Resolutions Moved the Process

The fifth White House Conference on Aging — the first of the 21st century — was held in Washington, DC from December 11 to 14, 2005. White House Conferences on Aging have been held once a decade since the 1960's and have served as catalysts for the development and enhancement of national, state and local aging policies in the United States.

The theme for the 2005 WHCoA, “The Booming Dynamics of Aging: From Awareness to Action” reflected the legislative mandate to focus on the aging of today and tomorrow, which includes the 78 million Baby Boomers born between 1946 and 1964. This theme charged the delegates to acknowledge the opportunities and the challenges facing our families, communities, country and the world, and to act now to responsibly and thoughtfully shape aging policy and programs for the future.

The WHCoA Policy Committee had actively sought input from a wide array of stakeholders to develop the overarching agenda and plan for the Conference, including resolutions development. Issues were identified and refined through public input received from more than 375 events involving 130,000 people across the nation as well as general comments received by the WHCoA. These events included listening sessions, solutions forums, mini-conferences and independent aging events. They were organized by communities, academic institutions, business (Continued on Page 3)

Implementation Motivated the Conference

As important as were deemed the voting for the top 50 resolutions, their implementation strategies were the essence of the conference. The Policy Committee shared the strong desire that the 2005 WHCoA produce real, positive results that will make a difference in the lives of the future generations of senior citizens.

As the 50 resolutions selected by the delegates identified what priorities the nation should address, so the implementation strategies would suggest how the resolutions might be put into action. Go to www.whcoa.gov/press/speakers/speakers/asp for strategies.

The Policy Committee believed it was critical for the delegates to consider what actions must be undertaken over the next ten years and beyond to translate the work of the delegates into meaningful actions across the spectrum of Federal, State and local governments, as well as throughout business and industry, private and non-profit sectors, including responsibilities to be assumed by individuals.

On August 31, 2005, the Policy Committee announced the 1,200 delegates selected, in a unique process, by the Governors of all 50 states, the U.S. territories, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia; the members of the 109 Congress; the National Congress of American Indians; plus, national aging and other allied organizations, academic institutions, business and industry. (Continued on Page 3)

Chris Kyker . . . Speaker’s Corner

The Texas Delegation bonded at the WHCoA with two meetings, luncheon and photo shoot. We formed consensus on 24 of 73 resolutions, and 23 of the 24 made the 50 resolutions considered by WHCoA. Nine made the Top Ten. The Delegation agreed to follow up with meetings and forums in 2006. TSHL was seen everywhere! The special luncheon for the Texas Delegation was hosted by Sears Methodist Retirement System, Inc.

TSHL has received a grant from SBC to conduct at least ten follow-up public forums in April or May 2006 regarding the 2005 WHCoA. The purpose of the forums would be for WHCoA delegates to report on priorities of the Conference and to provide opportunities to identify aging issues for development of TSHL resolutions for its Legislative session in September 2006. The forums would also provide a vehicle for AAA needs assessment/resource development and area plan and state plan development and align multiple resource development efforts for greater effectiveness in implementing Aging Texas Well.

TSHL will provide the leadership to convene the forums across the state, and work in partnership with the Texas Aging Network, including the Texas Association of Area Agencies on Aging, Advisory Council, Aging Texas Well, United Ways of Texas, Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services and the Health & Human Services Commission. TSHL members and the Texas Delegation will be involved in planning and conducting the forums.

A steering committee composed of TSHL officers and leaders of the aging network convenes in early January to plan details.
White House Conference on Aging TOP FIFTY RESOLUTIONS

- Provide Financial and Other Economic Incentives and Policy Changes to Encourage and Facilitate Increased Retirement Savings.
- Establish Principles to Strengthen Social Security.
- Foster Innovations in Financing Long-Term Care Services to Increase Options Available to Consumers.
- Strengthen Law Enforcement Efforts at the Federal, State, and Local Level to Investigate and Prosecute Cases of Elder Financial Crime.
- Modernize the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Program.
- Strengthen the Social Security Disability Insurance Program.
- Remove Barriers to the Retention and Hiring of Older Workers, Including Age Discrimination.
- Promote Incentives for Older Workers to Continue Working and Improve Employment Training and Retraining Programs to Better Serve Older Workers.
- Encourage Redesign of Senior Centers for Broad Appeal and Community Participation.
- Reauthorize The Older Americans Act Within the First Six Months Following the 2005 White House Conference on Aging.
- Ensure That Older Americans Have Transportation Options to Retain Their Mobility and Independence.
- Enhance the Availability of Housing for Older Americans.
- Enhance the Affordability of Housing for Older Americans.
- Support Older Adult Caregivers Raising Their Relatives' Children.
- Promote Economic Development Policies that Respond to the Unique Needs of Rural Seniors.
- Promote Enrollment of Seniors into the Medicare Prescription Drug Program.
- Develop a Coordinated, Comprehensive Long-Term Care Strategy by Supporting Public and Private Initiatives that Address Financing, Choice, Quality, Service Delivery, and the Paid and Unpaid Workforce.
- Apply Evidence Based Research to the Delivery of Health and Social Services Where Appropriate.
- Evaluate Payment and Coordination Policies in the Geriatric Healthcare Continuum to Ensure Continuity of Care.
- Promote the Importance of Nutrition in Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Management.
- Improve the Health and Quality of Life of Older Americans Through Disease Management and Chronic Care Coordination.
- Improve Recognition, Assessment, and Treatment of Mental Illness and Depression Among Older Americans.
- Prevent Disease and Promote Healthier Lifestyles Through Educating Providers and Consumers on Consumer Healthcare.
- Improve Health Decision Making Through Promotion of Health Education, Health Literacy, and Cultural Competency.
- Attain Adequate Numbers of Healthcare Personnel in All Professions Who Are Skilled, Culturally Competent, and Specialized in Geriatrics.
- Support Geriatric Education and Training for All Healthcare Professionals, Paraprofessionals, Health Profession Students, and Direct Care Workers.
- Promote Innovative Models of Non-Institutional Long-Term Care.
- Ensure Appropriate Care for Seniors with Disabilities.
- Reduce Healthcare Disparities Among Minorities by Developing Strategies to Prevent Disease, Promote Health, and Deliver Appropriate Care and Wellness.
- Promote Innovative Evidence Based and Practice Based Medical and Aging Research.
- Encourage Appropriate Sharing of Healthcare Information Across Multiple Management Systems.
- Ensure Appropriate Recognition and Care For Veterans Across All Healthcare Settings.
- Strengthen and Improve Medicaid Program for Seniors.
- Strengthen and Improve Medicare Program.
- Educate Americans on End of Life Issues.
- Improve Access To Care for Older Adults Living in Rural Areas.
- Improve Patient Advocacy to Assist Patients in and Across All Care Settings.
- Reauthorize the National and Community Service Act to Expand Opportunities for Volunteer and Civic Engagement Activities.
- Promote the Integration of Health and Aging Services to Improve Access and Quality of Care for Older Americans.
- Develop Incentives to Encourage the Expansion of Appropriate Use of Health Information Technology.
- Develop a National Strategy for Supporting Informal Caregivers of Seniors to Enable Adequate Quality and Supply of Services.
- Implement a Strategy and Plan for Accountability to Sustain the Momentum, Public Visibility, and Oversight of the Implementation of 2005 WHCoA Resolutions.
- Improve State and Local Based Integrated Delivery Systems to Meet 21st Century Needs of Seniors.
- Review Alignment of Government Programs That Deliver Services to Older Americans.

TOP TEN Resolutions are in BOLD
Carlos’ assessment of WHCoA

Texas was well-represented at the WHCoA. All of our delegates from Texas fully realize that we face serious national problems. All did their level best to faithfully represent the interests of Texans, especially our senior citizens. But there was some good news, and some not-so-good!

The good news is that the White House advisory team members (who conducted the WHCoA) have had a lot of exposure lately to issues of great concern to seniors. Not so good is that they can only guess as to what this year’s WHCoA delegates believe to be (1) the issues of most concern to seniors (the Resolutions), and (2) what should be done about ‘em (the Implementation).

Getting answers to these questions directly from a cross-section of knowledgeable seniors and others is supposedly why the WHCoA is assembled every ten years. 1,200 delegates from all across the U.S. arrived in Washington in December, ready to identify the issues and craft serious recommendations. They were not given enough latitude to do that. The difficulty was not in the delegates’ ability, knowledge or dedication but in the tight control under which this Conference was conceived, structured and implemented.

Even so, some parts of the WHCoA can be used to guess the views of most delegates on many of the issues. For example, even though the Resolutions were ranked using a process that gave “ballpark” results at best, those rankings at least suggest which issues are most important to the delegates. (In the ranking process, delegates were allowed to vote for 50 of 73 pre-packaged Resolutions but could not indicate a preference for any of the 50, could not change any wording in them, and could not offer any new or substitute Resolutions.) To me, the ranking process left us with a WHCoA Top Ten list that is questionable.

Probably the highlight of the WHCoA, and the message that most reached the hearts and minds of the delegates, was the powerful and persuasive wake-up call delivered by the honorable David Walker, U.S. Comptroller General. His review and projections concerning the financial status of our country were professional, objective, fact-based, and nonpartisan. (You can see an outline of his speech on the Internet at www.gao.gov/cghome.htm under the title, “A Look at Our Future: When Baby Boomers Retire.”)

Comptroller Walker painted a grim financial future. He says that continuing our current national direction “is not an option,” that we “cannot simply grow our way out of this problem,” and that our children and grandchildren may face “taxes 2.5 times today’s levels.” He also pointed out that our growing cost of healthcare is seven to eight times the problem of our looming Social Security shortfalls. Probably the greater concern of these senior citizen delegates is this: that we have got to start being more fair and responsible toward our children and grandchildren. A good start in that direction is for us to pay attention to the Comptroller’s warnings.

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Resolutions Moved the Process

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...and industry, national and local organizations and coalitions, non-profits, faith-based organizations as well as Federal, State and local agencies. TSHL sponsored the Texas Solution Forum in July at the State Capitol and submitted 15 recommendations. Comments also were received from the general public.

On November 3, 2005, the WHCoA Policy Committee adopted the final Annotated Agenda of the six issue tracks that reflect the emerging issues, interests and concerns shared through the public input process: Planning Along the Lifespan, The Workplace of the Future, Our Community, Health and Long Term Living, Civic and Social Engagement, and Technology and Innovation in an Emerging Senior/Boomer Marketplace.

In early December, the Resolutions — 73 total and categorized under the six issue tracks — were sent to all delegates. Delegates were asked to review the resolutions in advance and to come prepared to select the top 50 that they believed would be the most important for current and future generations of senior citizens.

Every delegate received a ballot in their information packet when they registered. Three time slots were available for top 50 voting: Sunday from 4 to 6 pm; Monday from 11 am to 1 pm; Monday from 5 to 7 pm. The resulting tally of the votes for the top 50 resolutions was slipped under the door of the rooms of the delegates on Monday night for use at the Tuesday Implementation Sessions.

Implementation Motivated the Conference

Continued from Page 1

Baby Boomers, disability, non-profit and veteran organizations, and other individuals with a stake in the aging of America.

It was the intent of the Policy Committee to ensure that the delegates represent a broad cross-section of the U.S. population and it worked to achieve an appropriate demographic balance by selecting alternate delegates to fill gaps that existed after the initial gubernatorial, Congressional and Native American delegate selections had been made.

Dorcas Hardy, Conference moderator and chairman of the WHCoA Policy Committee, speaking on the Conference theme, “The Booming Dynamics of Aging: From Awareness to Action,” stated in the closing session that, “We [Boomers] know that we are not the first generation to grow old. ...The Greatest Generation has led us to where we are today with fortitude, personal sacrifice and an enduring sense of history. ... Texas Delegate Chris Kyker at the final Solutions Forum in San Antonio spoke in eloquent detail — listing with pride the many contributions of the Greatest Generation [and] pointing out that the Greatest Generation must truly be great because its absolute greatest contribution is none other than the much celebrated 78 million baby boomers!”
Editor’s Note: Ivan’s Impressions

From this reporter's perspective, this was the best WHCoA ever. Thanks to the website, www.whcoa.gov, almost every word spoken at the 2005 WHCoA can be read or heard. In fact, the whole history of the almost two years leading up to the December date in DC is available on the Internet.

Plus the free health policy news and webcasting service of the Kaiser Family Foundation provides select webcasts, transcripts and related resources at www.kaisernetwork.org/.


— Ivan. J. Arceneaux

Pictured above, part of the WHCoA Texas Delegation. Photo courtesy of Carolyn Banks.

Carlos/WHCoA, continued from Page 3

Although the Texas delegation did not have full opportunity to organize or coordinate its efforts prior to the Conference, the group did meet while in Washington and quickly developed a strong working relationship. Members of the Texas Silver-Haired Legislature and of the Texas Health and Human Services Commission invited Texas delegates to meet and work together to help make the WHCoA more of a success.

By discussion and majority vote, Texas delegates came up with their own list of “the 24 most important Resolutions.” They then shared this list of 24 with delegates from other states and listened to recommendations from other states. Nine of the “Texas 24” ended up in the Top Ten WHCoA list, and 23 of the Texas 24 made the WHCoA “cut” of 50. In addition, Texas delegates coordinated among themselves so that ‘voices from Texas” might be heard in all of the many breakout sessions.

The Conference probably would have produced more meaningful results by giving delegates more freedom to decide for themselves which issues were most important and how the Resolutions should be worded, and then be allowed to formulate their own recommendations.

Even so, a meaningful and productive report from this Conference could yet be made to the nation. The delegates themselves could organize and generate their own recommendations. Such a report, with majority approval of the delegates, would more accurately reflect their consensus views. (This really should be done, because good solutions to these issues are overdue, and delegates to this gathering could make astute and workable recommendations.)

Finally, our state was well represented by a group of knowledgeable, serious, independent and caring delegates. Our Texas delegates were flexible enough to work together within the stringent controls imposed and still contribute much to whatever success the WHCoA might produce.