

Productive Aging

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

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Date: July 7, 1999

To: Ms. Sarah Bianci

Fax#: 202-456-5557

7/20 RE-FAXED
PER YOUR REQUEST.
PLEASE ACKNOWLEDGE
RECEIPT OF THIS PAPER
THANK YOU-

Dear Ms. Bianci:

Per our telephone conversation I offer the following thoughts on "Productive Aging" as a positive program for Vice-President Gore's political platform:

I - BACKGROUND

There is a mountain of data available to support the fact that a tidal wave of aging citizens is about to come crashing down with staggering impact. Some facts:

- 1) There are currently 34.5 million Americans age 65 and older, more than twice as many as the 16.7 million seniors there were in the U.S. in 1960.
- 2) Over the next 30 years the number of Americans age 65 plus will again double from the 34.5 million today to 69.4 million by the year 2030.
- 3) Over the next 30 years the "oldest old" Americans at age 85 and older will also grow rapidly from 4.2 million today to 8.5 million in 2030.
- 4) Over the past 100 years average life expectancy at birth has increased more than it had over the previous 2000 years. In the U.S. life expectancy has increased from 47 years in 1900 to 76.1 years in 1999 (78.9 years for women and 72.0 years for men).

There is a mountain of other data available that all points to the same conclusion. There is a rapid increase in the senior population and this surge will significantly change our society.

II IMPLICATIONS OF AGING IN AMERICA

This demographic shift has implications that are both negative and positive. The negative implications are those that have received the

publicity i.e. the aging population must be cared for, housed and supported medically, obviously a staggering fiscal burden. In addition there will be disruptions in employment and family patterns including competition with younger workers caused by this aging but vigorous population.

However there are many positive aspects to this "Graying of America" and it is those on which I would like to focus, for I feel they have received minimum attention in the press, from industry and from the political structure. The elderly population is the wealthiest in our society and these fiscal resources must be pulled back into productive use. In addition there is a reservoir of physical and emotional energy that sits in these aging citizens which I have directly experienced through the Legacy Award Program which I created at AARP. With this program we acknowledge and give grants to senior volunteers around the country who are making significant contributions to their local community. AARP gives those winners significant visibility and they serve as models to stimulate increased volunteerism.

Americans are not just living longer but are much healthier with significant additional energy to invest in community projects. An AARP study revealed 45% of older adults say they are unhappy about "the loss of usefulness after retirement". In a study by the U.S. Administration on Aging, 14 million Americans over the age of 65 said that they "are or may be willing to volunteer if asked". In addition 25.6% of seniors currently volunteering indicate they would like to volunteer more time and 40% of those surveyed said that they felt that the federal, state and local governments are doing less than they should to promote and provide opportunities for volunteerism.

With severe cutbacks in social services, elders have the opportunity and even the responsibility to help fill that gap in literally hundreds and hundreds of arenas across the country. The question is how can they best be stimulated into action?

III SOME IDEAS FOR DEVELOPING A "PRODUCTIVE AGING" POLICY

What is needed is a shift in the way aging is perceived. Elders should be looked on as a great natural resource, in fact the country's only increasing natural resource. Programs must be developed to encourage the involvement of senior citizens. There are numerous such efforts now under way around the country, including Foster Grandparents, Experience Corps, Retired Senior Volunteer Program, Habitat for Humanity, and others. But these have only scratched the surface.

In our society where youth has been idolized and aging seen as a burden, this image of the later years must be changed. An awareness must be developed among seniors that says "Our country needs you". Incentives must be developed to encourage volunteers, whether through some form of

tax benefit or utilizing social security payments or welfare dollars channeled through non profit groups to expand the work force. There are many programs that could be developed, and we need the equivalent of a GI Bill for Seniors to bring into productive functioning this vast reservoir of energy.

Sarah, we discussed in our telephone conversation the idea of convening group of creative people experienced in this field to spend a day discussing what kind of specific programs might be incorporated into a policy position for the Vice President's campaign. You asked that I submit to you a list of names with very brief reasons why such persons should be invited. Below is that list.

Richard Adler

Director, State of the World Forum Project on the Future of Aging

Former Vice President, SeniorNet (national non-profit that provides access to computer skills for older adults). He is currently leading a new project to promote more positive approaches to the aging of society.

Scott Bass

Dean, Graduate School, University of Maryland, Baltimore

Founder and former director, Gerontology Institute at the University of Massachusetts; founding editor of the "Journal of Aging and Social Policy"; author of "Productive Aging and the Role of Older People in Japan."

Bob Blancato

President, Matz & Blancato, Washington, DC

Former Executive Director, 1995 White House Conference on Aging; former staff member, House Select Committee on Aging. Bob is one of the most knowledgeable people in Washington about the politics of aging.

Donna Butts

Executive Director, Generations United, Washington, DC

Generations United is a national organization that supports an "age integrated society" through collaborative programs for seniors and youth. More than 50 organizations, including AARP, the Children's Defense Fund, the National Urban League, and the YWCA are members of GU.

Rose Dobrof

Brookdale Professor of Gerontology, Brookdale Center on Aging, New York City, NY

Dr. Dobrof founded the Brookdale Center on Aging of Hunter College in 1974. It is the largest gerontology center in the Northeast.

Ken Dychtwald

President, AgeWave, Emeryville, CA

AgeWave is the country's leading marketing/communications firm focused on older adults; Dr. Dychtwald is a psychologist, gerontologist and author of nine books on health and aging issues, including his newest book "Age Power: How the 21st Century Will be Ruled by the New Old" (in press).

Jim Emerman

Director of Special Project, American Society on Aging

The American Society on Aging is the largest organization of professionals in the field of aging. As Director of Special Projects, Jim Emerman has been involved in most of the organization's major initiatives over the past decade.

Marc Freedman

President, Civic Ventures, San Francisco, CA

Founder, The Experience Corps, a national organization that is developing community service opportunities for older adults; author of "Seniors in National and Community Service" and "Prime Time" (in press).

Judy Goggin

**Vice President, Education & Enterprise Development,
Elderhostel, Boston, MA**

Elderhostel is a national nonprofit organization that provides travel-study programs for nearly 300,000 older adults each year. Founded 25 years ago, Elderhostel provides programs for nearly 300,000 people each year. Ms. Goggin is responsible for developing new programs and partnerships for Elderhostel.

Harold Hodgkinson

Director, Center of Demographic Policy, Alexandria, VA

Bud Hodgkinson is an outstanding expert on the demographics of aging. He also serves as a member of the board of Elderhostel.

Dixie Horning

**Research Associate, Center for Aging and Health, University
of California at San Francisco**

As the former executive director of the Gray Panthers, Dixie has been a strong proponent of intergenerational cooperation between young and old.

Harry R. Moody

**Director, Brookdale Center on Aging, New York City, NY; Vice
Board Chair, Elderhostel**

One of the intellectual leaders in defining new approaches to aging. He is the author of numerous books and papers and is co-editor of the journal Spirituality and Aging. He will soon begin a new assignment as Program Officer responsible for the Faith in Action program at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Ann Wrixon

Executive Director, SeniorNet, San Francisco, CA

For the past two years, Ann Wrixon has been leading the largest national organization promoting the use of computers and the Internet by older adults.

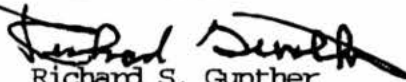
Other possible candidates include:

- Dr. Robert Butler, Director, International Longevity Center, Mt. Sinai Medical School, New York; former head of National Institute on Aging
- Gloria Cavanaugh, Executive Director, American Society on Aging, San Francisco
- Msg. Charles Fahey, Third Age Center, Fordham University, New York
- Jim Firman, Executive Director, National Council on Aging, Washington
- Andy Kohlberg, President, Kisco Retirement Communities, Del Mar, CA
- Dr. John Row, President, Mt. Sinaia Hospital and School of Medicine, New York; co-author "Successful Aging"

These issues are obviously very complex and it will be challenging to develop specific programs but I feel certain this can be done and a major campaign issue created around a new productive role for senior citizens in our society. This new vision of growing old, where older citizens would continue to make significant contributions to the welfare and growth of our society and to the enrichment of their own personal lives seems to me a winning platform.

I am happy to be able to help in any way possible.

Very truly yours,


Richard S. Gunther