

James Hayes Shofner Cooper '76

Just seven years out of Carolina, Jim Cooper confounded the experts and won a landslide victory to the U.S. House of Representatives from the Fourth Congressional District of Tennessee. To those who observed his campaign for *The Daily Tar Heel* co-editor in 1975, there was nothing surprising about it.

“Jim’s the kind of guy who sets high goals for himself, then goes to work and achieves them,” says Alan Murray, a *DTH* reporter during Cooper’s tenure, now covering Capitol Hill for *The Wall Street Journal*. “He was the underdog in the editor’s race, but he just outworked his opponent. He did the same thing when he ran for Congress.”

Shortly after arriving at Chapel Hill as a Morehead Scholar in 1972, Jim fixed his sights on three main goals: one, to become *DTH* editor; two, to start an undergraduate literary magazine; and three, to start a student review of the undergraduate curricula. By the time he left for Oxford with a Rhodes Scholarship three years later, he had achieved all three. Today, *The Cellar Door* literary magazine and *The Carolina Course Review* are still part of student life at Carolina.

Although he’s one of the youngest House Members, Jim has clearly won the respect of his colleagues. In fact, he secured a coveted seat on the Energy and Commerce Committee — considered one of the most powerful House committees — in just his third term. Parts of a compromise acid rain bill he introduced stand a good chance of being enacted in this year’s session, legislative analysts say.

Chapel Hill played an important part in the political development of this distinguished young alumnus. “I think he learned to loosen up a little bit and deal with people better, and that’s important when you represent the most rural Congressional district in the country,” Murray says.

For his own part, Jim expresses only one regret about his days at Carolina: “If I had it to do over again, I wouldn’t try to graduate in three years. It’s such a great place, I wouldn’t be in such a hurry to leave.”