

Remarks of U. S. Representative John E. Fogarty
Rhode Island

In Support of his Bill H.R. 10014 to Establish A
United States Commission on Aging
Before
General Subcommittee on Education

Tuesday, April 17, 1962 9:45 a.m.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I want to thank you for this opportunity to appear in support of H.R. 10014, establishing a U. S. Commission on Aging which I introduced January 31, of this year, at the same time Senator McNamara introduced an identical bill in the Senate.

It is my understanding, that you will also be considering other bills which would strengthen the Federal program in aging. All of the bills recognize the unmet need for positive action. Most of them suggest the creation of a special organizational unit on aging within the Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

Over a period of almost twelve years we have tried to encourage the Department to assume a leadership role in aging and to expand its staff and programs to meet the needs and rights of the increasing number of older persons in our population.

The Congressional Record and reports of hearings on appropriations document and demonstrate the need for an independent Commission on Aging if we are ever to achieve the goals that are outlined in the 600 recommendations of the White House Conference on Aging, and have

since been repeated in hearings and conferences held throughout the nation. A Commission would be able to take bold action without regard to a departmental policy or prejudice that consistently assigns low priority and limited staff to cope with the most demanding social problem of our time.

The most convincing presentation I could make this morning would be a playback of testimony presented at previous hearings, by officials of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, the Department of Labor, and former Chairmen of the Federal Council on Aging.

I have continued to charge the administrators of programs for the aging with failure to exercise leadership and to take action worthy of a government that has made such great strides in bringing security and independence to less fortunate individuals around the world and at the same time fails to heed the voices of 17 million of its own senior citizens who ask only to share in the profits of their efforts and to live in dignity and independence.

It was the vision and will of Congress that sponsored and enacted the White House Conference on Aging Act. I believe, we again must exercise the faith and trust of our stewardship by endorsing an independent Commission on Aging as the immediate answer for action that will translate the vague promises and good intentions of social theorists and articulate bureaucrats into practical, meaningful programs that will incorporate the wisdom and support of all government departments and agencies without the undue control or influence of any one.

No doubt you will be hearing testimony from individuals who now endorse everything about a Commission but its independent status. They will attempt to rationalize the placement of such an organization on aging within the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. And yet, it was not long ago that representatives for that Department were saying that "a centralization of existing services" could result in "an abrogation of the sound principle of functional and decentralized organization utilizing the manifold resources inside and outside the Federal government. Several of the agencies within the Department

of Health, Education and Welfare have developed sound programs and traditions of expertness in dealing with matters which concern our older citizens. This is equally true of the 12 other departments and agencies of the Federal Council on Aging. These other agency programs would not be improved by centralizing services and increasing the authority of one department. To the contrary, such action could adversely affect and diminish the orderly development of programs important to the aged which they are best qualified to administer."

Another statement that was made by an H.E.W. official before the Committee - "Because aging has so many facets, income maintenance, health, housing and so forth, we are never going to place it in a single bureau or single agency responsibility."

This is also an interesting quote, "If you create a large staff, they end up creating their own program; they are not coordinating; they are not working with other agencies. They end up with their own program."

Still another - "No unit working on an operational program basis in our Department as a bureau can really effectively deal with programs that are in other departments."

These and many more such denials of the role of the Department or inability of the Department to give the broad leadership required where so many programs and agencies are involved, gave convincing proof that if an agency to deal with the full scope of aging were established, it would have to be organized above departmental interests and problems, on a full partnership basis with all of the many departments and agencies that have so much to offer to aging in the programs for which they have responsibility.

The concept of an independent Commission on Aging is the organizational pattern the Department of Health, Education and Welfare has recommended for the States. It is especially interesting to me to note in the study on "Aging in Rhode Island", conducted by the Special Staff on Aging, the first recommendation in the Summary states, "Whatever agency or committees may be developed, should be independent of existing departments of the government and be responsible to the Governor." We followed this recommendation and have found it to be most satisfactory. Other States have implemented this recommendation and will be testifying to its effectiveness.

It is difficult for me to understand why such an organization is "right" for States and "wrong" for the Federal government. I am sure the answer would suggest that, no one State government department embraces all of the programs of H.E.W. This might also suggest that because of the very size and volume of the program in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, that programs on aging, though vital nationally, get lost or have a low departmental priority and seldom get beyond the talking or conference stage.

This may also account for the recent statement in the Congressional Record that Secretary Ribicoff believes that H.E.W. is "too big" and that the Office of Education should be combined with Art and Sciences in a new department having Cabinet status.

It should be evident to anyone studying H.R. 10014 objectively that it was designed to incorporate all of those features that we know to be necessary if our nation is to face up to practical solutions to the problems of aging and add quality as well as quantity to the later years.

Let me highlight just a few of the provisions of the Bill to illustrate our sincere desire to establish a workable, meaningful, action program.

(1) The commission would be a permanent bipartisan agency.

It is our sincere belief that we must develop continuity in our programs for the elderly and that such programs should be above political motives. To the extent possible, it should not only be bipartisan, but nonpartisan.

(2) The entire concept of the Commission is to work cooperatively with the States to encourage and assist them but at no time impose the will or control of the Federal government.

The grants are available to official state agencies or commissions to carry out the broad purposes of the Act.

There has been a full recognition of the rights of the States and these will not be undermined or ignored by the direct operation of a staff or department of the Federal government.

(3) The need for a central source of information on aging has been one of our obvious program gaps.

I am sure that your constituents, like mine, complain because they do not know where to go, at the Federal level for information on aging, and rightly, do not understand why they must be directed to a half-dozen places to get partial answers.

The Commission on Aging would have as one of its major functions, the responsibility to serve as a central information source on all Federal programs on aging, as well as the plans and programs being made to implement conferences or hearings held by the executive or legislative branch.

(4) The ability and facility to develop policy and legislative proposals in the light of the needs of older people has been "built into" the Commission by the very nature of its direct responsibility to the President. Here it will serve as the focal point within the Federal government for developing national policy, providing information, guidance and support to the governmental and nongovernmental agencies with programs in

the field of aging, and for sponsoring a balanced nationwide program to achieve such objectives.

(5) The "U. S. Commission on Aging" bill authorizes "Planning Grants, Project Grants and Grants for Research, Training and Demonstration."

I do not need to underscore the significance of such grants to vitalizing state programs, with a full recognition of the need to provide adequate funds to bring into realization those needs of the elderly that have gone so long unknown, unfilled and unjustified.

(6) An Interdepartmental Council on Aging would be established to make recommendations to the Commission to improve and coordinate the function and responsibility of the executive branch of the Government with respect to problems of the aging.

This would replace the present Federal Council on Aging that has been a paper organization that has little to offer in its own defense except reports or summaries of other Federal activity.

I shall not go into other details of the Bill, but each section was carefully designed to meet a need that conferences, study and experience indicated necessary to a program in aging, that would measure up to its full potentials, without fragmentation.

I think it is very significant that Senator McNamara, who once favored the creation of an Office of Aging in H.E.W. has joined forces in the interest of a U. S. Commission on Aging and has introduced S. 2779 which is identical to H.R. 10014. I have great respect for Senator McNamara's knowledge and dedication to programs that will enrich the lives of older persons and am proud to share honors with him in jointly sponsoring this legislation.

I do not have to express my deep conviction in an action program for our senior citizens. I am concerned that we have delayed so long. Favorable, prompt action on a bill creating a U. S. Commission will not only provide the mechanism for action, but will give visibility to the nation's concern and sincerity in moving ahead to re-enlist the elderly in the ranks of proud, productive and independent Americans.