94; Jaynes Burrell Burks, “Economic Crises for Women: Aging and Retirement Years” (1977), in Jill S. Quadagno, ed., *Aging, the Individual and Society: Readings in Social Gerontology* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1980), 451; Molly C. Michelmore, *Tax and Spend: The Welfare State, Tax Politics, and the Limits of American Liberalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); Carpenter, *Democracy by Petition*, 476.

23. Historically, African Americans have been less likely to write elected officials than other members of the general public. Lee, 97.

24. Analysis Division, “Agricultural Workers and Household Employees,” Program for Development of Old Age and Survivors Insurance, Report 1 (BOASI, Social Security Board, 1945), p. 16, in Folder: Program for Development of Old Age and Survivors Insurance 1945–1947, SSA; Lieberman, *Shifting the Color Line*, 116–17, 69, 106.

25. Carpenter offers a theoretical grounding for seeing petitioning as both potentially democratizing (by giving voice to some left out of electoral processes) and undemocratic (by giving elites chances to set agendas) in Daniel Carpenter, “Agenda Democracy,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 26, no 8 (2023): 1–20.

26. Daniel A. Reed to Howard C. Seaman, May 6, 1954, RG233, Records of the United States House of Representatives, 83rd Congress, HR 83A-F17.12, Committee on Ways & Means, box 2097, NAB.

27. Historian Scott Sandage shows how the phrasing and tropes of epistolary pleas reveal broader cultural themes and individual experience. Studies of letter writing in England under the Poor Laws have also noted the importance of the rhetorical strategies in letters from and on behalf of poor people. Scott A. Sandage, *Born Losers: A History of Failure in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Steven A. King and Peter Jones, “Testifying for the Poor: Epistolary Advocates for the Poor in Nineteenth Century England and Wales,” *Journal of Social History* 49 (2016), 784–807; Carpenter, *Democracy by Petition*, xi–xii.

28. "Commissioner's Correspondence, 1936-1969," Social Security Administration, Office of the Commissioner, RG 47, Entry 40, National Archives II, College Park, MD.
29. "The Bureau of Hearings and Appeals," *Oasis* (September 1963), 12-14, 19; Social Security Board, Federal Security Agency, "Basic Provisions Adopted by the Social Security Board for the Hearing and Review of Old-Age and Survivors Insurance Claims, with a Discussion of Certain Administrative Problems and Legal Considerations," 1940, SSA.
30. Grisinger, *Unwieldy American State*, esp. chap. 3 and 4.
31. Mrs. Leroy C. Arnold to Walter George, March 11, 1950, RG46, US Senate, 81st Congress, SEN 81A-E7, Committee on Finance, box 16, Social Security Acknowledgment #7, NAB.
32. RG 46, Records of the US Senate, Finance, SEN 83A-F6, box 58, NAB.
33. In fact, growth in the workforce during the war actually meant that the percentage covered under the social insurance program decreased between 1939 and 1949; Coll, *Safety Net*, 158.
34. For one example, H. O. Lytle to Robert Doughton, May 22, 1952, RG233, Records of the US House of Representatives, 82nd Congress, Committee on Ways & Means, HR 82A-F17.1, box 816, NAB.
35. Sarah E. Igo, *The Known Citizen: A History of Privacy in Modern America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 58.
36. Eleanor L. Strong to Walter George, March 8, 1950, RG46, US Senate, 81st Congress, SEN 81A-E, Committee on Finance, box 15, NAB.
37. E. V. Pease to Senate Finance Committee, February 22, 1950, RG46, US Senate, 81st Congress, SEN 81A-E7, Committee on Finance, box 16, Social Security Acknowledgment #7, NAB.
38. "We are very interested in the changes to be made in the Social Security Act" began a clutch of postcards from women in Atlantic City, addressed to Ways and Means in June 1956. See RG 233, Records of the US House of Representatives, 84th Congress, Committee on Ways & Means, HR 84A-F17.3, box 940, Social Security Correspondence Pursuant to newspaper articles, NAB.
39. Mrs. F. E. Sampson to Congress of United States, December 10, 1935, Pensions—Old Age, Miscellaneous Subject Files 1933-1946, A. Willis Robertson Papers, College of William & Mary, Williamsburg, VA; Herbert R. Beaty to Charles C. Diggs, March 28, 1960, Charles Diggs Collection, box 40, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, DC.
40. Miss J. Snyder to Walter George, December 29, 1952, RG46, Records of the US Senate, 82nd Congress, SEN 82A-F7, Committee on Finance, box 166, Social Security Eligibility Requirements, NAB.
41. Floyd Snyder to Edward R. Stettenius Jr., April 24, 1948, RG46, Committee on Finance, S. Res. 141, SEN 80A-F8, box 4, Benefits Increase-OASI Inquiries, NAB.
42. Harry J. Davenport to Robert Doughton, February 8, 1949, RG233, Records of the US House of Representatives, 81st Congress, Committee on Ways & Means, HR 81A-F17.1, box 170, OASI-Benefits for Married Women and husbands, NAB; "Social Security Revision: Proceedings in Executive Session before the Committee on Finance United States Senate, 81st Congress, Second Session, on H.R. 6000, January 12, 1950" (Washington, DC:

Government Printing Office, 1950), RG46, US Senate, 81st Congress, SEN 81A-E7, Committee on Finance, box 34, NAB.

43. Ways & Means Committee counsels Leo H. Irwin and Charles W. Davis exerted a particularly strong influence on constituents' understanding of Social Security by being the principal respondents on behalf of the committee in the 1950s. Both were hired by Robert Doughton in 1949. Irwin stayed on the committee's staff until he was appointed to the US Tax Court in 1968. Davis clerked for Ways & Means until being nominated by Truman to serve as counsel to the Internal Revenue Bureau in 1952. In the Senate, Robert Ball, director of the Senate's Advisory Council on Social Security, was asked to respond to letters to senators and to council chairman Edward R. Stettinius, Jr. See United States Tax Court, "Opening Remarks of Chief Judge Lapsley W. Hamblen, Jr. at the Memorial Service for Judge Leo H. Irwin on December 1, 1995," *United States Tax Court Reports* 105 (1995): ix—xx; Kenan Heise, "Charles W. Davis, 69, Prominent Tax Lawyer," *Chicago Tribune*, February 19, 1987.

44. On petitions as standard congressional work and the "participatory state" built to handle them, see Maggie McKinley, "Petitioning and the Making of the Administrative State," *Yale Law Journal* 127, no. 6 (April 2018): 1558–66.

45. John F. Kennedy to Robert Doughton, January 17, 1949, RG233, Records of the US House of Representatives, 81st Congress, Committee on Ways & Means, HR 81A-F17.1, box 171, NAB; Leonard Irving to Robert Doughton, March 19, 1952, RG233, Records of the US House of Representatives, 82nd Congress, Committee on Ways & Means, HR 82A-F17.1, box 814, NAB.

46. For example, Social Security subcommittee chair Carl T. Curtis (R-NE) wrote Robert Barker of Rochester, New York, in 1953 to let him know his letter would be part of the hearings. Carl T. Curtis to Robert J. Barker, October 28, 1953, RG233, Records of the US House of Representatives, 83rd Congress, Committee on Ways & Means, HR 83A-F17.12, box 2091, NAB.

47. Undated document "Benefit Situations—(Letters illustrating), RG233, Records of the US House of Representatives, 83rd Congress, Committee on Ways & Means, HR 83A-F17.22, box 2137, NAB; Robert M. Ball to August H. Andresen, February 8, 1954, RG233, Records of the US House of Representatives, 83rd Congress, Committee on Ways & Means, HR 83A-F17.22, box 2137, NAB; James G. Fulton to Janet L. Storrie, June 16, 1952, RG233, Records of the US House of Representatives, 82nd Congress, Committee on Ways & Means, HR 82A-F17.1, box 816, Social Security Old-Age and Survivors Ins. Coverage Domestic Employees, Ministers, Professionals, NAB; Leo H. Irwin to James G. Fulton, June 28, 1952, RG233, Records of the US House of Representatives, 82nd Congress, Committee on Ways & Means, HR 82A-F17.1, box 816, Social Security Old-Age and Survivors Ins. Coverage Domestic Employees, Ministers, Professionals, NAB.

48. 81 Cong. Rec. H13955 (daily ed. October 5, 1949) (statement of Rep. Elliot).

49. 81 Cong. Rec. S8817 (daily ed. June 19, 1950) (statement of Sen. Pepper).

50. 81 Cong. Rec. 8493 (daily ed. June 13, 1950) (statement of Sen. George).

51. 81 Cong. Rec. S8587 (daily ed. June 14, 1950) (statement of Sen. Taft).

52. Cindy Hahamovitch, *No Man's Land: Jamaican Guestworkers in America and the Global History of Deportable Labor* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 92–93.

53. Karen M. Tani, “Flemming v. Nestor: Anticommunism, the Welfare State, and the Making of ‘New Property,’” *Law and History Review* 26, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 379–414; Cohen and Fauri, “The Social Security Amendments of 1956,” 6. Landon R. Y. Storrs, *The Second Red Scare and the Unmaking of the New Deal Left* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 14.

54. Donald L. Davis, “Growing Old Black” (1971) in Quadagno, *Aging*, 365; on the meaning of “universalism” in welfare policy, see Quadagno, *Color of Welfare*, 156–57; on the conservative foundations of reducing of social welfare, see Jennifer Mittelstadt, *From Welfare to Workfare: The Unintended Consequences of Liberal Reform 1945–1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

55. Eloise Lyman Palmer to Walter George, January 30, 1950, RG46, US Senate, 81st Congress, SEN 81A-E7, Committee on Finance, box 16, Social Security Acknowledgment #7, NAB.

56. Lee, 94–95; Robert S. McElvaine, ed., *Down & Out in the Great Depression: Letters from the ‘Forgotten Man’* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 6; for a typical example, see E. M. Nelson to Franklin D. Roosevelt, July 14, 1933, Folder: CES-Correspondance—(Old Age Pensions), SSHA.

57. Coll, *Safety Net*, 82, 92–93; Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression* (New York: Knopf, 1982). For letters endorsing Townsend to Congress, see for example, RG 46, U.S. Senate, 81st Congress, SEN 81A-E7, boxes 32–33, NAB. On the ways social movements can lead to cultural shifts with policy-making implications, see Edwin Amenta and Francesca Polletta, “The Cultural Impacts of Social Movements,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 45 (2019): 289–91. On the origins of Social Security specifically within this framing, see Edwin Amenta, *When Movements Matter: The Townsend Plan and the Rise of Social Security* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

58. The age 65 was chosen because it was common in other pension programs and seemed actuarially feasible, as remaining life expectancy was about 12–14 more years. Larry Dewitt, “The Development of Social Security in America,” *Social Security Bulletin* 70, no. 3 (2010): 6–7; Coll, *Safety Net*, 52.

59. Berkowitz, *America’s Welfare State*, 26; Dewitt, “The Development of Social Security in America,” 4.

60. Quadagno, *Color of Welfare*, 157–58.

61. “A Program for the Development of Old-Age and Survivors Insurance” was begun by the Analysis Division of the the Bureau in 1941 and revised repeatedly until 1949. The so-called Calhoun Report, named for Chief of Social Security Technical Staff Leonard J. Calhoun, was ordered by Congress in 1945. United States, “Issues in Social Security: A Report to the Committee on Ways & Means of the House of Representatives by the Committee’s Social Security Technical Staff Established Pursuant to H. Res. 204 (79th Congress, 1st Session)” (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1946).

62. In response to the accusations of conservatives that liberals were willing to pass anything “that Altmeyer wants to put over on you,” congressional leaders repeatedly insisted that legislation was *their* job. 81 Cong. Rec. H13811 (daily ed. October 4, 1949).

63. 81 Cong. Rec. H13907 (daily ed. October 5, 1949) (statement of Rep. Mills).

64. 81 Cong. Rec. S8498 (daily ed. June 13, 1950). (statement of Sen. Millikin).

65. Arthur J. Altmeyer, "Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance," *Social Security Bulletin* (April 1949).
66. US House of Representatives, Committee on Ways and Means Report, H.R. Rep. No. 81-1300 (August 22, 1949).
67. Cohen, "The Social Security Act Amendments of 1950," 60.
68. Cohen, "The Social Security Act Amendments of 1950," 37n48.
69. Mrs. S. T. Williams to Robert Doughton, April 10, 1949, RG233, Records of the US House of Representatives, 81st Congress, Committee on Ways & Means, HR 81A-F17.1, box 170, OASI-Benefits for Married Women and husbands, NAB.
70. H. W. Duckworth to C. W. Bishop, April 8, 1949, RG233, Records of the US House of Representatives, 81st Congress, Committee on Ways & Means, HR 81A-F17.1, box 170, OASI-Benefits for Married Women and husbands, NAB.
71. Charles W. Davis to H. W. Duckworth, April 20, 1949, RG233, Records of the US House of Representatives, 81st Congress, Committee on Ways & Means, HR 81A-F17.1, box 170, OASI-Benefits for Married Women and husbands, NAB.
72. K. S. Mummert to James F. Lind, June 9, 1949, RG233, Records of the US House of Representatives, 81st Congress, Committee on Ways & Means, HR 81A-F17.1, box 170, OASI-Benefits for Married Women and husbands, NAB.
73. 81 Cong. Rec. H13963 (daily ed. October 5, 1949) (statement of Rep. White).
74. Glen Stegall to Lyndon B. Johnson, June 18, 1949, RG233, Records of the US House of Representatives, 81st Congress, Committee on Ways & Means, HR 81A-F17.1, box 170, OASI-Benefits for Married Women and husbands, NAB.
75. Henry Hausen to Walter George, February 19, 1950, RG46, US Senate, 81st Congress, SEN 81A-E, Committee on Finance, box 15, NAB.
76. John Burke to Walter George, January 9, 1950, RG46, US Senate, 81st Congress, SEN 81A-E, Committee on Finance, box 15, NAB; For another example, see also C. C. Burns to Walter George, March 18, 1950, RG46, US Senate, 81st Congress, SEN 81A-E7, Committee on Finance, box 16, Social Security Acknowledgment #7, NAB.
77. For example, Nellie Speer to Walter George, February 9, 1950, RG46, US Senate, 81st Congress, SEN 81A-E, Committee on Finance, box 15, NAB. For another example, see. Bess Norton Cobb to Wright Patman, January 7, 1950, RG233, Records of the US House of Representatives, 81st Congress, Committee on Ways & Means, HR 81A-F17.1, box 170, OASI-Benefits for Married Women and husbands, NAB.
78. On the state's ability to create "kinds" of Americans through legislative inclusion and exclusion from social policy programs, see Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).
79. Cohen, "The Social Security Act Amendments of 1950," 10n21.
80. Wilbur J. Cohen, "Social Security Act Amendments of 1952," *Social Security Bulletin* (September 1952).
81. G. A. Connor to Walter George, June 4, 1951, RG46, Records of the US Senate, 82nd Congress, SEN 82A-F7, box 165, NAB; Walter George to G. A. Connor, June 7, 1951, RG46, Records of the US Senate, 82nd Congress, SEN 82A-F7, Committee on Finance, box 165, NAB.
82. Cohen, "Social Security Act Amendments of 1952."

83. 82 Cong. Rec. H5471–5472 (daily ed. May 19, 1952) (statement of Rep. Reed).
84. 82 Cong. Rec. H5474 (daily ed. May 19, 1952); Isaac Kirsner to Robert Doughton, May 20, 1952, RG233, Records of the US House of Representatives, 82nd Congress, Committee on Ways & Means, HR 82A-F17.1, box 814, NAB.
85. 81 Cong. Rec. S8802 (daily ed. June 19, 1950).
86. Cohen, “Social Security Act Amendments of 1952.”
87. Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* (New York: Liveright, 2013), 260; Quadagno, *Color of Welfare*, 20–21; Lieberman, *Shifting the Color Line*, 102–3; Deborah E. Ward, *The White Welfare State: The Racialization of U.S. Welfare Policy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005). Historian Mary Poole nuances this picture a bit but does not totally overturn the basic responsibility of racist southern congressmen. Mary Poole, *The Segregated Origins of Social Security: African Americans and the Welfare State* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).
88. 81 Cong. Rec. H13900 (daily ed. October 5, 1949) (statement of Rep. Cooper). Vermont Senator George Aiken believed a general will to be included did exist, but farmers needed more details. 81 Cong. Rec. S8587 (daily ed. June 14, 1950).
89. Cohen, “The Social Security Act Amendments of 1950,” 13–14.
90. Edward Rees to Charles W. Davis, January 30, 1952, RG233, Records of the US House of Representatives, 82nd Congress, Committee on Ways & Means, HR 82A-F17.1, box 814, NAB; Leo H. Irwin to Edward Rees, January 30, 1952, RG233, Records of the US House of Representatives, 82nd Congress, Committee on Ways & Means, HR 82A-F17.1, box 814, NAB.
91. J. P. Warrick to Carl B. Albert, June 5, 1952, RG233, Records of the US House of Representatives, 82nd Congress, Committee on Ways & Means, HR 82A-F17.1, box 813, Social Security Old Age Assistance, NAB.
92. Lieberman, *Shifting the Color Line*, 115; Wilbur J. Cohen, Robert M. Ball, and Robert J. Myers, “Social Security Act Amendments of 1954: A Summary and Legislative History,” *Social Security Bulletin* (September 1954).
93. Nelson Cruikshank to George Meany, October 19, 1953, AFL, CIO, AFL-CIO Office of the President. RG1-027 President’s Files: George Meany, 1944–1960 Series 6: Miscellaneous Correspondence, 1946–1960, box, 39, folder 7, Social Security, 1952–1954, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, MD (Hereafter GMMA-UMD).
94. Mrs. C. H. Terry to Harold Ostertag, January 12, 1953, RG233, Records of the US House of Representatives, 83rd Congress, Committee on Ways & Means, HR 83A-F17.12, box 2091, NAB.
95. Edwin D. Wertzler to Harold, January 9, 1953, RG233, Records of the US House of Representatives, 83rd Congress, Committee on Ways & Means, HR 83A-F17.12, box 2091, NAB.
96. L. V. Hughes to Harold [O]stertag, January 8, 1953, RG233, Records of the US House of Representatives, 83rd Congress, Committee on Ways & Means, HR 83A-F17.12, box 2091, NAB.
97. 83 Cong. Rec. H7458 (daily ed. June 1, 1954).
98. 83 Cong. Rec. H7441 (June 1, 1954).

99. Social Security bureaucrats saw letters from constituents in need of disability insurance as an important way to influence Congress. For example, Wilbur Cohen forwarded letters to Georgia congressman Sidney Camp, who sat on Ways and Means. Cohen and Fauri, "The Social Security Amendments of 1956," 16; Edward D. Berkowitz and Wendy Wolff, "Disability Insurance and the Limits of American History," *The Public Historian* 8, no. 2 (Spring 1986): 65–82; Wilbur J. Cohen to A. Sidney Camp, n.d [1950?], RG233, Records of the US House of Representatives, 81st Congress, Committee on Ways & Means, HR 81A-F17.1, box 172, NAB.

100. Cary Franklin, "The Anti-Stereotyping Principle in Constitutional Sex Discrimination Law," *NYU Law Review* 85 (April 2010): 83–173.

101. I was not able to identify letters from Black women regarding Social Security in congressional correspondence in this period. But scholars have been wrong before about advocacy by African Americans, and so I am loathe to rule it out. For women's limited citizenship, see Suzanne Mettler, *Dividing Citizens: Gender and Federalism in New Deal Public Policy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); Igo, *The Known Citizen*, 94; Canaday, *The Straight State*, 152.

102. Blackhawk et al. show that women made their voices heard in Congress through petitioning even before the Nineteenth Amendment brought them into the electoral process. Blackhawk et al., 834–39.

103. On conservative women's response to Social Security, see Elizabeth Gillespie McRae, *Mothers of Massive Resistance: White Women and the Politics of White Supremacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 153–54. Examples of letters from self-identified conservative white women include, Celeste Clemens to Mr. Mahan, July 31, 1951, RG233, Records of the US House of Representatives, 82nd Congress, Committee on Ways & Means, HR 82A-F17.1, box 816, Social Security Old-Age and Survivors Ins. Coverage Domestic Employees, Ministers, Professionals, NAB; Esther Jordan to Robert Doughton, August 6, 1951, RG233, Records of the US House of Representatives, 82nd Congress, Committee on Ways & Means, HR 82A-F17.1, box 816, Social Security Old-Age and Survivors Ins. Coverage Domestic Employees, Ministers, Professionals, NAB; Ethel Berard to Robert Doughton, August 6, 1951, RG233, Records of the US House of Representatives, 82nd Congress, Committee on Ways & Means, HR 82A-F17.1, box 816, Social Security Old-Age and Survivors Ins. Coverage Domestic Employees, Ministers, Professionals, NAB; Petition to Estes Kefauver, August 28, 1951, RG46, Records of the US Senate, 82nd Congress, SEN 82A-F7, Committee on Finance, box 168, NAB.

104. 81 Cong. Rec. S8890 (June 20, 1950); Leo Irwin to Wright Patman, January 21, 1950, RG233, Records of the US House of Representatives, 81st Congress, Committee on Ways & Means, HR 81A-F17.1, box 170, OASI-Benefits for Married Women and husbands, NAB.

105. Cobb to Patman, January 7, 1950.

106. For an example, among many, in committee files: Anna Huffman to Walter George, October 14, 1952, RG46, Records of the US Senate, 82nd Congress, SEN 82A-F7, Committee on Finance, box 166, Social Security Eligibility Requirements, NAB.

107. Vaughn quoted in W. Kerr Scott to Harry F. Byrd, July 11, 1956, RG46, Records of the U.S. Senate, 84th Congress, Committee on Finance, Sen 84A-F6, box 821, NAB.

108. Mrs. Newton A. Wiggins to Harry Byrd, December 27, 1956, RG46, Records of the U.S. Senate, 84th Congress, Committee on Finance, SEN 84A-F6, box 821, NAB.

109. Hazel Hayden to Jere Cooper, May 26, 1955, RG233, Records of the United States House of Representatives, 84th Congress, Committee on Ways & Means, HR 84A-F17.3, box 947, NAB.

110. The letters can all be found in RG233, Records of the United States House of Representatives, 84th Congress, Committee on Ways & Means, HR 84A-F17.3, box 947, "Social Security Age—Women 1 of 2," NAB.

111. Statement by Oveta Culp Hobby, Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, Before the Senate Committee on Finance, July 26, 1955. Attached to Victor Christgau, OASI Director's Bulletin No. 222, (July 29, 1955), SSHA, <https://www.ssa.gov/history/legislative-history.html>; "News from the AFL-CIO," March 22, 1956, AFL, CIO, AFL-CIO Office of the President. RG1-027 President's Files: George Meany, 1944–1960 Series 6: Miscellaneous Correspondence, 1946–1960 box 39, Folder 8 Social Security, 1956–1960, GMMA-UMD.

112. Madeline Denton to Harry F. Byrd, July 15, 1956, RG46, Records of the US Senate, 84th Congress, Committee on Finance, SEN 84A-F6, box 821, NAB.

113. Edna Kraft to Harry F. Byrd, July 13, 1956, RG46, Records of the US Senate, 84th Congress, Committee on Finance, SEN 84A-F6, box 821, NAB.

114. Lillian J. Brady to Harry F. Byrd, July 13, 1956, RG46, Records of the US Senate, 84th Congress, Committee on Finance, SEN 84A-F6, box 821, NAB.

115. For example, the office files of conservative congressmen, such as Virginians A. Willis Robertson and Watkins Abbitt, show the same responsiveness to constituents regarding Social Security benefits as those of liberals who publicly supported the program. See A. Willis Robertson Papers, College of William & Mary, Williamsburg, VA; Watkins Abbitt Papers, University of Richmond Library, Richmond, VA.

116. Mary T. Collins to Harry F. Byrd, July 31, 1956, RG46, Records of the US Senate, 84th Congress, Committee on Finance, SEN 84A-F6, box 821, NAB.

117. 84 Cong. Rec. S13042 (daily ed. July 17, 1956).

118. 84 Cong. Rec. S13065 (daily ed. July 17, 1956).

119. Cohen and Fauri, "The Social Security Amendments of 1956," 2.

120. Brian Balogh, "Securing Support: The Emergence of the Social Security Board as a Political Actor, 1935-1939," in *Federal Social Policy: The Historical Dimension*, ed. Donald T. Critchlow and Ellis W. Hawley (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988), 55–78.

121. Arnold M. Rose, "The Subculture of the Aging: A Framework for Research in Social Gerontology" (1965) in Quadagno, *Aging*, 75.

122. Quadagno, *Color of Welfare*, 157.