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2005 White House Conference on Aging The Booming Dynamics of Aging: From Awareness to Action

The first White House Conference on Aging of the new century took place in Washington, DC, December 11-14, 2005. The conference's legislative mandate dictated a focus on aging of today and tomorrow—with emphasis on both the challenges and opportunities presented by the 78 million boomers born between 1946 and 1964.

The 1200 delegates invited to the conference represented a broad range of constituencies. This WHCoA differed significantly in process from its four predecessors. Six issue topics had been identified by a wide variety of stakeholders prior to the conference. The conference's policy committee utilized extensive public input to develop 73 policy resolutions addressing defined needs within each issue topic. The issue topics included:

- Planning along the Lifespan (to achieve financial security in retirement)
- Workplace of the Future (changing demographics, changing workforce)
- Our Community (aging in place)
- Health and Long Term Living (consumer education to quality in health care)
- Civic and Social Engagement (intergenerational integration and adaptation)

2005 WHCoA was the first to have a resolution specifically promoting the use of public libraries by older adults and the “boomers.” However, PC 60 was a late addition and had not evolved out of the earlier public assessments of issues and needs.

The first order of business for the delegates was to vote on 50 of the 73 resolution in between presentations on the “challenges and opportunities” by a wide variety of speakers. Once the 50 resolutions were chosen, the delegates were put to work in facilitated sessions to craft implementation strategies for each.

In developing the implementation strategies, delegates were to be both visionary and practical to ensure the work of the conference would continue and produce effective outcomes. Each strategy was to meet three primary criteria:

- How the new change or policy contained in each resolution could be accomplished had to be identified
- Who was going to be responsible had to be defined
- Strategies were to be innovative but also realistic and fiscally responsible

The facilitated implementation strategy sessions were remarkable efforts to produce maximum results in a minimum amount of time—with mixed results. A final report will be submitted to the President and Congress by June 2006.

In summary, the issues and strategies that have come out of this WHCoA present unique “challenges and opportunities” to address the current and future needs of aging Americans in the next ten years and beyond. The general consensus was that, to quote the executive director of Idaho’s Council on Aging, “We need to build partnerships if we are to make a difference.”

Commissioner Sandra Ashworth
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