

HR 7957

TESTIMONY

OF

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UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, D. C.

H.R. 7957

THE OLDER AMERICANS ACT OF 1963

SELECT SUBCOMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee:

It is a privilege to appear here this morning to testify on behalf of H. R. 7957 "The Older Americans Act of 1963" which I introduced August 6 and the identical bills which have been introduced by our distinguished colleagues.

I believe deeply that the bills under consideration fall squarely into the category of urgent unfinished business and I would like to commend the Committee for taking such prompt action in scheduling these hearings and for the high caliber of the witnesses representing the major areas of interest in aging who have been invited to testify.

No one could have worked as closely as I have on the Appropriations Subcommittee dealing with the basic programs and budgets affecting older persons without recognizing the growing dilemma facing America's spiraling population of older persons.

I have repeatedly challenged the responsible authorities to develop action programs to meet these needs and to accept leadership in stimulating and coordinating training, research and demonstration projects that could result in utilizing the wisdom and the talents of our older Americans for the enrichment of retirement living with its ultimate benefits to the community, the State and the nation.

I shall not take the time of the Committee to repeat what

seems to me an endless record of my displeasure with existing programs, my dissatisfaction with the rate of progress and my sincere desire to create within the framework of the Federal government an organization properly staffed, financed and administered at a level that would keep the operation above personal or partisan prejudice or control and give it the prestige necessary to compete with other important programs.

It will be helpful to highlight three major efforts on my part directed toward meeting these goals.

As a first order of business when Congress convened in January 1958, I introduced a bill known as the White House Conference on Aging Act which became law in August of that year. The purpose of the Bill was to convene a national forum of the most knowledgeable people in the field of aging to distill their combined experience into a "Blueprint for Action in Aging."

Funds were made available to every state for studies, surveys and conferences. Never before in our history has a more complete evaluation been made of an age segment in our society than the action that preceded the White House Conference on Aging held January 9-12, 1961.

The findings of the States together with the recommendations of approximately 2900 delegates resulted in a comprehensive

report listing over 600 recommendations for action.

Fully aware of the implication of such a report and acting on the suggested recommendation for a Federal organization necessary to implement a program in aging, Senator McNamara and I introduced identical bills on January 31, 1962, for the establishment of an independent Commission on Aging.

The programs affecting older persons cut across the responsibilities of many departments and agencies. It was our recommendation that the independent commission would recognize the importance of each of these many vital programs and give them a proper focus without the influence or control of any one department.

The testimony last year given before the General Subcommittee on Education, Chaired by Congressman Bailey was practically unanimous in favor of an independent commission on Aging.

Opposition came only from those with vested interest in continuing the existing organization dominating the field and programs in aging. I am convinced the Administration's best interests were not properly represented and the legislation was stalemated.

One other unfortunate development that was consummated in January of this year was the reorganization within the Department

of Health, Education and Welfare that downgraded the program on aging by removing the Special Staff on Aging from the Office of the Secretary and placing it under the jurisdiction of the Commissioner of Welfare as an Office of Aging.

Let me hasten to emphasize that this statement is not a reflection on the Commissioner who is regarded as an outstanding administrator and is recognized as an authority in the field of public welfare.

I object and indeed I believe everyone of America's 18 million persons over age 65 has a right to resent this official action by the Federal government announcing to the nation that "the independence, dignity and usefulness of our Older Americans will hereafter be regarded as welfare problems." This is contrary to everything that has been researched and recommended to change the image of aging from a sickly, indigent individual to a dignified, responsible person. The welfare setting has wiped out most of the social progress that was made over the last 15 years in the field of aging.

"Welfare" to Americans means public assistance. It seems to me that the recent welfare publications of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare have failed to convince or overcome this understanding.

I give you these details to document the background of H.R. 7957 and the identical bill S. 2000 which Senator McNamara has introduced. To keep faith with the thousands who have gone on record in favor of grants for training, research and demonstration projects; to restore the Federal program in aging to a level where our nation's older persons can look with pride; to provide the States with funds needed to salvage the programs initiated with White House Conference on Aging funds and permit older persons to provide a climate for senior citizen participation, the Older Americans Act of 1963 was introduced.

You are undoubtedly familiar with the Bill, but I would like to highlight several of its features which to me are so long overdue and urgently needed that we cannot afford further delay without risking another social revolution among a segment of our population that quite frankly has been assigned the status of another minority group. H.R. 7957 would restore this deserving group of our population to their rightful place as first class citizens.

I might add in passing that this group represents a 35 billion a year market in the United States and that 15 out of 100 eligible voters in the United States are over 65.

It is because older Americans are responsible individuals,

they look to the orderly Congressional processes for providing the necessary funds and facilities by which they can exercise their full citizenship rights and offer their services.

The objectives of the Older Americans Act of 1963 are primarily these:

- (1) An adequate income in retirement in accordance with the American standard of living.
- (2) The best possible physical and mental health which medical science can make available and without regard to economic status.
- (3) Suitable housing, independently selected, designed and located with reference to special needs and available at costs which older citizens can afford.
- (4) Full restorative services for those who require institutional care.
- (5) Opportunity for employment with no discriminatory personnel practices because of age.
- (6) Retirement in health, honor, dignity-after years of contribution to the economy.
- (7) Pursuit of meaningful activity within the widest range of civic, cultural, and recreational opportunities.
- (8) Efficient community services which provide social

assistance in a coordinated manner and which are readily available when needed.

- (9) Immediate benefit from proven research knowledge which can sustain and improve health and happiness.
- (10) Freedom, independence, and the free exercise of individual initiative in planning and managing their own lives.

Within the Department of Health, Education and Welfare an administration to be known as the Administration for Aging would be established. This would be under the direction of a Commissioner for Aging to be appointed by the President by and with the advice of the Senate.

It would be the duty and function of the Administration:

1. To serve as a clearing house for information related to the problems of the aged and aging
2. Assist the Secretary in all matters pertaining to the problems of the aged and aging
3. Administer the grants provided by the Act
4. Develop plans, conduct and arrange for research and demonstration programs in the field of aging
5. Provide technical assistance and consultation to States and political subdivisions with respect to programs for the aged and aging

6. Prepare, publish and disseminate educational materials dealing with the welfare of older persons
7. Gather statistics in the field of aging which other Federal agencies are not collecting, and
8. Stimulate more effective use of existing resources and available services.

Funds would be appropriated for grants by the Secretary to States for projects for;

1. Community planning and coordinating of programs to carry out the purposes of the Bill
2. Demonstrations of programs or activities which are particularly valuable in carrying out such purposes
3. Training of special personnel needed to carry out such programs and activities
4. Establishment of new or expansion of existing programs to carry out such purposes, including establishment or expansions of existing centers providing recreational or other leisure time activities and informational, health, welfare, counseling and referral services for older persons and assisting such persons in providing voluntary community or civic services.

It should be noted that no cost of construction other than

minor alterations and repairs would be included in such establishment or expansion.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, I think you will agree that this is basic legislation. There are no frills. Every part of it has been directed toward a demonstrated need. Its administration will be at a level equal to that of the Commissioner of Social Security and the Commissioner of Welfare.

It will enjoy the prestige needed to get the job done. The funds have been provided for a limited period to provide the necessary safeguards, but for a period long enough to demonstrate the practical aspects of the proposed program.

I am convinced that the testimony which you will be hearing the next few days will further document the urgency for this legislation.

It almost seems unnecessary to encourage prompt action on the Older Americans Act of 1963. As the facts unfold in later testimony, I believe you will agree with me that the hour is late, action overdue, and that our role as responsible legislators is to do everything within reason to expedite the passage of H.R. 7957. This Bill transcends personal or political self interest and will be regarded as one of the most important contributions to the social legislation of our time.