

Ex-Senator Conducts a Ministry at Capitol

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Special to The New York Times

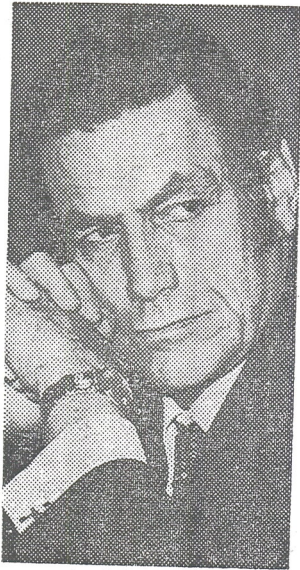
WASHINGTON, Dec. 8—It is not uncommon for former Congressmen to haunt the cloakrooms and dining rooms on Capitol Hill. Sometimes they are there in a new incarnation as lobbyists; generally they are simply seeking to recapture a glimmer of the recognition and perquisites they enjoyed before their constituents terminated their political careers.

Harold E. Hughes, the former Senator from Iowa, is different. Only 52 years of age, he withdrew from politics of his own accord at the end of his first term in the Senate, last January. There are those who still think that he not only would have won re-election easily but might have figured prominently in the current scramble for the Democratic Presidential nomination.

He was a Presidential aspirant once but set his temporal ambitions aside to devote his life to religion. It was a choice that provoked baffled conversation in political circles here for a brief time; then Mr. Hughes was left to go his own way. That is what he did, but he still has not put Capitol Hill behind him.

"I have a ministry here on the Hill," he explained the other day.

Every Wednesday that ministry brings him back to



United Press International

Harold E. Hughes

Congress, not to reminisce or lobby but to pray.

The day starts with a prayer breakfast in the Senate that has been a weekly event there, Mr. Hughes said, for small numbers of serious Christians for more than 30 years. At lunch time, he prays with small groups of Congressmen and Congressional aides who are struggling as he is, he says, to be "disciples of Christ in our everyday lives."

In between prayers, Mr. Hughes has reluctantly allowed himself to take on

nonspiritual tasks. He had only just vacated his Senatorial office in January when he agreed to serve the Senate Judiciary Committee as a special assistant on alcoholism and narcotics. A former alcoholic himself, he had been preoccupied by these problems during his Congressional career but now he worries that he has not been doing enough to earn the \$12,000 salary the committee pays him.

Mr. Hughes, who lives entirely on contributions from people who support his religious work, turns that salary over to what he described as an "inner city ministry" here.

"The ethical point in my own heart," he said, "is am I worth the \$12,000?"

He is inclined not to think so and plans to tell Senator James O. Eastland, the Mississippi Democrat who hired him, that he is relinquishing the post.

More recently, he accepted the chairmanship of a nine-member commission of the operation of the Senate, which has been empowered to study the upper house's procedures, staffing and facilities with an eye to making recommendations as to how the Senate can be made more efficient and responsive to public needs.

"I'm not leaving the world," Mr. Hughes said. "I don't intend to retreat to a cave to spend the rest

of my life in contemplation."

Yet it was obvious that he viewed these duties as a distraction from his real work. The commission is supposed to complete its report by September; its limited duration, plus an assurance that he would be expected to devote only two days a month to its activities, were factors in his agreeing to be lured back to the periphery of public life.

That decision, like any other one he has to make in his personal life now, was reached only after discussion and prayer in a five-man fellowship that includes a sitting Congressman, Representative Albert H. Quie of Minnesota, and Charles W. Colson, the former special counsel in the Nixon White House who joined the group after his conviction on a charge of obstruction of justice.

Mr. Quie is a Republican as was Mr. Colson, of course, and although Mr. Hughes is reluctant to talk about the close relationship that exists within the prayer group, it seems apparent that their political identification has something to do with his attitude to politics now.

"It's a funny thing for a man who has spent so many years trying to get his name into the papers," he added. "But I want to witness for Christ. I don't want to witness for Harold Hughes. I guess that's what I'm saying."