

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON AGING

Keynote Address

Prologue to the District of Columbia White House Conference on Aging

Shoreham Hotel

June 10, 1960

Address by

Hon. John E. Fogarty, Congressman from Rhode Island

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Commissioner Karrick, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

I feel especially privileged to have the honor of keynoting the Prologue to the District of Columbia Conference for the White House Conference on Aging. Seven months from today delegates to that Conference will be discussing and deciding on some of the recommendations that will evolve from your deliberations. Meetings such as this are being held throughout the entire nation and its territories.

In a very real sense we are going down the "home stretch" in the activities which were initiated September 2, 1958, when the President signed the White House Conference on Aging Act. At that time there were many who asked why so much time would be needed to prepare for such a meeting. Now, there are many who would prefer to have more time before the national forum.

For many of you this meeting is a preview not only to your Citizens Conference in September, but also to the White House Conference which will be held in Washington. In many respects the Capital City should be a showcase for aging to the Nation as well as an example for other countries. Therefore, what you accomplish today and in the second phase of your plan may be more far-reaching in its effect and influence than many state and territorial meetings on aging.

You have had certain advantages that other States have not enjoyed in their preliminary activities to the Conference. Unlike Alaska and Texas or many other States you are not separated by wide geographical areas or territorial divisions. Unlike States with their many cities and counties you are divided only by signs of the compass - no part of your area being more than a few miles from dead center.

My interest in the aging, as many of you know, long preceded the introduction of my bill calling for a White House Conference on the subject. In reality it was my personal awareness of the problems through my 20 years in the House of Representatives - 14 of which were served on the Health Subcommittee on Appropriations.

During these years I became increasingly concerned over the failure of responsible individuals and agencies to give leadership and substance to the programs and reports planned and published in the name of aging.

While medical science and technological advances were extending the life span of our elderly, the threat of disability or chronic disease haunted the added years. The high cost of drugs, medical and hospital care placed unreasonable demands on fixed retirement incomes.

Millions of dollars were being appropriated for research in many fields of health indirectly effecting the elderly, but relatively little money was made available to study and understand this new phenomenon of our time - the new generation of the aged.

Completely outmoded hiring and retirement policies denied job opportunities to skilled workers both able and willing to continue in gainful employment.

In these years of the greatest expansion and development of housing in our history, the pleas for suitable housing for the elderly at prices they can afford are still mostly in the promising stage and the fulfillment is far from realization.

Almost as great as the need for economic security, reasonably good health and insured medical care is the desire to remain independent, useful and wanted throughout the later years.

Those of you familiar with my original White House Conference on Aging Bill will recognize that I included each of these areas as purposes for the national conference, emphasizing the importance of involving older persons in the solutions and establishing appropriate responsibility at the Federal, State and local levels.

The reports of hearings before the House Appropriations Committee and frequent statements appearing in the Congressional Record document my dissatisfaction with the lack of interest and imagination, failure to take action on known problems, and a general reluctance on the part of officials to request funds sufficient to keep pace and plan for the accelerating growth of the elderly population.

I might even add that I favored a larger grant for each of the States for the White House Conference planning and have asked if the funds requested by the administration were sufficient to insure a successful meeting. I have reason to believe that the amount of the appropriations submitted were dictated or restricted by the Bureau of the Budget.

As a matter of principle I do not favor a token program in any field so vast and urgent.

I realize that money alone will not accomplish the goals of the White House Conference on Aging. Success of the meeting will depend on a four way sharing of responsibility:

1. Older persons themselves taking an active part in the program and recommendations which will effect them,
2. Communities accepting their responsibilities and creating a climate in which older persons can continue to make a contribution as independent and respected citizens,
3. Each State realizing and assuming its responsibility to provide assistance beyond the reasonable ability of the individual, his family or the community, and
4. The National Government taking its rightful place as a partner to each of the others in assuring the rights and privileges of its citizens, of every age, to those liberties and protections for which our government was established.

From the reports I have received to date on the pre-Conference activities, I am encouraged to see positive action at all levels.

1. More than ever before, the needs-and-solution to the problems of aging are being marshalled closer to the grass roots.
2. Responsible leaders in management, labor, public and private organizations are studying the problems of aging in more practical and realistic ways.

3. National, state and local organizations are discovering the advantage of closer cooperation and a clearer definition of purpose and responsibility.

Does this presume that the full significance of the White House Conference on Aging is being realized - I wish I could say "yes." The answer as I see it at this stage is only "partially." Let me explain.

1. Too much of the planning is still for and not with older people. In the report of the National Health Forum held last January - the role of the individual was mentioned almost not at all - it was instead a "doing for approach" to the aged almost exclusively.
2. It is my understanding that relatively little state or local money has been added to the \$15,000 appropriated under the White House Conference on Aging Act and that some of the States and Territories will have exhausted their funds before the Conference and have made no provision for appropriations to carry out the recommendations of the Conference. There are several States that have done an outstanding job and deserve credit for exceeding the Federal grant in carrying out its White House Conference on Aging planning and for creating an organization that will stand ready to implement the Conference recommendations.
3. I am disappointed that some of the basic documents that were promised to the States are not and will not be available to serve as background materials for state and local activities. None of the sample case studies have been issued for use prior to the Conference.

4. It was my hope that some significant programs might have been established prior to the Conference instead of waiting for the findings and recommendations of the Conference to become available. The Conference was never intended to be the goal or deterrent to any positive action preceding *it*.
5. The next few months will determine whether my fears of a departure from a bi-partisan approach to the Conference were well founded. The selection of delegates, the political pressures and even the campaign and election may very well become injected in the picture.

Perhaps my concern is unwarranted. I hope so. The next six months will decide. To you in this important meeting, I hope you will accept the challenge and in each of your workshops be able to answer affirmatively to these five questions.

1. Have you identified the role the older individual must take in putting the findings and recommendations into effect?
2. Have you established the degree of responsibility to be assumed by the community, state organizations or national government?
3. Can some action be initiated on the program preceding the White House Conference?
4. Will your delegates to the White House Conference be individuals who truly represent the many areas of interest in aging, and are they in a position to transmit and interpret the Conference proceedings to the community and responsible organizations?
5. Has structure for a long-range program been considered?

I am aware that I may sound like an indulgent parent and to part of the charge I would agree.

I feel so deeply the urgency of programs of positive action in our country for the elderly that I have become impatient.

There is nothing about the solution to the problems of aging beyond the realm of the imagination and ingenuity of a people that are conquerors of the problems of outer space, and a government and economy more affluent and sound than any in the world.

No greater reward can come to any one of us than knowingly having made a contribution to a program that will restore the pride, maintain the dignity and insure the independence of the aging members of our society.