

KEYNOTE ADDRESS OF HONORABLE JOHN E. FOGARTY, M.C., 2ND DISTRICT
RHODE ISLAND AT THE THIRD NEW ENGLAND CONFERENCE ON AGING AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND, TUESDAY, JUNE 16, 1959.

AN AUTHOR LOOKS AT HIS BILL - THE WHITE HOUSE

CONFERENCE ON AGING ACT

Ladies and Gentlemen of New England:

You all know that the older population of the country and particularly that of New England is growing rapidly. Life expectancy is being extended far beyond the expectations of the scientists of even a generation ago. I wish I could stand before you and say that the years we have added to life are satisfying years to all. Unfortunately, I cannot.

From my position in the Congress I have been able to support and expedite a good deal legislation which has helped to improve the health, welfare, income, and housing of our older people. We have accomplished a great deal over the past 10, 15, 20 years. Yet, we have a long way to go.

In spite of our social security and pension programs, it is reported that fully half of our older people do not have enough income to live at a minimum level of health and decency. We are making great strides in medical research. Yet, three-fourths of our older people are suffering from one and often two or more long-term illnesses or disabling conditions and that many of them are

in desperate need of medical care. Poor health accounts for more than half of all retirement from work.

In the matter of housing, the circumstances are almost as tragic as those I have just mentioned. A few years ago our Rhode Island Commission on Aging made a survey of the situation of older people. One-third of them have no central heating in their homes. And more than one-fourth are living in homes that are either dilapidated or without elementary sanitary facilities.

My friends, I know that many of our older people are here today. They could speak much more eloquently than I of the conditions under which they are trying to get along.

I say to all of you that we must do better. We know that much of the deprivation and illness among our older people today is unnecessary. We know that thousands who are ~~vegetating~~ in mental hospitals, infirmaries, and nursing homes could be living in the community if medical care and rehabilitation were available to them. In Rhode Island, in Massachusetts, and in Connecticut there are public housing programs for older people which are setting models for the whole country.

We can provide a better life for older people. Our economy is growing even more rapidly than the older population. Automation is giving us more and more goods and services and higher incomes with less and less expenditure of effort. It is said that the standard of living for the whole population will be increased by a half during the next 10 or 15 years. We must learn how to share this increase with those who have retired; they are our neighbors, our friends, indeed, many of them are our relatives. They helped to produce this growing wealth; surely they are entitled to share in it.

Ladies and Gentlemen: A year and a half ago, I decided that what we need is action. In many places around the country, States and communities have been taking hold of this matter and are improving the conditions of living for their older people. There are many examples of fine programs in our New England States. Most of what is being done is excellent. The trouble is that there is not enough of it; that it is moving too slowly. I am very much afraid that our efforts are not increasing as rapidly as the older population itself.

I believe that more people in our communities need to know about the problems of aging. More people need to become concerned. More need to be convinced that we must act and act now.

This is the reason,-- these are some of the circumstances, that led me to introduce my bill for a White House Conference on Aging. It seemed to me that if we could stimulate a nationwide, grassroots recognition of the problems and the need we might get the whole country moving.

Apparently, there were others who thought so, too. I received a good many letters from all parts of the country and many other members of the Congress received letters urging that we pass the bill. And I am happy to say that we did pass it during the closing weeks of the Session last summer.

Since its passage, the White House Conference on Aging Act has attracted much attention and favorable comment. It is widely regarded as a clear reflection of the conviction of the Congress of the pressing need for broad-scale, stepped-up action on behalf of our mounting population of middle-aged and older citizens.

Included in the Act is a broad statement of the purposes of the White House

Conference. The Act states that it is "the policy of the Congress that the Federal Government shall work jointly with the States and their citizens to develop recommendations and plans for action ... which will serve the purposes of --

- (1) assuring middle-aged and older persons equal opportunity with others to engage in gainful employment which they are capable of performing, gaining for our economy the benefits of their skills, experience, and productive capacities; and
- (2) enabling retired persons to enjoy income sufficient for health and for participation in family and community life as self-respecting citizens; and
- (3) providing housing suited to the needs of older persons and at prices they can afford to pay; and
- (4) assisting middle-aged and older persons to make the preparation, develop skills and interests, and find social contacts which will make the gift of added years of life a period of reward and satisfaction and avoid unnecessary social costs of premature deterioration and disability; and
- (5) stepping up research designed to relieve old age of its burdens of sickness, mental breakdown, and social ostracism."

These are the objections^{les} of the White House Conference on Aging Act. I hope very much that we shall begin to achieve them while they can still be meaningful to the present generation of older citizens.

Now, let me tell you something about how this legislation is being put into effect, -- about how we expect to get results. The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, and its predecessor the Federal Security Agency, has had a wealth of experience in this field of the aging population. Therefore, responsibility for organizing and conducting this Conference was assigned to the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare. He is being aided by a National Advisory Committee composed of recognized leaders in gerontology and in the fields of economics, education, health, housing, recreation, religion and welfare, and distinguished citizens in public life. These individuals on the Advisory Committee have a vitally important role to play in relation to the Conference, and I understand that Mr. Fitch, Staff Director of the Conference, will be telling you more about the Committee and its first meeting last week. You will be interested to know that the average age of the Advisory

Committee members is close to 60, with a number being well into the 80's.

I certainly hope that older people, with their wisdom and personal concern, will be closely involved in all the state and local activities in relation to the White House Conference. I think you may wish to know, too, that 11 of the members of this Advisory Committee represent our New England States.

My colleagues and I in the Congress were convinced that the aims and objectives of the White House Conference Act could not be achieved merely by having a big meeting in Washington in January 1961. States and communities have a most significant part in this total national effort, and the legislation provides for their participation.

The Act authorized grants of from \$5,000 to \$15,000 per State to carry out their responsibilities, which include the conduct on one or more Statewide conferences prior to 1961 and the development of facts and recommendations about their older people, which are to be reported to the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare. Funds not used for these purposes may be allocated to help pay for the expenses of the State's delegation to the White House Conference itself. These funds are available now and several States have

already asked for their share.

It is obvious that States cannot hope to do an effective job of preparing for this Conference without the maximum possible involvement of individuals and organizations, governmental and voluntary, at the local and state levels.

During my years in Congress I have had a part in the enactment of many pieces of legislation. Some of them have not always lived up to our expectations, and with others the results have been a long time becoming evident. This is assuredly not the case with Public Law 85-908 -- The White House Conference on Aging Act.

There has been an immediate response to this law, and this naturally served to reinforce my already strong conviction about its wisdom and timeliness.

Organizations and individuals began at once to express their interest, and I understand that the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare was deluged with offers of help and with requests for information as to how groups and people could start mobilizing their own resources in relation to the Conference.

Let me give you a few instances. The National Committee on the Aging of the National Social Welfare Assembly named a liaison committee to work with the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in relation to the Conference. The American Public Welfare Association is naming a similar committee. The National Tuberculosis Association promptly informed its state and local affiliates and urged them to participate to the fullest possible extent in the preparatory activities. The National Council of Churches has circularized all the local councils with information about the Conference and has urged its 40 affiliated denominations to offer their total resources in helping to establish stronger state and local programs and to take part in the White House Conference planning. The Joint Council to Improve the Health Care of the Aged, whose first annual meeting I addressed last Friday, has as one of its major objectives the stimulation of greater interest in the White House Conference on Aging. Response from the states was equally swift and gratifying. In a number of state legislatures the White House Conference Act, and the need for coordinated state action to implement its provisions, was the major argument used in favor of creation of an official commission or committee on aging. In others

the Act served to give new life to groups which were lacking purpose or needed stimulation. There are now 38 of these official state coordinating agencies in aging, and it is especially significant that some of them are now getting more adequate financial support than they ever did in the past. I am glad to know that all but one of the states in our New England region have a statewide coordinating council or committee. For reasons of both our own obvious need and for pride of leadership, I hope that we shall continue to find ourselves in the front rank. The prospect of Federal grants to the states for White House Conference purposes is serving -- as was hoped -- to prime the pump at the state level. But much more of this financial support provided by the states themselves will be required in order to fully carry out the state and local activities which I regard as so essential.

One of the state conferences on aging has already been held, and many others are now being planned. Efforts are underway in many states and localities to survey the needs of their older people and to assess the adequacy of present programs and resources. Demonstration projects of one sort or another are being set up so that they can be evaluated by the time of the 1961 Conference.

State and local leaders will get additional stimulation and concrete help next week through participation in the National Leadership Training Institute which the Conference staff is conducting at Ann Arbor, Michigan.

It is an encouraging feeling to be able to review the progress which has been made as the result of a piece of legislation in which I was so vitally interested. But this progress only scratches the surface. We still have a long way to go to achieve the objectives of the White House Conference on Aging Act. More special commissions and committees need to be established in the states and localities; more organizations and agencies need to be involved; more civic leaders and plain everyday citizens need to be stirred up about aging; more money needs to be expended at all levels of government and through voluntary sources.

I am confident, however, that the big movement has been started, triggered by the White House Conference on Aging Act, and the nation is now rolling up its sleeves to tackle this challenge. Together -- at the national, state and local levels -- we can rise to this challenge and assure a better way of life for our older people in whose behalf the Act was passed.