

Luncheon Speech, Get Ready for the Aging Boom
May 14, 2009
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Thank you.

Nice to be back so soon.

This morning, Get Ready for the Aging Boom was our focus and its implications nationally and to some degree locally.

This time focus is more on building communities for successful aging.

I will be using some examples of initiatives underway.

Let me begin by commending the work that is being done here by David and his team at the SW Washington Agency on Aging and Disabilities.

I had an opportunity to review there area plan and it is clear that they have the present and the future of successful aging in their sites.

It is seen in their mission to promote independent choice, well being and dignity for those 60 and over and those with disabilities and their families with a focus on comprehensive and coordinated system of home and community based services.

It is seen in their primary functions to inform the public of services as well as to plan them and evaluate them.

A community built for successful aging must do as this agency does—strengthen community partnerships and do strong advocacy itself and support the efforts of the advisory council.

As positive as the work of this agency is—nationally it is still not reflective of the majority of American communities.

Study done in part by N4A noted that only 46% of US communities had begun planning efforts to prepare for aging population and most of them were single issue focuses vs. more holistic as done here.

One fundamental fact is that people overwhelmingly want to live in their own homes and communities as they age. The community must help and not impose barriers intended or unintended.

Central to this reality is to create livable communities which at the very least have appropriate and affordable housing, adequate options for mobility, community features, and programs that promote personal independence and continued engagement of people as they age in their community. And the community must be safe.

As AARP in a report Reimagining America said-- Marketplace can resolve some of these issues but good

community planning and sound public policy are also essential.

I have in my White House Conference on Aging capacities and other capacities visited many locations which were planning and preparing and innovating for an aging population.

N4A in its study with MetLife foundation also examined some communities.

Let me run through a few of these as examples:

Town of Stratham, New Hampshire modified its zoning ordinances to provide Affordable Senior Housing which includes:

- Minimum lot sizes to encourage the development of smaller structures for empty nesters**
- Accessory apartments**
- Retirement Planned Community zoning and**
- “elder affordability” under the Multi-Family Housing Section.**

Arvada, CO

- Adopted an ordinance which mandates that 15 percent of new home construction of all types include universal design components.**

Detroit, MI

Working with the Michigan Department of Transportation, the City:

- Developed standards for pavement markings**
- Installed brighter stop lights, and**

-Increased street-name signage.

Scottsdale, AZ

-In partnership with local realtors, Scottsdale provides lock boxes that interested seniors can secure outside their homes with a key that only police and fire personnel can access in case of emergency.

St. Louis Park, MN

-Revised its comprehensive land use plan to embrace the vision of “a community so special that people will “consciously choose to make St. Louis Park their lifelong home.”

Then some state wide initiatives:

Silverprint, Colorado -A direct outgrowth of the 2005 White House Conference on Aging

-There the focus was creating a statewide strategic plan for aging based on vision of establishing a culture for positive aging addressing the needs, contributions, and opportunities for all its older residents.

Next, we go to the state of Texas, the Texas aging well initiative. This initiative was built around the preparedness of individuals to be involved in all aspects of their lives from physical health to their legal affairs and the development of social infrastructure laws, policies, and services that create opportunities for improved housing and transportation to better community supports to protections of older people as they age.

Like Colorado, this is a statewide process involving the aging network and health care and APS and other networks and citizens groups.

In Illinois, there is the maturing of Illinois—getting communities on track for an aging population. Goal is to produce development of livable communities for all ages in Illinois.

Here the work is to collaborate with 45 selected communities, 13 planning and service areas, comprehensive assessment of their preparedness, and using AAA to submit final reports on preparedness to the Illinois Department on Aging by October 2010.

A recent report about activities among older immigrants and refugees in the Philadelphia area identifies among their civic engagement roles:

- Serving as disciplinarians in local high schools**
- Translation services for other elders**
- Drive for other elders**
- Organize communities to provide support for newly arrived refugees.**
- Serve as President or other leadership role of an ethnic based association or senior center**
- Collaborate with other agencies to write grants**

My last examples are appropriately from my home county and state.

In my state, I serve on two statewide groups—The Commonwealth Council on Aging—in my case appointed last year by our Governor Tim Kaine

I am also a member of the Technical Advisory Board of the Older Dominion Partnership.

Let me focus on the Older Dominion Partnership which was created in part because we did not want Virginia to be known as the Old Dominion for negative reasons.

Older Dominion Partnership is an initiative created by Virginia businesses, government, foundations, and non-profits to help Virginia ride the age wave where our 65+ population will double by 2030.

We are a coalition of the willing working to create a viable organization with early emphasis on a new statewide age wave preparedness research database.

Virginia relies upon U.S. Census data. That data, while useful, does not address the true quality of life for those over 65. Metrics like diet, nutrition, oral health, and social connectedness do not exist. Our shared database and information center will inventory, organize, and make publically accessible existing data on the state of the 65+ population in Virginia as well as information on age preparedness. It has not been done in 30 years.

And finally in my home county of Arlington Virginia—we had our elder readiness task force develop a blueprint for an aging ready community based on the premise that Arlington is a community that knows and values its seniors as well as supports and listens to them.

Our priority recommendations which our Commission is to monitor implementation include:

- Develop and implement a coordinated communication plan regarding available programs and services.**
- Identify existing mixed age apartment buildings and provide them with concierge services for seniors to link them to services.**
- Establish a mobility management program.**
- Enhance the appeal and relevance of senior centers.**
- Use trained volunteers to offer safety checks of homes.**
- And offer guidance for older drivers in selecting appropriate vehicles and assistive technology.**

In closing--

Aging is a reality across our great country.

Denial about it is not really an option.

It is a challenge if you let the age boom catch you unprepared and you cannot respond.

It is an opportunity to let the age boom become a strong tool for local economic development.

It takes engagement of the community—leadership—collaboration between traditional and even some non-traditional networks.

Need to be involved early and often –way they used to vote in Chicago.

Need to keep it relevant—be aware of the political and fiscal environment.

We must keep the pressure on DC. Aging is an inescapable part of our future agenda and we must make more get it, just as your Senators get it.

I have concerns about the impact the recession might have on individual efforts on aging readiness—but the advocacy job is to demonstrate the cost effectiveness of investing in planning for aging society— work to avoid elder flight—which depresses communities.

Stay on timetable.

**Have benchmarks to monitor progress.
Stay 30,000 feet up and also grounded.**

Keep momentum--

At the end of the day there are deeply personal questions we ask as we age and this is depending on our age--

Would I want my parents to live and age here?

Do I want to grow older in my community?

If I do, what can I do to help make it better?

I believe in the value of community infiltration—join boards—commissions—those entities making decisions that affect your future.

I wish your five counties continued success as you move forward and embrace the aging boom..