

The Federal Government and the Voluntary Agency

Presentation By

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I welcome this opportunity to participate in the Twelfth Annual Meeting of the Council. It also provides the occasion for me to express my appreciation for the valuable support of many of the members before the Committees of Congress and to recognize publicly the fine studies and reports prepared under the auspices of the Council that have have done so much to expand the knowledge and the understanding of aging.

It was my privilege recently to be among those honoring your Vice Chairman, Miss Ollie Randall, for her outstanding contribution to the enrichment of retirement living. I know the work of the Council has benefited from her wisdom, experience - and fine Rhode Island heritage.

The Report of the Hearings Before the General Subcommittee on Education on my Bill, H.R. 10014, to establish a U. S. Commission on Aging has been released within the last few weeks. The list of those testifying read like a "Who's Who in Aging" and includes the name of your distinguished Chairman Garson Meyer, several of the Board Members and many others who identified themselves as members of the National Council on the Aging. I would assume that several are in the audience today and to each of them I am grateful for their well documented testimony and fine letters favoring the U. S. Commission.

I have been very much aware of the fine work of the Council throughout my 12 years as Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Appropriations. Frequently I have asked those representing the

programs in aging to what extent there was cooperation between the Federal programs and the National Committee or the National Council on the Aging. I believe that Government and voluntary organizations have a joint responsibility to work together in achieving the best program for our older adults.

As most of you know, I have tried to have aging recognized as a major program responsibility of the Federal Security Agency and the Department of Health, Education and Welfare since the time it acquired Cabinet status. The report of every budget hearing is filled with documented dissatisfaction with the scope of the program or the failure to come forward with specific plans, but justify all of the conferences held in the name of aging and to implement the vast array of knowledge that is set forth in the report of the White House Conference prepared by the Department itself.

In the FOREWORD of this report its able Chairman, Robert Kean prepares the stage for action. He said:

"This report sets forth the findings of the Conference—the conclusions that were reached, the agreements that were arrived at and the courses of action that were determined to be necessary and feasible. This document was prepared for the President, the Congress, the States and communities, and all other public and private groups and individuals who are concerned with America's aging population. However, the report will have real and enduring value only to the extent that it is used by these groups and individuals as a guide to action in the coming years. It is these people who now must convert the Conference findings into specific actions

that will help America's older citizens cope with their problems, fulfill their potentials, and make their full contribution to the life and strength of the Nation."

To many the tragedy - and I mean tragedy - has been the failure to take Congressman Kean's words to heart and give them meaning through action that would long since have touched the lives of the millions of older persons who were misled into believing the findings of the experts would become realities within their lifetime.

It is inconceivable to me how a conference of such able leadership, that generated so much interest and support in the two years preceding the main event, that involved so many of the Nation's experts, and cost so much could have achieved so little in the 21 months that have elapsed since that meeting.

I have begun to sound like a broken record in my reference to a "Blueprint for Action" that was to have been one of the main accomplishments of the White House Conference. Other groups and organizations have published their blueprints and have had to proceed without benefit of the basic plan that would have shown how each could complement and strengthen the other. I have every reason to expect that the delayed blueprint will be announced before the next budget hearing of the Department along with other overdue materials that will be flooding the mails before our hearing in January.

I do not intend to downgrade the staff efforts going into the production of these materials and I firmly believe many of them will be helpful. I am concerned that any program in depth or study of lasting value should be done under such pressure and without the

advice and consultation that is needed to give them clarity and scope to assure their usefulness.

This is not an attempt on my part to prejudge the testimony being prepared for the next budget hearings. I believe instead that the Federal program in aging cannot and should not be measured in pounds or numbers.

There is little that the Department can do at this point that will offset its "jamming" strategy that prevented action on the bill that would have created an independent U. S. Commission on Aging. This legislation would have established a firm base for a national program that recognized the rights of the states and provided the funds for planning, training and demonstration projects.

In my presentation at the opening session of the White House Conference on Aging I said "I have no patience and very little respect for any who would place political, personal or professional prejudice and greedy self-interest ahead of positive action for our Nation's older citizens." I believe that statement is pertinent in the present situation. I am sure that Secretary Celebrezze will give this problem thoughtful consideration and I believe that he will agree with our approach.

Senator McNamara and I shall renew our efforts to have aging elevated at the national level to an independent status when Congress reconvenes in January. No one can ignore the testimony already on record in support of a U. S. Commission on Aging. These statements transcend political, religious, labor management and organizational boundaries. Rarely has there been such unanimity of opinion in

support of a bill before the Congress that did not result in favorable action. The facts behind the issues do not make pleasant luncheon conversation but I assure you the aging are not going to continue to allow themselves to be manipulated for the convenience or the prestige of a few who mouthed sentimental platitudes. They are beginning to recognize the false note in the "song of love" and no longer react to the words of "oh promise me."

I know that this audience was not diluted when the Federal Council on Aging had its name changed to the President's Council on Aging. You were too familiar with the previous "tranfusions" that had been given to revive the body. The latest effort now six months old is distinguished mostly by the list of candidates who have been suggested or who have rejected the offer to direct a council. Anyone knowledgeable in the field of aging and aware of the impossible organizational structure of the Council could only consider such an assignment as a temporary solution to an employment problem. It does not have the stability or basis upon which a realistic practical program can be constructed, unless it is done at the expense of programs or activities which are either borrowed or usurped from existing operating agencies.

The encroachment of the Federal staff on Aging into areas presently handled by other agencies or organizations is a serious threat. In the absence of a clearly defined program there is a great temptation to "do something" regardless of whether it is appropriate, necessary or already being done better elsewhere.

The present situation is particularly interesting to me. It has been I who continued to challenge the inadequate staff on aging

in the Department of H. E. W. The picture has reversed itself - staff we have - program we have not. I belong to the school where a well documented program with realistic objectives merits additional staff. I do not support the philosophy that promotes adding staff to impress the Committee or the Bureau of the Budget that something is bound to happen if you add more people.

At this stage of national programming in aging the need for coordination with state and voluntary organizations was never more urgent. The theme of this meeting "A Realistic Look at the Older Person's Place in Society" undoubtedly has brought this need into sharper focus.

Federal government must never assume functions more properly the responsibility of non-Governmental groups. Indeed its role should be the stimulation, the strengthening and the support of activities that more directly affect older persons where they are - usually at community level.

The Handbook of National Organizations prepared for the White House Conference on Aging identified some 308 national organizations with program interest and budgets in the field of aging. This represents a tremendous potential for a far-reaching program beyond anything that has been projected to date.

The 25 recommendations in the Section on National Voluntary Organizations contains challenges that have not been implemented by either Government or voluntary groups.

Just as real is a need for coordination of Federal programs. There is a similar need for a clearer working relationship among voluntary groups in the field of aging. The National Council on

the Aging has done more to relate the activities of the national voluntary programs than any other group. It is my understanding that in an early draft of the White House Conference Report the National Council on the Aging was suggested as the possible coordinating agency.

I do not know the scope of the Council's program, but surely there is an unmet need when so many national groups are working in the field with only "courtesy channels of communication between them."

Related also is the fact that until the Federal government has developed better channels of communication with national voluntary organizations, planning at both levels will proceed without the shared knowledge and experience that could translate conferences and reports into better understanding and more action.

It will be one of the major objectives of the U. S. Commission on Aging to correlate the multidimensioned activities in aging utilizing the skills of national groups and developing an appropriate avenue for the interchange of information and supporting those activities that are best performed by non-Governmental agencies.

The Advisory Committee for the U. S. Commission on Aging would include leaders from national voluntary groups to insure the separation of function and to define more clearly the responsibility of each.

We cannot afford the time or expense of more conferences to discover new words to describe the problems of aging. In spite of the pleas of the planners of conferences for new facts we usually wind up with a rehash of all the old data - and many times not as effectively stated as it was in the reports of the White House Conference on Aging or the subsequent materials that have been published.



There have been some very challenging goals pronounced in conference themes and objectives in the recent past. Many of you probably were responsible for them and participated in them. Let me recall a few that have come to my attention: "The Changing Image of Aging", "Education for Aging", "Added Depth as well as Length to the Later Years", "Education is Life-Long Learning", "Making the Most of Maturity" and "The Freedom Years."

Madison Avenue could not do better, but what are we doing to make them practical and tangible? I do not mean to imply that nothing is being done. Actually much is being accomplished but it does not bear any significant ratio to the people, the talents and the funds that are being expended in the name of aging.

Can we then resolve that not only have we taken a realistic look at the aging in our society but we will now return to our responsible jobs and take whatever action is appropriate to develop realistic plans, legislation, organization and budgets to implement your findings.

No meeting must be an end in itself. As the most sophisticated group in the field of aging you have a stewardship of influence and a responsibility that few others have.

I pledge to you my wholehearted support in legislation that will expand and strengthen your programs. The most difficult task is yours, but together we have an unbeatable combination.

The greatest power on earth is an idea whose time has come. This idea is not new, but the time is now.