



# INSIDE THE VAULT

*Harry S. Truman and National Healthcare*  
with Barbara A. Perry

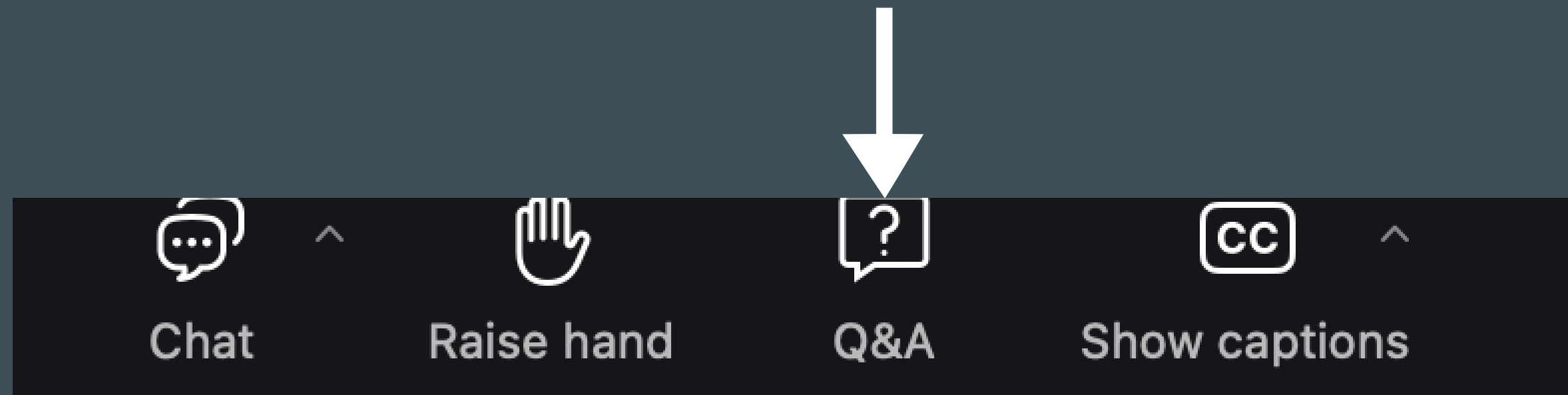
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2024

☆☆☆

THE  
GILDER LEHRMAN  
INSTITUTE  
of  
AMERICAN HISTORY

☆☆☆

# How to Participate



- If you would like to ask a question, you can use the Q&A feature.
- We will be answering audience questions throughout the session.
- The views expressed here are those of the historian.

## For Security and Privacy

- Your microphone is automatically muted.
- Your camera is automatically turned off.

# Today's Document



THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

January 31, 1951

Dear Dr. Frothingham:

I hope you do not think that my failure to make earlier acknowledgment of your thoughtful letter re national health insurance indicates any lack of appreciation on my part. As you can readily understand, we are all working under an unusually heavy pressure here these days and even important matters have to wait their turn.

I am more grateful than I can tell you for this assurance of your continued loyal support of the national health insurance program. As you so frankly indicate, that program has powerful enemies who are not above misrepresenting its aim and purpose, in fact its fundamental principle.

Despite all obstacles it has been my observation that in the nearly two years since we met to discuss the program, understanding and appreciation of its merits have shown steady increase. I, too, believe that its further development is inevitable.

There is no doubt but that legislation to meet the present national emergency must necessarily take precedence in national consideration at this time. Nevertheless, I am convinced that we must continue to move forward in promoting the principles of national health insurance and of other health measures proposed by the administration to meet the dangerous lack of adequate medical care among a large proportion of our population. Certainly the need for more doctors is very real. It is in fact vital at this time.

I desire, therefore, to assure you once more of my continued appreciation of your support of the health program. Your letter was very heartening.

Very sincerely yours,

Channing Frothingham, M.D.,  
101 Bay State Road,  
Boston 15, Massachusetts.

Letter from Harry S. Truman to Channing Frothingham, Washington DC, January 31, 1951.

(The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09651)

# Barbara A. Perry



Barbara A. Perry is the J. Wilson Newman Professor of Governance at the University of Virginia's Miller Center. She also co-chairs UVA's Presidential Oral History Program. She holds a PhD in Government from UVA, an MA from Oxford, and a BA from Louisville. A former Judicial Fellow at the US Supreme Court, she won the Justice Tom C. Clark Award. Perry has authored or edited 17 books and is currently writing *Strange Bedfellows: How Jack Kennedy and Eleanor Roosevelt Found Common Ground and Launched a Women's Rights Movement*. A frequent media commentator, she served as lead expert for CNN's documentary *The Kennedys*.

# FDR's Efforts Toward National Healthcare



President Roosevelt signing the Social Security Act, August 14, 1935.  
(Library of Congress)

**76TH CONGRESS } SENATE { REPORT**  
**1st Session } } No. 1139**

---

**ESTABLISHING A NATIONAL HEALTH PROGRAM**

**AUGUST 4 (legislative day, AUGUST 2), 1939.—Ordered to be printed**

**Mr. MURRAY, from the Committee on Education and Labor, submitted the following**

**PRELIMINARY REPORT**

“Establishing a National Health Program,” Preliminary Report of the Committee on Education and Labor, No. 1139, August 4, 1939. (Healthcare-NOW)

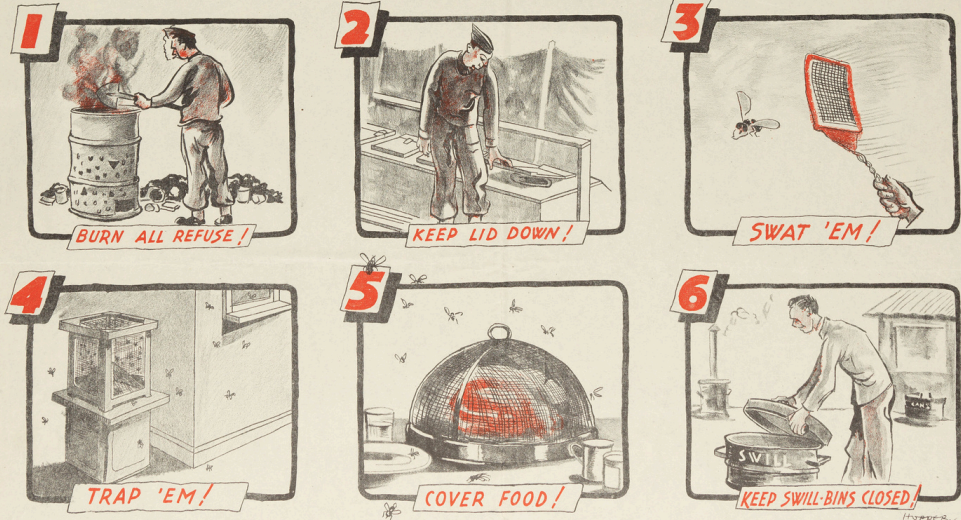


# WWII Pamphlets on Hygiene

## DYSENTERY AND DIARRHOEA

WHAT IS THE CHIEF SOURCE OF THESE INFECTIONS?


WHERE DO FLIES BREED?

HOW CAN I PREVENT THESE FLY-CARRIED INFECTIONS?



PS 5, 13/E 738/49M/4-45

World War II: Hygiene instructions against dysentery and diarrhoea for the British army in Italy. Lithograph by Stacy Hopper, 1945. (Wellcome Collection)



**DON'T GO TO BED WITH A MALARIA MOSQUITO**

★ SLEEP UNDER A NET! ★ KEEP IT REPAIRED! ★ TUCK IT IN! ★

BE SURE NO MOSQUITO IS INSIDE WAITING FOR YOU

**FIGHT THE PERIL BEHIND THE LINES**

“Don’t go to bed with a malaria mosquito” poster by the US GPO, 1944. (National Library of Medicine)



**Knock out V.D.**

Prophylaxis **PREVENTS** Venereal Disease!

© 1942 JOHN WYETH & BROTHER, INC. PHILADELPHIA, PA. PRINTED IN U.S.A. VP-3

“Knock Out V.D.” poster by Wyeth & Bro., 1942. (National Library of Medicine)

# Truman to Congress on National Healthcare



Harry S. Truman, 1945. (Library of Congress)

“As of April 1, 1945, nearly 5,000,000 male registrants between the ages of 18 and 37 had been examined and classified as unfit for military service. . . . [A]bout a million and a half men had to be discharged . . . for physical or mental disability . . . and an equal number had to be treated in the Armed Forces for diseases or defects. . . .”

“These men and women who were rejected for military services are not necessarily incapable of civilian work. It is plain, however, that they have illnesses and defects that handicap them. . . . It is more important to resolve now that no American child shall come to adult life with diseases or defects which can be prevented or corrected at an early age.”

Harry Truman, “Special Message to the Congress Recommending a Comprehensive Health Program,” November 19, 1945. (Harry S. Truman Library & Museum)

# Opposition to Truman's National Healthcare Plan



April 12, 1949



My dear Ben:

Your letter of April first is most interesting. The main difficulty is that you start off with the wrong premise. Nobody is working for socialized medicine - all my Health Program calls for is an insurance plan that will enable people to pay doctor bills and receive hospital treatment when they need it.

I can't understand the rabid approach of the American Medical Association - they have distorted and misrepresented the whole program so that it will be necessary for me to go out and tell the people just exactly what we are asking for.

I am trying to fix it so the people in the middle income bracket can live as long as the very rich and very poor.

I am glad you wrote me because I think there are a lot of people like you who need straightening out on this subject.

Sincerely yours,  
*Harry*

Mr. Ben Turoff  
Lees Summit  
Missouri

Letter from Harry S. Truman to Ben Turoff, April 12, 1949.  
(National Archives)

"Still Just as Hard to Swallow" from back cover of *Showdown on Political Medicine*. Chicago, IL: National Physicians' Committee for the Extension of Medical Services, 1946. Pamphlet.  
(The National Library of Medicine)



—Reprinted by permission, New York Journal-American



# The Polio Epidemic in the 1950s

## Third Doctor To Join City Polio Battle

New York Specialist  
On Way to Dallas  
As Six More Cases  
Sent to Hospitals

Dr. John L. Lavan, director of research for the National Infantile Paralysis Foundation of New York City, is on his way to Dallas to join local specialists in their efforts to combat spread of the disease, Mrs. G. H. Pittman, state representative of the foundation, announced Thursday.

"Third Doctor To Join City Polio Battle," July 23, 1943, p. 1.

(The Gilder Lehrman Institute,  
GLC09993.077.05)

## Warm Springs Doctor Here To Aid in War on Polio

The National Infantile Paralysis Foundation, which sent Dr. Bennett to Dallas, plans to set up a temporary research laboratory in North Texas to determine causes for the epidemic, Mrs. G. H. Pittman, state representative, said Tuesday. Dr. Thomas Francis Jr., epidemiologist of the University of Michigan, who recently conferred with Dallas, Austin, Waco and Fort Worth doctors, will return in the next few days to complete plans.

A doctor from the national foundation in New York and a staff of several men will come to Dallas within the week and conduct the research for the laboratory, Mrs. Pittman said.

"Warm Springs Doctor Here To Aid in War on Polio," July 23, 1943, p. 1.

(The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09993.077.06)

## Health

CONTINUED FROM FIRST PAGE.  
of the health department's laboratory, said indications were that the disease was becoming more widespread.

"While the incidence does not show a tendency to decline, it may be that some of these are delayed reports, in which instance the situation would not be as bad as it appears from the bare figures," Irons said.

Cleanup campaigns to insure high standards of sanitation are of paramount importance to fight the epidemic, Irons added.

While the state department did not have records on the number of deaths from infantile paralysis since the recent sharp rise in incidence, the normal rate of fatality is 5 to 10 per cent of cases, Irons said.

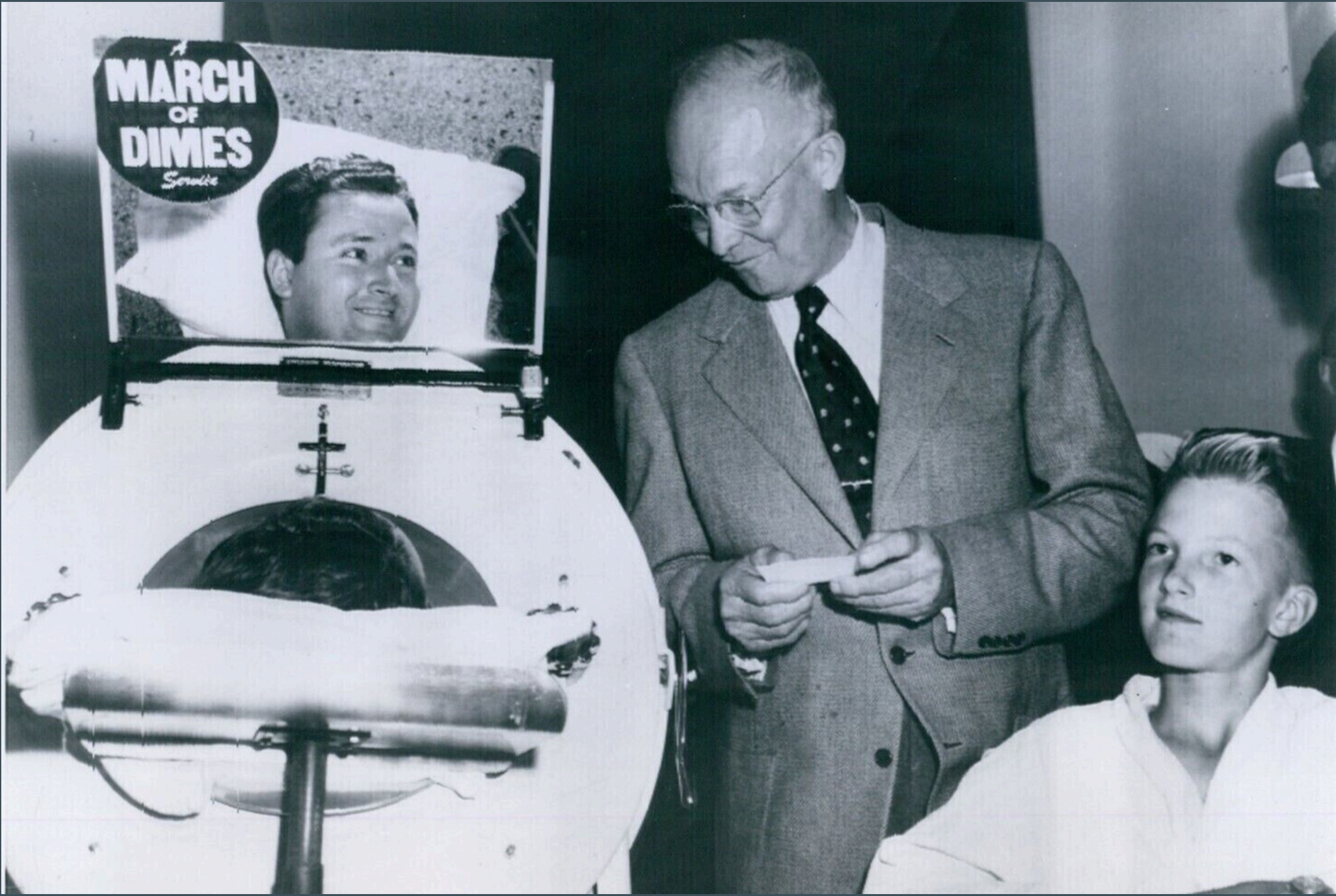
"Warm Springs Doctor Here To Aid in War on Polio," p. 12.

(The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09993.077.07)

# The Polio Epidemic in the 1950s



**8 Die as Fire Levels Block At Saratoga**  
**Young Wife Sole Family Survivor**  
**PACEMAKER AGAIN HALTED BY ROCKSLIDE**  
**Uprstate Child Polio Rate Cut**  
**Erase Polio Drive Planned; Child Protection in Priority**  
**Makers Ready to Rush Polio Vaccine to Area**  
**SKETCHES BY BENJAMIN**



President Dwight Eisenhower with polio patients David Madden (in the iron lung) and Jerry Snow at Saint Mary's Hospital., September 9, 1952.  
 (International News Soundphoto)

"Salk Vaccine Rolling to Doctors After U.S. Okay," *Times Union*, May 9, 1955. (Times Union Archive)

# AMA Opposition to Social Security



“If the AMA has never opposed Social Security, some questions may be asked in order to set the record straight:

Why did Dr. Fishbein, the official spokesman for the AMA, make a statement . . . with the following remarks about Social Security: ‘Indeed, all forms of security, compulsory security, even against old age and unemployment, represent a beginning invasion by the state into the personal life of the individual, represent a taking away of individual responsibility, a weakening of national caliber, a definite step toward either communism or totalitarianism?’”

Letter from John F. Kennedy to the President of the American Medical Association, June 4, 1962.

(The American Presidency Project at UCSB)

President John F. Kennedy, July 11, 1963. (JFK Library)

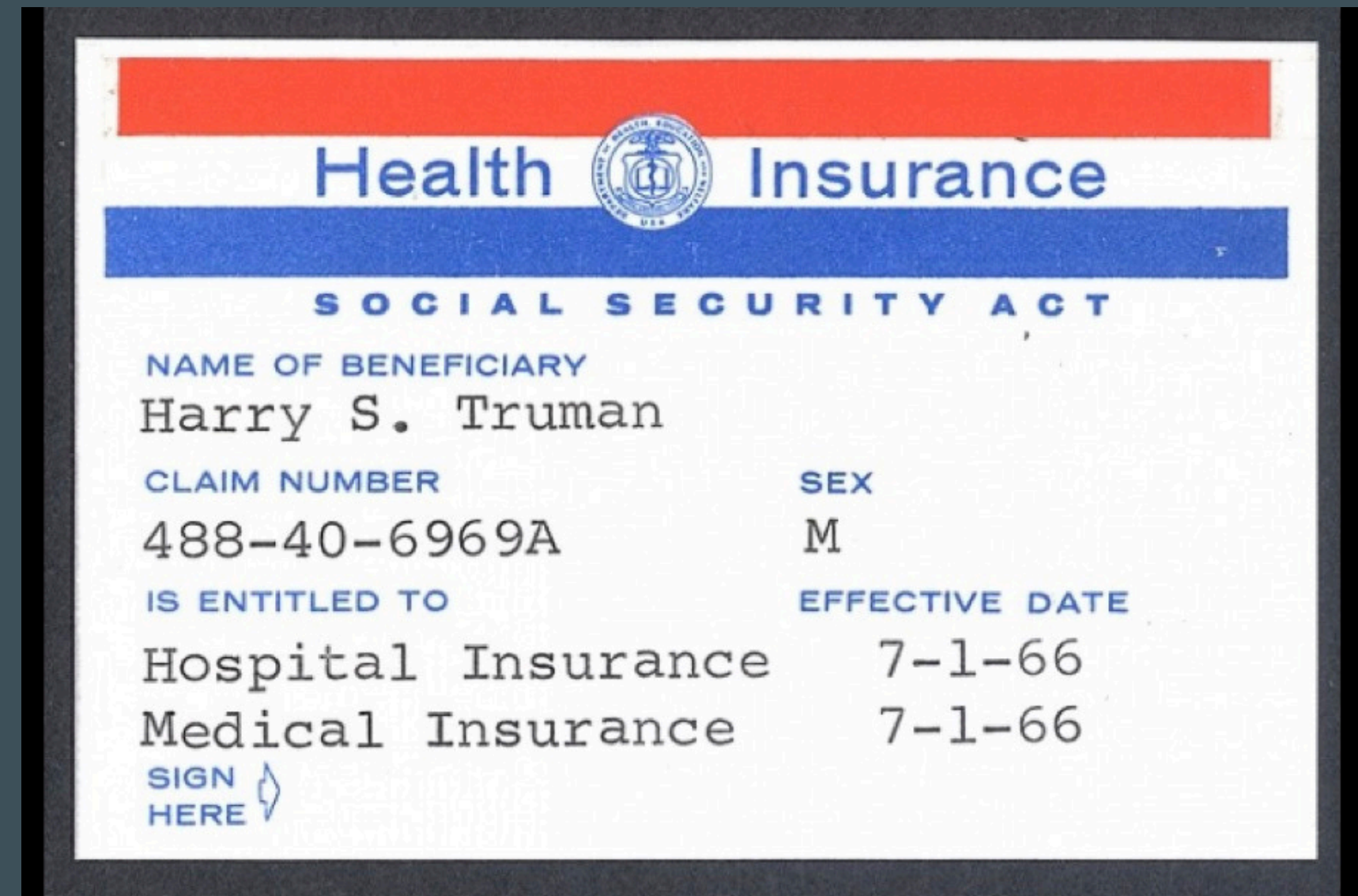
# Medicare Under Lyndon B. Johnson



President Lyndon Johnson signing the Medicare program into law, July 30, 1965.

Shown with the President (on the right in the photo) are (left to right) Mrs. Johnson, former President Harry Truman, Vice-President Hubert Humphrey, and Mrs. Truman.

(LBJ Presidential Library)



First Medicare card given to Harry Truman, July 30, 1965.

(LBJ Presidential Library)

# Health Disparities in the South



“The distribution of physicians in the United States has been grossly uneven and unsatisfactory. . . . Year by year the number in our rural areas has been diminishing. . . . People who live in rural areas do not get the same amount or quality of medical attention as those who live in our cities.”

“Special Message to the Congress Recommending a Comprehensive Health Program, November 19, 1945. (Harry S. Truman Library & Museum)

## ***Figures Show ‘Down On The Farm’ Not So Healthy As It’s Talked***

***---Rural Health Care Far Behind  
---Death Stalks Rural Lanes***

Before the war, there was one doctor for every 650 people in the towns, but the average was only one doctor for every 1700 people in most rural areas, and some counties were getting along on one doctor for every 3000 to 5000 people.

The same story was presented on hospitals. There simply aren’t enough hospitals in rural areas. A paradox on this aspect of the situation is that there are usually empty beds in rural hospitals, while city hospitals are overcrowded. But the explanation given is that most farm people can’t afford hospital service, and that’s why there aren’t more country doctors, too. The trend, by the way, is said stil to be downhill.

“Figures Show ‘Down On The Farm’ Not So Healthy As It’s Talked,” *The Daily Advertiser*, May 3, 1946, p. 6. (Newspapers.com)

# Community Clinics



*Round-the-clock out-patient care in the Columbia Point Health Center may cut hospitalization by more than 50 percent among the 6000 residents of this housing project. Dr. Lourdes Felarca examines a neighborhood child.*



**SHE HAD PNEUMONIA**  
Dr. Harvey Sanders diagnosed pneumonia the reason Dorothy Jean Wallace, 15, Winstonville, was ill. Mrs. Charlotte Rodrigues, a visiting nurse, helps in the examination at the Health Center.

“Health Clinics,” *Boston Globe*, March 19, 1968, p. 75. (Newspapers.com)

“A Way to Better Life for Poor in Delta,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, November 22, 1968, p. 17. (Newspapers.com)

# Upcoming Free Programs

**INSIDE THE VAULT:** January 2 at 7 p.m. ET (11 a.m. PT)

- We will discuss the road to the Thirteenth Amendment with Dr. Touré Reed

**BOOK BREAKS:** December 8 at 2 p.m. ET (11 a.m. PT)

- Dr. Ana Lucia Araujo will discuss her book *Humans in Shackles: An Atlantic History of Slavery*