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American Association of Retired People

I am honored to have this opportunity, to speak before you today and to share my thoughts with you on the subject of aging - a subject near and dear to the hearts - and I might add - ^{to the} pocketbooks - of all here present.

I would like to thank _____ for making this occasion possible. I am delighted to be here.

I would like first to offer my praise to the American Association of Retired People for its many years of steadfast dedication to the needs and to the rights and privileges of our senior citizens.

This dynamic organization is to be highly complimented, not only for bringing realistic recognition to the plight of the elderly, but also for its successful efforts in obtaining meaningful social reforms for this deserving and long neglected sector of our society.

Indeed, this Association and others similar to it, ultimately, have been responsible for the recent enactment of the legislation which created the Department of Aging in the State of Pennsylvania, Act 70.

This significant piece of legislation is the culmination of many years of hard work by people like yourselves and by those representatives in Harrisburg who heard your cry over the din of political bureaucracy.

In recent years, hundreds of bills have been introduced by

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members of the Pennsylvania General Assembly to benefit senior citizens. A few, such as the Senior Citizens Property Tax or Rent Rebate Act have become law.

HB
No. 981

The older
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Undoubtedly, during this time, some very worthwhile pieces of legislation, whether for political or other reasons, fell by the wayside. The majority of these bills, however, were simply not good bills and most of them would have proven counterproductive to the overall needs of our economy.

Because of this lack of positive action in recent years, it would appear that the economy of the United States has not been geared or tuned in to ~~our~~ an aging society.

This was understandable in the early part of this century, since in 1900 only 4% of the population or around 3 or 4 million people were 65 years of age or over. ~~This~~ ^{Age} was no great problem.

Certainly, the question of where a person would spend his or her retirement years was not the dilemma it is today. A massive increase in population and drastic changes in technology were not prevalent.

In earlier years, when a person became too old or infirm to live independently, they most likely became part of the family of close relatives.

This was a rewarding experience for older persons because they were able to make valuable contributions to the

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households in which they were living and at the same time, their family ties remained unbroken.

With the incredibly fast changes in technology and the tremendous increase in population, noticeable particularly since World War II, this way of life for the elderly has almost disappeared.

Today, although love between the generations remains as constant as ever, our altered life styles have propelled young families to the far corners of our land.

The structure of the American home has also changed. No longer do we have the large family homestead with its ~~burdensome~~ expensive and laborious upkeep.

We have, instead, a smaller more compact home to meet the needs of smaller families whose interests are likely to be centered outside of the home.

And, most important - whether for reasons of economic security or personal fulfillment - or perhaps both - more and more women are becoming members of the working force.

Sons and daughters who feel the responsibility of caring for older parents are faced with a dilemma because the modern home seldom has a family member available to care for an elderly or infirm parent.

This change in lifestyle has had a deleterious effect on those people thinking of retiring and who do not wish to become uprooted from a community life

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of many years standing. They do not wish to leave familiar surroundings and good friends and neighbors to go to live in strange lands.

This state of affairs, together with the unbridled inflation which continues to stifle our economy, are partially responsible for today's heartbreak, frustration, poverty, and discouragement among our beloved elder citizens.

Government officials and a concerned society were aware of these problems as they developed and acted in good faith to remedy conditions by enacting legislation such as Social Security and Medicare and by funding volunteerism at all levels.

Retirement became institutionalized with the enactment of the Social Security Act of 1935 and traditions of old age became stereotyped.

In the ensuing years we became insensitive to the changes in society as they affected the elderly - both economically and socially.

Unfortunately, as the number of elderly increased and as social changes continued to progress, measures already taken proved to be inadequate and today are backfiring. We know that their limitations have been obvious for some time.

The vastness and the seriousness of the aging problem was simply not comprehended by our country or our countrymen.

Experts warned that the population of the elderly was increasing each year and that further steps would have to be taken to provide for adequate old age care - steps which would enable our citizens to enjoy the fruits of their labors during the later years of life.

① Indeed, today those over 65 years of age comprise 10% of our total population or about 23 million people.

To compound the problem, people are living longer. In 1900, perhaps 66% of the population reached age 20. Today, that percentage has jumped to 90. Naturally, such statistics indicate that many more people are reaching the ages of 75 and 85. As a matter of fact, we have in America about 10,000 people who are centenarians.

Young people, who do not ever like to think of growing old themselves, have not considered the problem of aging to be their problem. To them, insurance plans, retirement plans and Social Security have been the answer. They have had enough to do to care for their growing families.

Many older people - well off financially - have considered the financial problems of their peers in a remote kind of way. They have been

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① The Pennsylvania Gazette June 1978
Aging by Marshall Ledger p. 18

concerned and sympathetic but since they were not in the same boat they have been willing to leave the solution to this problem to the government.

The government, however, although concerned, has had more pressing priorities to deal with and to pay for - priorities such as war, unemployment and inflation.

One might very well compare the handling of the aging problem with the handling of our present day environmental problem. Circumstances are preventing effecting effective action in this area, also.

On the one hand, ~~we~~ the American people are proving that as individuals they are unwilling to be deprived of their material comforts and do not want to change their way of living.

On the other hand, economic forces are holding back progress in progressive reforms in this critical area of concern.

At the same time, reliable sources indicate that if, within a generation, sweeping changes are not forthcoming to save our environment, our life on earth will inevitably be destroyed.

Negligence and procrastination seem to be the key words in the treatment of both of these crucial issues and have caused, in both, a state of limbo to exist.

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The day of reckoning seems to have arrived with relation to the aging problem which has reached a crisis stage. Both the people and the government have awakened at last to realize that this situation has become intolerable.

Let us hope and pray that a day of reckoning never has to come on the environmental issue because it will then be too late to do anything about it.

X The entire concept ^{on} aging is now changing. It is emphasized that one cannot just look at age as the number of years lived. As attention becomes focused in this area, it is realized that there is a great disparity ^{between} physiological, psychological, chronological, sociological and economic aging.

If one is a longshoreman, for example, one may be physically old at age 45. If one is a musician, one may still be working - as is Eugene Ormandy, conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra, at age 78.

Also - it is now believed that senility, minus personality development, decreasing intelligence, decreasing creativity - are all myths of aging. Geriatricians ~~Gerontologists~~ are discovering that these conditions are often the results of anxiety, grief, physical disorders and masked depressions.

Today, actual physiological changes do not become

accented until age 75.

Many interesting and challenging questions are being asked. - Such as -

Is it better for old people to live in age-integrated housing situations or is it better for them to live in age-separated housing situations?

Do the elderly drop out of society, or does society remove itself from the elderly?

Do we give services to the elderly or do we give them money to buy their own services?

Answers are being sought to such questions and science is working toward a goal of a better life for all older individuals. I feel that the time is ripe for the rest of us to band together to assist in this challenging task.

The creation of the Department of the Aged Aging by the General Assembly can be an auspicious beginning.

If properly promulgated, this legislation can prove to be a major step forward in restoring to older Pennsylvanians the rights, privileges and freedoms which inherently belong to them.

The bill is much too long and complex to give a detailed analysis to you at this time so I will only touch upon the overall intent of the legislation.

By the way, one of its provisions is to publish a description of the organization of the Department so

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that all interested agencies and individuals may be better able to solicit assistance from the Department.

The bill provides the mechanism by which areas of concern pertaining to housing, health, transportation, education and employment may be reexamined and reexplored in the light of contemporary times and economic conditions.

It provides a consolidation of functions now performed by other departments. In other words, functions now provided for by the Departments of Public Welfare and Transportation or other areas - which are inconsistent with the Department of Aging ^{are being} ~~will be~~ transferred to the Department of Aging. All appropriations and obligations, staff and equipment are also being transferred.

The Department will be a cabinet level agency of State Government and will ~~be~~ deal specifically with advancing the well-being of our older citizens.

It will coordinate and eliminate duplication in Federal and State programs which benefit them and will be the sole State agency to receive and disburse Federal funds under the Older Americans Act of 1965.

The development of present services, activities and programs for the elderly which are furnished by State agencies will be broadened and methods will be provided for their evaluation.

Quality of life, health and social needs of those residing in boarding homes and nursing homes will be studied and evaluated and reported to the General Assembly on an annual basis.

There will be collaboration with the Department of Community Affairs and the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency with regard to home maintenance, utility costs and other housing services.

All rules, regulations, eligibility and payment standards set forth by the Departments of Public Welfare, Health, Labor and Industry and Environmental Resources relating to the licensure and regulation of nursing homes, hospitals and other health facilities shall be reviewed and commented upon by the Department of Aging and may not take effect until they have been submitted to the Department for such comment.

The same applies with relation to medical assistance, supplementary security income, homemaking and home health care and residential care facilities for older adults.

- And the same applies with relation to transportation needs.

A Pennsylvania Council of Aging is created in the office of the Governor consisting of 19 persons appointed by him. Ten of these people

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will be 55 at least 55 years of age.

This council will meet at least 6 times a year. Among other duties, it will submit to the Governor, the General Assembly, the Secretary of the Department of Aging and the public - an annual report evaluating the level and quality of services provided to the aging and will also recommend improvements.

The Council will establish 4 regional councils with sufficient staff to carry out its powers and duties.

Under the Department of Aging, the Commonwealth will be divided into district planning and service areas. ~~pursuant to the Federal Older Americans Act~~ For each of these areas, there will be an area agency established in accordance with the Federal Older Americans Act of 1965.

The area agencies will act as advocates at all levels of government as well as within the communities at large for the interests of older persons.

Independent clubs and associations of older Pennsylvanians will be promoted which will involve them in social, economic and political affairs in their communities and help them to maintain independence and dignity.

Support programs, studies and policies in cooperation with the Departments of Labor and Industry, Education, Commerce, Public Welfare and other agencies will promote the opportunity for continued work, education and training for the elderly.

You are undoubtedly familiar with the hierarchical administrative framework which necessarily encompasses this kind of legislation.

I think a very important feature of ~~the~~ ^{the} act is that for the first time - all agencies and commissions dealing with senior citizens are brought together under one roof, so to speak.

There will be no overnight miracles with the enactment of this legislation but hopefully, there will be a gradual improvement in responding to the vital needs of all older Pennsylvanians.

The mechanism is there to deal effectively with all of their concerns - health services, employment discrimination, mandatory retirement, housing ^{and} ~~as well as~~ any other problems which may lie in the offing.

Act 70 presents a panorama of possibilities. To make it work, all of us must be determined to make it work.

We must focus our minds, our hearts and our energies on providing the human resources which are imperative to successful achievement.

under this act.

As your representative, I will try my utmost to assist in this process. I am confident that as members of the American Association of Retired People, all of you will do the same. ~~Let us not exclude God from this endeavor.~~

Let us not exclude God from this endeavor. He has given to us the strength and fortitude to withstand life's adversities, thus far. He has enabled us to share in the development and enrichment of a country second to none.

Our contributions have brought America to a higher level of human dignity and understanding than ever before in history.

I am sure that ^{with God's} He will guide us to a successful ^{achievement} ~~conclusion~~, in this, our newest mission for mankind.