

FEDERAL CITY REPORTER



TO: The Mayor

FROM: John J. Gunther
Executive Director

SUBJECT: The White House Conference on Aging

DATE: December 18, 1981

After a highly contested and visible three-and-a-half day debate, the 3,700 participants at the 1981 White House Conference on Aging adopted by a single voice-vote nearly 600 resolutions recommending a wide range of federal policies for older Americans. Many of these recommendations, if adopted by the President and Congress, could have a significant impact upon the national economy and on the increasing numbers of senior citizens--nearly two-thirds of whom reside in urban areas.

The two dominant issues of the Conference were the future of the Social Security System and the rules and procedures of the Conference itself. Many delegates were concerned that they were restricted to voting on specific resolutions within their assigned committee. In addition, they were allowed only a single "up or down" vote on the total package of often conflicting committee resolutions.

The concern for Social Security surfaced in most of the fourteen committees, and even brought President Reagan to the Conference to clarify his position on safeguarding the system. A key fight on Social Security concerned the use of general revenues to help finance the ailing system. Initially the Committee for Economic Well-Being passed a resolution to prohibit the use of general revenues to fund the system. The following day, however, a modified resolution was adopted. This compromise resolution stated:

"The Conference strongly opposes any reduction in benefits being paid current Social Security recipients, and strongly recommends that Congress and the

Administration make every possible and fiscally responsible effort with regard to the security of the Social Security System, to maintain no less than the real protection which Social Security currently provides to all participants."

A number of other committees adopted recommendations in support of the Social Security System and to ensure adequate benefits for participants. The issue of universal coverage of Social Security was defeated. It would have included coverage for nearly all federal employees as well as those state and local government employees who are not now covered.

A number of other resolutions which may concern Mayors, local officials and the nearly 17 million urban elderly recommended support for the Community Development Block Grant, senior centers, Section 202 and other senior housing programs, transportation services, in-home and community based health care, the Older Americans Act, volunteer and private sector involvement, legal and counseling services, flex-time, part-time and other employment opportunities.

The delegates and observers will be sent a complete set of resolutions within the next few weeks and will have an opportunity to register their personal judgement on each resolution. Below are some of the highlights of the various committee resolutions:

- #1 Committee for the Economy of an Aging Population (chairperson, Kenneth Austin, Des Moines, insurance executive) -- focus on issues to increase elderly workforce participation, increase rate of savings and investments, control inflation, provide adequate income, and strengthen Social Security System. Specific resolutions were passed to eliminate mandatory retirement, promote part-time/flex-time work; raise Social Security earnings test, remove excess federal regulations, improve private pensions.
- #2 Economic Well-Being (Robert Steel, former CT Congressman, businessman) -- focus on the financial integrity and benefits of Social Security including inter-fund borrowing, removing earnings test, return to Social Security System uncashed benefit checks, establish a non-partisan commission to examine the System, restore minimum benefits, and maintain system of cost-of-living increases. Other issues concerned support for pre-retirement education, private pensions and employment opportunities.
- #3 Older Americans as a Continuing Resource (James Balog, Spring Lake, NJ, financier) -- enact a Bill of Rights for Older Americans; abolish mandatory retirement; oppose all forms of age discrimination; increase employment opportunities, including the Title V Older Workers Program; promote volunteerism; use general funds to finance Social Security, and eliminate the retirement test.

through community crime prevention programs, provide mandatory and severe penalties for crimes against the elderly, and victim assistance programs; promote use of multi-purpose senior centers in every community.

- #10 Education and Training Opportunities (Bernice Neugarten, Ph.D., Chicago, professor) -- support role and responsibility of federal government in policies and financing education and training; increase research on the elderly; provide gerontological training for personnel involved in aging services.
- #11 Concerns of Older Women (Josephine Oblinger, Springfield, IL, state legislator) -- pass ERA; provide portability and vesting to protect women's rights to spouse's pension and benefits; implement non-taxable pension benefits for widows; ensure coverage by spouse's insurance upon spouse's death; support Community Development Block Grants and senior centers; address crime prevention for older women; balance defense budget and social services; provide need for additional subsidized housing at affordable prices; enact medigap insurance; support semi-annual cost-of-living increases for Social Security benefits; increase SSI benefits.
- #12 Private Sector Roles, Structures, Opportunities (George Davy, Elkhart, IN, business executive) -- encourage private corporations to donate two percent of pre-tax earnings to address social services needs; promote volunteerism, including outreach efforts to recruit older volunteers; encourage private sector to provide on-the-job training and counseling particularly with minorities, women, rural and handicapped; provide tax incentives for hiring older workers; promote part-time, job sharing, and flex-time employment opportunities; promote employers continuous group health coverage for retirees.
- #13 Public Sector Role and Opportunities (Doris Dealaman, Somerville, NJ, county commissioner, Somerset Co.) -- remove funding barriers that inhibit flexibility of local government and private sector in developing better coordinated services; complete in the 1980's a comprehensive service delivery system at the community level built on the foundation of the Older Americans Act partnership of federal, state and local jurisdictions; promote volunteerism; preserve Social Security minimum benefits and timely cost-of-living increases, require universal coverage; establish the positions of Aging Counselor to the President and Assistant Secretaries for Elderly Affairs at HHS and HUD.
- #14 Research (Edward Young, Los Angeles, researcher) -- require two percent of federal budget be set aside for research; increase research for long-term care, service delivery system for ethnic and rural elderly, mental health, the aging process, and the relationship of aging to work and retirement; develop mechanism for the dissemination of research.

- #4 Promotion and Maintenance of Wellness (Madge Mayers, Kansas City, professor) -- develop a national health care policy which includes federal, state, and local governments with private sector; encourage preventive care; provide tax credits to families for home care to elderly members, community mental health services, pre-retirement education.
- #5 Health Care and Services (William Hunt, M.D., McKeesport, PA, physician/commissioner, Allegheny Co.) -- expand Medicare to cover prescription drugs, eyeglasses, hearing aids, adult day care; expand home health care; shift Medicare/Medicaid to system which emphasizes competition within the market forces; provide tax credit to families for home care of elderly members; expand education, research training in care for the elderly; provide incentives to encourage health-care providers to locate in rural and inner-city areas; provide utilization of senior centers for health services.
- #6 Options for Long-Term Care (Denham Harman, M.D., Omaha, professor) -- establish a comprehensive national health program which includes long-term care community based health systems; eliminate current Medicaid eligibility procedure forcing individuals to loose resources ("spend down") to qualify; stress importance of mental health, preserve minimim benefit of Social Security; address special needs of minority older women.
- #7 Family and Community Support Systems (Adelaide Attard, Carle Place, NY, Commissioner, Dept. of Senior Affairs, Nassau Co.) -- promote coordination of private and public resources; promote public policy for a comprehensive continuum of services to enable older persons to maintain their independence; preserve the Older Americans Act; promote in-home services; promote volunteerism; recognize importance of pets; provide legal services.
- #8 Housing Alternative (Nicholas Panuzio, former Mayor of Bridgeport, consultant) -- provide at least 200,000 units of elderly housing, including at least 20,000 units annually for Section 202; prevent displacement; support Community Development Block Grants; housing options such as shared housing and congregate housing should be encouraged through rental assistance and zoning changes; rent controls should be determined by state or city government; continue FHA and FmHA mortgages as a means of increasing elderly housing; fund block grants to states which provide "circuit breaker" property tax relief.
- #9 Conditions for Continuing Community Participation (Janis Martin, Columbus, OH, State Aging Director) -- consolidate and coordinate transportation services of all public, private and volunteer providers; promote employment through job sharing; eliminate age discrimination and mandatory retirement; promote volunteerism; ensure security at home and on the streets

3. S-11
Comm. from Paul E. Healy, City Clerk, transmitting comm. from John J. Gunther, Executive Director, Federal City Reporter, re: recommendations by the White House Conference on Aging relative to federal policies for older Americans.

In City Council,
January 11, 1982

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Placed
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File.