

TITLE

NEED FOR IMMEDIATE NATIONWIDE ACTION
ON WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS IN
EDUCATION FOR AGING

SUB-TITLE

Wanted: Less Talk and More Action in Aging

by

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New England Conference on Education for Aging

Reverend Collins, Governor Notte, Mr. Bresnahan,
Dean Browning, ladies and gentlemen

It was with sincere pleasure that I accepted the invitation to speak here today. I consider this New England Conference on Education for Aging to be one of the truly hopeful results of the White House Conference.

The Office of Education deserves a great deal of credit for its foresight in planning for the series of regional meetings to implement the recommendations of the Conference that are uniquely the responsibility of Education and educators throughout the nation.

I was glad to see the statement in the preliminary material for this meeting, sent out by your program chairman, that you are expected to develop "specific action recommendations" and not a "repeat of the recommendations which emerged from the White House Conference on Aging."

Those of you who have heard me speak before, on the subject of aging, know of my plea for action. I believe we have long since passed the stage where words can be substituted for tangible deeds. If we are sincere, we can start to build with the tools at hand and with the vast amount of information and knowledge we already possess.

I would not be honest with you, if I did not also share my disappointment in the lack of positive planning and action that has followed the national conference that was said by many to be "the beginning - not the end", "the launching pad", "a milestone for action", and other high sounding promises. So far, these can be considered empty phrases, or professional oratory.

No conference is expected to perform miracles, but I do not think the American public was expecting too much, to believe that following all of the local and state meetings involving thousands of citizens, building toward a national conference that included the outstanding people in the field of aging, that there would be more reassuring activity than we have had to date.

Is it any wonder that meetings are being held to consider "the political aspects of aging"? The elderly are beginning to lose faith in those who speak in their behalf and are wondering whether the only recourse remaining is action through pressure. I hope this will never be necessary, but rather that we, together with the older persons may find answers to the complex situations that have resulted for this rapidly expanding segment of our population.

Your deliberations these two days can exert a very positive influence on the role that education will play in accepting and discharging its responsibility for the elderly who have earned the right to fair treatment and stand ready to share in the effort necessary to put words into action.

As I reviewed the background statements for the White House Conference and the policy statements developed at the meetings, I became aware of two recurring themes that seemed common to each.

(1) The need to involve older persons in the research and planning for their age group, and (2) the need for further education at all levels and in every phase of the problem.

It would be presumptuous of me, in the presence of so many educators, to attempt to suggest the methods. Instead, I would like to

suggest some of the areas where the need for additional information or education is apparent, if we are to face up to the nation's second most challenging problem. Next to achieving peace, the problem of our aging is considered to be the most serious social problem of our time.

My list of areas requiring educational support and assistance is not complete, nor is it arranged in any way to suggest priorities. To some degree, they are interrelated.

1. The image of aging itself is old-fashioned and inaccurate. We, of course, are vitally concerned with the problems of all older persons, but we have emphasized the indigent and senile aged and have neglected the elderly who are enjoying better health in their later years than at any time in our history. This group will continue to reap the benefits of the millions of dollars being devoted to research into every aspect of health that will benefit all age groups including senior adults.

I am aware that the theme of a recent conference was "Changing the Public Image of Aging." I am not aware, however, of any significant action that is being taken to accomplish it.

2. Ability, still is not accepted as the basis for hiring and retiring - in spite of the studies that have proven older workers to be more of an asset than a liability. Who educates management to the point of removing age barriers to employment or replacing chronological age as the basis for separation?
3. Never before have we been so acutely aware of the housing needs of the elderly. New legislation offers greater hope for achieving the goal. But, who will convince local authorities to amend

zoning restrictions and who will overcome the concept that homes for the aged are undesirable and "breed future slum areas."

Perhaps even more discouraging to older persons are the age restrictions that exist in available housing. Even where they can afford to pay the rentals and apartments are vacant, individuals over 50 and 55 are being rejected as undesirable - too old.

4. Much has been said about the need to introduce an understanding of the problems of aging at the earliest reasonable period in our educational program. Who is preparing or revising the curricula and text books? Who has trained the instructor to teach the material?
5. Everywhere I hear about the need for professionals in the field of aging. Where are such courses being given? Is there sufficient subject matter and research to establish a collegiate degree in the field of aging?
6. For the retired persons who may be bed or home bound and for others who depend on television for filling time - what kind of educational viewing is beamed toward them to challenge their minds, overcome illiteracy for some, and to train them for more responsible senior citizenship?
7. Where are the educational programs needed to supplement earlier training. It was recently said that doctors and others who have worked in the medical field for any length of time should attend graduate courses or seminars in geriatric psychology. For whom and by whom should such sessions be arranged?

8. With shortages in teacher supply or teacher assistants what efforts are under way to take advantage of the experience and talents of the thousands of retired teachers who are interested and willing to serve?
9. Preparation for the later years is recognized as the key to successful retirement. But at best, it is still being scheduled on a hit and miss basis. Who should sponsor such training, and by whom should it be given?

You can and will add other areas to my nine-point list in your deliberations, but it is unmistakably clear that there is a job to be done at every educational level and by every available educator.

I would hope that every first rate college and university throughout the nation would develop a program for its retired alumnae that would make it financially feasible and possible for them to return to the campus to participate in programs that will keep them interested and alert throughout their later years.

Adult education leaders in every community should consider ways to bring the instruction to the retirement or nursing homes - either in person or by way of educational television.

Under the cooperative research program of the Office of Education, grants can be made for programs in aging. This law has been in effect for several years, but to my knowledge the University of Michigan has submitted the only acceptable application to be approved. Following this series of meetings across the nation, there should be many dynamic projects initiated, under this research program, that will give real meaning to the authorizing legislation.

Before closing, I would comment on two recommendations that I made when I last spoke on the subject of aging in this region. (1) That a Regional Center on Aging should be established on this campus, and (2) that I would introduce legislation establishing a Federal Commission on Aging.

Plans are well along for the Regional Center, meetings have been held on the campus and in Washington to identify distinguished leadership for the project and to establish guidelines for grants. It is appropriate that the University of Rhode Island serve as host for this Regional Meeting.

As you know, I introduced my bill H.R. 2238 to establish a Federal Commission on Aging immediately following my remarks at the opening session of the White House Conference on Aging. I expected an action program to be submitted by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

During the hearings on the Department's appropriation, I severely criticized their representatives for failure to give leadership to a Federal program in aging. These remarks I also included in the report of the hearings. Because I believed action could not wait for the next session of Congress, I scheduled hearings on my bill for a Federal Commission on Aging.

Representatives of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare advised me of several organizational changes and expressed a sincere interest in initiating an immediate program of action. Rather than divert any staff from this goal, I had the hearings on my bill postponed.

Confirming my action to postpone the hearings, I wrote to Secretary Ribicoff and raised seven basic questions that I believed

required answers, if the Department were to demonstrate its interest and support of a program that would measure up to the known needs and provide the leadership expected of the department that expends two-thirds of the money spent by the Federal government for services and benefits for older persons.

Briefly the questions covered; my concern for the failure of the Federal Council to carry out a dynamic interdepartmental program; the need for more direct and effective channels for initiating legislation and public relations activity; the assurance, that following the White House Conference, the relationship with national organizations, the vital place of the regional representative on aging; and the continuation of projects begun under the Conference Act would not terminate with the final report of the meeting.

I also expressed my deep conviction in maintaining a bi-partisan approach to the entire field of aging and the desirability of a citizens advisory group.

It would have been far better for the expanded program to have been included in the regular budget proposals. However, I advised the Secretary of the possibility of a supplemental appropriation and the need for immediate action.

I have been assured the Department will submit a supplemental request for funds that will make it possible to expand staff, authorize grants for research, training and demonstration projects in addition to those presently permitted under existing authority. Also, it is my understanding that a nonpartisan advisory committee will be named by the Secretary.

If all of this comes to pass, I believe we would all agree, that we are off to a good start. The success of the Department's program will not depend entirely on their efforts, but the combined efforts of government at all levels, with interested volunteers and private organizations and most important of all - the energy, imagination and support of citizens of all ages throughout the nation.

Your efforts here will make a significant contribution toward the responsibilities of the Office of Education in the total Departmental program. I must say the Adult Education Section of the Office of Education has a head start with one Regional Conference completed, with this one well under way and the planning for the seven others nearly completed.

We can all hope that statements like the following quotation may be eliminated if our efforts are successful. It reads, "Never have so many said or written so much about a class of people so old. Everywhere you look is an article, a speech, an interview or theory expounded about retirement. People just retired, or about to retire, must be getting self-conscious. But there is one peculiarity about this flow of concern and counsel regarding senior citizens. It is full of paradoxes - exact opposites approaches."

I do not suggest that we shall all suddenly agree on a single answer to each of our problem areas. We are dealing with individuals, separately molded, with widely different backgrounds and experience gained during an earlier 40 or 50 years.

As the article states further "It takes all kinds, and these days all kinds grow old." To which we may also add - that by whatever route

an individual reaches later maturity, he never surrenders his right to independence or dignity - and he never loses his desire to be needed and appreciated.

For those of us who believe that education is a life-long experience the task before us, though broad and unchartered will give a special measure of deep personal satisfaction.

At a time in world affairs when all available manpower and every existing talent needs to be alert, prepared and strong, we dare not falter or delay in our efforts to recognize and reclaim the vast army of senior soldiers who have served and whose experience and wisdom are still very much needed. Time is of the essence - the deadline for action is now.