

*Dialogue on Aging*

**STEP FORUM**

**REPORT & DIGEST**

**September 25, 1975**

DIALOGUE ON AGING

STEP Forum

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Sponsored by the City Council

Report and Digest

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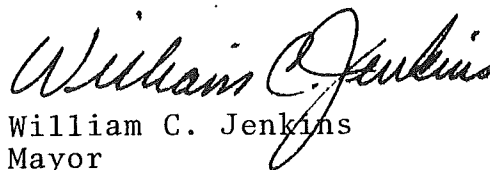
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## COMMENTS

The September 25, 1975, STEP Forum "Dialogue on Aging" proved to be very well named. The success of the forum was indicated by the enthusiastic dialogue that was established during the day-long program. Not only was there communication between the citizens and the council members; a great deal of constructive dialogue between the adults in attendance and a group of thirteen high school students who were able to sit in on the morning sessions occurred.

A review of this report of the forum will indicate the large amount of interest among the people at the meeting in continuing the lines of communication established during the meeting.

Once again, I want to express the thanks of the City Council as well as my personal thanks to all who gave so willingly of their time and interest to make the forum a success.

  
William C. Jenkins  
Mayor

## REPORT

### STEP FORUM "DIALOGUE ON AGING"

The STEP Forum "Dialogue on Aging" brought forth a number of opinions and concerns relating to the relationships of the older citizens and the community. While a number of these were specific in nature, the basic concerns are easily broken out. They include: "What can the older citizen contribute?", "Lines of communication are needed, how can they be developed?", and "What are the city's responsibilities to its older citizens?"

The forum opening with a panel discussion "The Philosophy of Aging in the Past, Present and Future" which served to provide a background frame of reference for the roundtable discussions that followed. By utilizing the panelists as resource people throughout the day, it was possible to develop and expand upon the theme of the forum past the provincialism often inherent in discussions of the older person and his community.

The roundtable discussions held throughout the day served to bring to the forefront the great need for communications between the older person and the various segments of the community. This need kept recurring through all five groups' considerations and discussions. By the end of the forum everyone was united in making one major request -- that being for "Information, Please!" Regardless of the age or background of the participant, each one stressed the overriding need to be better informed about: the problems of aging; services available to the older citizen from both the private and public sectors of the community; current and proposed projects relating to the older citizen; and the specific needs of the older citizen.

As with all of the STEP Forums sponsored by the City Council, specific answers were not sought or decided upon. However, the discussion groups did indicate the kinds of solutions that could be used to enable the older person to enhance his or her life style while contributing to the enrichment of the entire community.

The various concerns and recommendations have been classified and are presented as part of this report for consideration and implementation where possible.

## NEEDS OF THE OLDER CITIZEN

Recognizing that there are basic needs which must be met to enable the individual to maintain his dignity and positive self concept, the discussion groups identified them as:

- Responsibility: The need to be involved and be responsible;
- Meaningful direction: The need to be part of an evolving productive system or function;
- Understanding and respect: The need to have his worth as a person is understood and respected;
- Resources: The need to know what resources are available and how to utilize them;
- Counseling: The need to have a variety of counseling services readily available to him, especially in the areas of financial and health assistance; and
- Recreation and Fellowship: The need to be able to relax and enjoy life while developing a spirit of fellowship with all the age groups of the community.

## POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Transportation - greater mobility to the elderly so they can take advantage of services being provided now and that will be provided in the future.

### Alternatives

- Subsidized cab service
- Dial-a-Ride
- Subsidize people who are donating transportation
- Better bus schedules

Senior Citizen's Center - a central location for senior citizens to meet to:

- Find companionship and friends
- Provide a referral center
- Provide a resource center
- Organize people of common interests into productive groups whether for recreation or contributions of time and talents
- Provide specialized services
- Market personal skills (job banks)
- Provide an educational center
- Provide meals (nutrition needs)

Lobby for Modification of Social Security System - so senior citizens are not punished or adversely affected by:

- Working part-time (65-72)
- Seeking a partner via marriage
- Lack of full benefits for widows (rather than 2/3 spouse's benefits now received)

### Health Care

- Reduce cost of drugs
- Better out-patient care
- Expand the scope of Medicare services
- Health care in the Home for Indigents
- Establish nutrition centers and hot meals program

Maintain the Quality of Life and Life Style of Senior Citizens by Providing More Subsidized Housing

- Place housing near transportation and/or senior citizen's center
- Subsidize only those who can't afford their own home
- Monthly rents subsidized to be of benefit to the elderly
- Provide a variety of housing opportunities

Narrow the Youth/Elderly Generation Gap

- Involve the youth with senior citizens
- Do not segregate youth from the senior citizen center
- Work towards more respect towards one another

Information

- Better use of news media facilities
- Establish an outreach program to locate isolated citizens, particularly the infirm and homebound
- Provide continuing educational possibilities

LUNCHEON ADDRESS

BY

Dr. Paul A. Kerschner, Director  
Community Programs Division  
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"AGING IN THE '70'S"



## "AGING IN THE '70'S"

I have chosen Aging in the Mid-70's as my topic for today. The double meaning is an intentional one, for as we move into the late 1970's, we are as a society beginning to take a serious look at our elderly, not only those 60, 65 and 70, but also, and equally important, those in the mid-70's and beyond. The overall direction of my discussion today will be to focus on the need for acknowledging that older adults will not, like the proverbial child, agree to be seen but not heard. I can easily cite examples with which all of you are familiar, demonstrating that age is no barrier to success. I could, for example, talk about Senator Thurmond, Justice Douglas, Alice Longworth Roosevelt, Margaret Mead and others. But the argument could be raised that these individuals are not typical of older Americans. Indeed, common logic would respond that with 22 million older adults over 65 in the United States, one can describe perhaps 100 or maybe even 1,000 of these individuals with the other 21,999,000 being mere mortals.

Let's look at that statement and discuss to what extent those other 21 million plus older Americans are becoming involved and/or "self-actualized". I want to address whether they are demanding and receiving a greater voice in the affairs of their community and whether they are working to receive that recognition which has been so long due and ignored.

I may not, when I am finished, convince you that a new wave of anti-agism or pro-seniorism is sweeping the nation. It's time something "swept" the nation. I do suggest, however, that upon the completion of my remarks you will agree that this is a vastly different society in terms of its treatment of older citizens than it was 15, 20 or 25 years ago at the scene of the first White House Conference on Aging.

Let us begin our journey side-by-side with today's mid-70's older adults. For the most part they are not institutionalized, indeed 5% of all aged are institutionalized. (I do not wish to play down the importance of analyzing the life situation of institutionalized older adults. Indeed, as you heard, I was a Director of a Commission which spent 100% of its time investigating conditions in Nursing Homes.) Rather, I wish to speak out not of the ill but rather of those "well" seniors who continue to spend a vigorous and energetic life.

However, while they are generally living outside of institutions, there are many living at poverty income levels. Income remains the most stubborn, pervasive and seemingly insoluble problem of all. On a happier note, we know that Social Security payments are increasing and that we now have the Supplemental Security Income Program to help our aged, poor, disabled and blind. Consequently, the income situation, although inadequate has seen some improvement.

Rather than discussing income, we should ask who are these moderate-to-low income, non-institutionalized older adults? Are they white? Some. Are they black? Some. Lithuanians? Some. Jews? Some. Are they tall? Redheaded? Women? Men? I guess the message is clear. Older adults in this country are represented by those of you in the audience and are not a homogeneous mass, all of whom do not accept the same ideas, the same philosophies and project the same view of the world. I am thankful that, indeed, at the magical age of 65 someone does not wave a magic wand and say "Eureka! you are now aged and here is the aged Bill of Rights and the aged Constitution and you shall hereby behave in an aged manner."

It certainly would be unique if that were the case. For I know of people who are as rigid and old-fashioned in their ideas at 20 as they are at 70; grouches are grouches. I also know the Maggie Kuhns, convenor of the Grey Panthers, of this world who continue to be creative on into their 70's. Let us not assume, as too many of our policymakers do, that there is one voice out there, that there is one Great Senior Citizen in the sky who speaks for us all, because as we all know, this is not the case. The strength of America, the strength that was forged by many of our senior citizens is that very strength which exists through a diverse collage of people coming together to achieve some common goals, and not coming together for the sake of "commonness".

I wish now to move to a discussion of those activities, which set today's older adult aside from yesterday's generation of seniors, indeed, from all generations of seniors. While I trust that the next generation of seniors, as well as my generation of seniors in the year 2010, will be very different from the picture that I am about to draw, today's picture is not as bleak as some would portray it.

The important element in this picture is not what the ultimate change will finally look like, but the very fact that the world is in a process of changing. I wish to point out somewhat facetiously that the interesting thing about Watergate was that there were no senior citizens or women present. Perhaps there is more of a message in that than first would appear to meet the eye. It has long been

assumed that the only role for the aged in politics was that of spending one's declining years as the rambunctious, yet "courtly" (always courtly) chairman of the House Ways and Means, Finance, Transportation, etc. Committees. It has been always assumed that those individuals were there not because they were any more competent, but instead because they had accumulated sufficient years to position themselves in seats of power. As you are all aware, the newly elected Congress has instituted a new clean broom policy, whereby they began to "throw the rascals out". What I wish to make clear to you today, and what I wish would be made clear by our news commentators to the majority of American people, is that, in many cases, these chairmen were being thrown out not because of their age. Rather, it is because of their political ideology, which was the same when they were 30 as it is today at 60 or 70. I stress that one lesson of the 60's and 70's is that age is being used as a cover-up for the destruction of committee power in the Senate and Congress, and for that matter, whenever it can become the scapegoat.

Let me explain, however, that I am in favor of the reform movements in Congress which are removing many of the chairpersons, indeed, in favor of many of their replacements. What I am pointing out, however, is that we should not try to disguise this reform movement by calling it a replacement of the old, out-dated and out-worn by the new, young, vigorous and dynamic politicians. We should not confuse ideology with agism. What we are seeing is the dawning of a new era in the political process. Older adults will now be competing with the middle-aged and young for political office on a basis of desire, competence and skills, rather than the accumulation of political debts and expectations. This process will be hastened by the increase in the number of early retirements whereby individuals of 50, 55 and 60 will see stretched before them, many years of potential activity within the political process. I suggest that young, middle-aged and old will compete for a limited number of political seats and that we will have State Assemblies and National Congresses that reflect the total age span, and not simply a domination either by "crustly old Southern bosses" or by "brand-spanking new Northern reformers". Perhaps when that day dawns, we will not hear the Walter Cronkites or John Chancellors of this world speculate that Nelson Rockefeller, Ronald Reagan, Hubert Humphrey or Barry Goldwater cannot be considered for the Presidency, for they are in fact too old . . . when too old is 70, 68, 65 or even 60?

Moving away from the political process and on to a local level and another subject, recent studies conducted at the University of Southern California and other institutions show a marked decline in the interaction between children and older adults. This decline is due, in some part, to the mobility of the present society wherein children and grandparents are separated by geography. (By the way,

this is not as serious a problem as many think. Indeed, the studies show that many more children live close to their parents than would normally be assumed). Nevertheless, the closeness is not as ingrained or expected as it once was. In addition to the geographic separation there is the increased pace of the society as was so colorfully described in Toffler's Future Shock. Today's societal pace often does not allow for the lingering grandchild-grandparent interaction that once was so characteristic of our American Culture. Parents work, children spend time in day care centers, older adults are engaged in their own activities, and indeed, the interaction becomes an exception rather than a weekly rule. In addition, as family size declines and the birth rate drops off precipitously, for many grandparents, the grandparenting role either ends early with only a few children or never begins. What we are seeing, however, is an extraordinary rise in the number of programs designed to fill the gaps left by these sociological "happenings". You are all familiar, of course, with one of the country's most successful aging programs, that of the Foster Grandparents Program. Foster Grandparents brings together the institutionalized child and the Volunteer Older Adult. It has proven to be extremely successful and to be of great benefit to both the child and the older person. We are now seeing the rise of Foster Grandparenting-like programs in day care centers, nursery schools, local community groups, within their own homes, not necessarily only in institutions. I look forward to, and predict, a continuing rise in the Foster Grandparent like model around the country.

In addition, there are now programs which bring together the older adults and the non-elderly teacher together within the same classroom. Thus the young teacher, who is describing what it was like during the depression, Second World War, Los Angeles earthquakes, etc., need not only rely on the text that he/she is using. Rather, the teacher can now turn to his/her team teacher (an older adult) and together they can walk the child through the scenes of the past forty years, scenes in which the older person was an active participant. What could be more exciting than having an older person describe what it was like to fight in the Korean War, work in the sweat factories, stand in the breadlines, or observe the McCarthy period. I think this is an exciting and intriguing new role for older adults.

In addition to working with children, older adults are themselves developing courses and teaching them to their peers. Past professors, high school teachers, and researchers are setting up courses of interest for their fellow seniors in community colleges, adult education schools and gerontology centers. This is being done at the Andrus Gerontology Center. It is a challenging new venture for retired professionals who seek to share their knowledge and experiences with those around them.

Community involvement is another area in which I'd like to place emphasis today. As many of you know, we now have federal/state programs within geographical areas referred to as Triple A's, Area Agencies on Aging. This is the federal government's attempt to provide local coordination and control of aging problems which receive direction and money from the states and federal government but have a high degree of local independence and autonomy. One of the striking features of the Triple A structure is the requirement that they have an Advisory Council made up of at least 51% senior citizens in addition to ethnic, geographic and income distribution. I am sure you are familiar with the statement "maximum, feasible participation". What we are seeing in the Triple A structure is an attempt to bring older adults into the initial planning, implementation and operations process, a process for which they have so long been barred. Make no mistake, however, this is a long and tedious experience. Being aged, as in the case of being young, does not make one automatically a parliamentarian or indeed a wise community organizer. It takes a long time for everybody's agenda to be placed on the table and heard, for egos to be assuaged, ideas to be considered, ideas to be rejected, until finally we begin to hammer out a policy. What I think makes the process unique and in some ways radical in nature, is that the ultimate decisions as to the process and structure can be decided by the aged themselves, and by those writing regulations at the state and national levels. Many young and middle-aged are quick to criticize the advisory group's process on the grounds that it does not provide for the kind of power, authority and control that senior citizens should have. My counter to that is that although that may be true, older adults, like any other group that is disadvantaged, must begin to size power and initiative by themselves. While I don't buy the "pull yourself up by the boot straps" argument, I think it is a cruel hoax. One thing which is clear and which we can learn from Black America, is that no one is going to reach down there and pull those boots up for us. We pull them up and stomp ahead, or we just aren't going to get the needed boost. Concerning the Triple A's, the aged must take the initiative, seize the authority granted to them in legislation and become well versed and solidly grounded for the goal of establishing themselves with a full voice in the legislative process.

There are numerous other fields in which the elderly have begun to reassert their influence. Hollywood honored Art Carney and his Academy Award for the movie, "Harry and Tonto". Music is well represented with Arthur Fiedler and the Boston Pops among many others. But once again, there are also rank and file, if you will, older adults who are making contributions which may be every bit as important, if not as glamorous, as those two super stars I

aforementioned. Take for example, in terms of numbers, the meteoric rise in advocacy groups for the elderly. AARP/NRTA leads the pack with its 7 to 8 million members. The National Council of Senior Citizens, the National Council on Aging, the Black Caucus and the Grey Panthers also represent millions of seniors. These groups, composed primarily of older adults, are far more than social clubs, far more than the means for coming together in order to purchase reasonable insurance or to establish a fund raising organization. Instead, they represent a combined width of wisdom, expertise and experiences which, when molded together, produce a powerful force for the development and implementation of legislation for older adults. If this society receives a National Health Insurance Program which reforms Medicare and moves to install preventive and out-patient health care for older adults, it will be largely due to the behind scenes activities of advocacy groups for the elderly and primarily in that case, AARP and NRTA.

To me it is exciting and refreshing that groups of older adults are coming together on issues such as Nursing Home reform, hearing aid abuses and consumer fraud. What better army to march to the gates of Congress than an army of concerned, and knowledgeably well-armed senior citizens. The battle cry of the militant Jewish defense league is that of "Never again"! "Never again" relegated to a position of uselessness. "Never again" being given an income floor that is not designed for dignity, but rather designed for despair.

Rise up ye ranks of elderly! Rise up, face your oppressors and in a concerned voice, vow "Never again"!

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