

WASHINGTON (UPI) — The cost of living, a key barometer of the nation's inflation rate, rose 0.4 per cent in September, the smallest advance since April, the Labor Department reported today.

The main reason for the slowdown, the report said, was a leveling of food prices.

Last month's rise in the Consumer Price Index, which translates into an annual rate of 4.8 per cent, was smaller than the 0.6 per cent increase in May and the 0.5 per cent jump in June through August. The CPI rose an identical 0.4 per cent in April.

Today's report is welcome news for

President Ford, whose presidential campaign effort has been hit hard in recent weeks with a series of disappointing economic reports.

The September consumer price figure—the last to be published before the election—indicates that despite sluggish growth in the economy, inflation slowed somewhat last month.

Ford's economic advisers have maintained throughout this year's campaign that the economy must be brought along slowly so as not to rekindle the disastrous inflation of the recession.

Following three months of relatively small] increases, food prices showed no change between August and Sep-

tember. This leveling in the cost of food accounted in large part for the slowdown in the overall inflation rate.

Prices for commodities other than food—such as autos, clothing, gasoline. etc.—rose by 0.4 per cent in September, an improvement over the 0.6 per cent

rate recorded in both July and August..

The rise in the cost of services also slowed last month, rising 0.5 per cent after three consecutive months of 0.6 per cent increases.

For the third quarter as a whole, inflation grew at an annual rate of 5.8 per cent, compared with 6.1 per cent in the spring quarter. In the first three months of this year, prices rose by 2.9 per cent.