

FORUM ON NUTRITION AND AGING  
NATIONAL NUTRITION CONSORTIUM

OCTOBER 23, 1981 - HYATT REGENCY - WASH., D.C.

I'M DELIGHTED TO HAVE THIS CHANCE TO SPEAK WITH ALL OF YOU, AND TO COMPARE NOTES ON A SUBJECT OF LONGSTANDING MUTUAL INTEREST: NUTRITION IN AMERICA, AND WHAT GOVERNMENT CAN AND CANNOT DO TO PROMOTE IT AMONG OUR ELDERLY CITIZENS. I MUST BE CANDID AND SAY THAT THERE ARE MANY AMONG US - PERHAPS MANY IN THIS ROOM - WHO FEEL SKEPTICAL REGARDING THE ATTITUDE OF THE ADMINISTRATION. I DON'T HAPPEN TO BE ONE OF THEM. NOT THAT THERE HAVEN'T BEEN TIMES WHEN I WISHED SOME OF MY COLLEAGUES OVER AT 1600 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE WERE A LITTLE MORE ADEPT AT CONVEYING THEIR INTENTIONS. I NEEDN'T REMIND YOU THAT A FEW FELLOWS AT THE WHITE HOUSE HAVE THEMSELVES TO BLAME FOR GOING PUBLIC PREMATURELY WITH SOME EMBRYONIC IDEAS ABOUT SOCIAL SECURITY REFORM - AND BY THE TIME DAN RATHER SIGNED OFF THE AIR THAT NIGHT, A LOT OF ELDERLY MEN AND WOMEN WERE MAKING A LOT OF ANGRY CALLS TO A LOT OF CONGRESSMEN. I KNOW - AS CHAIRMAN OF THE SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE, I GOT MORE THAN MY SHARE.

THEN TOO, THE ADMINISTRATION'S OWN EMPHASIS ON SPENDING AS WELL AS TAX CUTS, AND A PERCEPTION SO FAR THAT MOST OF THE CUTS HAVE COME IN DOMESTIC PROGRAMS NEAR AND DEAR THE HEARTS OF POLITICIANS AS WELL AS RECIPIENTS, HAVE FURTHER TENDED TO PROJECT A SOMEWHAT ONE - DIMENSIONAL IMAGE.

- 2 -

THE IMAGE IS MISLEADING. WHEN WE WHO LABOR ON CAPITOL HILL SAY EVERYTHING IS RELATIVE, WE'RE NOT REFERRING TO WASHINGTON NEPOTISM. AND IF YOU LOOK AT THE RECORD OF THE PAST SEVEN MONTHS, I THINK YOU'LL FIND THAT AT A TIME OF WIDESPREAD FISCAL AUSTERITY, NUTRITION AND THE ELDERLY HAVE FARED PRETTY WELL.

CUTTING THE BUDGET - PROTECTING THE ELDERLY

FOR INSTANCE, THERE'S BEEN A GREAT DEAL OF ATTENTION FOCUSED ON CUTS IN THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM. AMONG OTHER PROVISIONS ADOPTED AS PART OF THE FINAL PACKAGE WAS AN ELIGIBILITY RESTRICTION TO HOUSEHOLDS WHOSE GROSS INCOME EXCEEDED 130% OF THE POVERTY LEVEL. THIS TRANSLATES INTO ROUGHLY \$11,000 FOR A FAMILY OF FOUR. WHAT RECEIVED FAR LESS ATTENTION WAS THE SENATE'S SUCCESS IN EXEMPTING ELDERLY OR DISABLED PEOPLE FROM SUCH CRITERIA. IN ALL, WE EXPECT TO SAVE OVER SIX BILLION DOLLARS IN THE NEXT THREE YEARS - BUT NOT AT THE EXPENSE OF THOSE MOST IN NEED.

IN FACT, WE'VE ACTUALLY BROADENED PARTICIPATION IN THE PROGRAM IN MANY RURAL AREAS, WHERE THE OLD CASH PURCHASE REQUIREMENT TENDED TO RESTRICT BENEFITS. IN KANSAS, FOR INSTANCE, WE'VE SEEN PARTICIPATION IN THE PROGRAM RISE BY 65%. AND IN THE PROCESS OF RENEWING AND REFORMING THE WHOLE PROGRAM, I THINK WE'VE RECOGNIZED MORE THAN EVER BEFORE THE IMPORTANCE OF FOOD STAMPS TO OLDER AMERICANS, WHO MAKE UP ABOUT A FIFTH OF ALL FOOD STAMP HOUSEHOLDS.



- 3 -

WE'VE ALSO TAKEN NOTE OF THE DIVERSITY OF OUR ELDERLY POPULATION IN MOVING TOWARD EXTENDING THE OLDER AMERICANS ACT. BOTH HOUSES OF CONGRESS, FOR EXAMPLE, HAVE AGREED TO MORE FLEXIBILITY IN ALLOTING FUNDS - ALLOWING TRANSFERS OF UP TO 20% BETWEEN TRANSPORTATION AND NUTRITION SECTIONS. EVERYONE KNOWS ABOUT ELDERLY POPULATIONS IN FLORIDA AND ARIZONA - BUT HOW MANY OF US KNOW THAT THE LARGEST GROWTH AMONG OLDER AMERICANS IN RECENT YEARS HAS COME IN STATES LIKE IOWA, KANSAS, MISSOURI AND THE DAKOTAS? IN THE HEART LAND OF THIS COUNTRY, WHERE DISTANCES ARE CONSIDERABLE AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN RURAL AREAS ARE SOMETIMES DISCOURAGING, IT MAKES LITTLE SENSE TO ALLOT ALL YOUR FUNDS TO PREPARE HOT MEALS - UNLESS OLDER PEOPLE CAN GET TO WHERE THEY ARE BEING SERVED.

THE BUDGET PROCESS HAS ALSO RESULTED IN EQUAL OR HIGHER FUNDING FOR OTHER PROGRAMS UNDER THE OLDER AMERICANS ACT. THIS IS AS IT SHOULD BE, SO LONG AS THE AMERICAN POPULATION CONTINUES TO GROW OLDER, AND SO LONG AS A DISPROPORTIONATE SHARE OF OLDER AMERICANS ARE POOR OR HUNGRY OR NUTRITIONALLY SHORT CHANGED. CONGREGATE AND HOME - DELIVERED MEALS WILL CONTINUE TO BE SERVED FIVE OR MORE DAYS A WEEK TO MILLIONS OF PEOPLE AGE 60 AND OVER. IN ALL, THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT WILL SUBSIDIZE 15% OF ALL THE MEALS SERVED DAILY IN THIS COUNTRY - MORE THAN ONE HUNDRED MILLION PER DAY. AND SUPPORT SERVICES - INCLUDING NUTRITION RESEARCH AND

- 4 -

EDUCATION - WILL BE MAINTAINED, EVEN IF AT FUNDING LEVELS THAT MANY OF US MIGHT TAKE ISSUE WITH. IN ALL, FEDERAL SUPPORT FOR THE ELDERLY WILL AVERAGE NEARLY \$16,000 PER COUPLE IN THE NEW FISCAL YEAR. THAT'S A 36% INCREASE IN JUST TWO YEARS.

HOME CARE: A SPUR TO EXPERIMENTATION

BUT IT'S NOT ONLY DOLLAR SIGNS THAT CAN BE TRANSLATED INTO ENCOURAGING NEWS. ONE OF THE MOST HOPEFUL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE WHOLE FIELD OF GERONTOLOGY IS THE CONGRESSIONAL AUTHORIZATION TO WAIVE FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS THAT NOW BLOCK EFFORTS BY STATES TO SPUR INDIVIDUAL PLANS OF CARE FOR THOSE OTHERWISE LIKELY TO BE INSTITUTIONALIZED. FOR TOO LONG, I THINK, WE'VE FOCUSED HEALTH CARE FOR THE ELDERLY ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY ON THE INSTITUTION. TO SOME DEGREE, WE CAN THANK INSTITUTIONS FOR A HEALTHIER POPULATION - NOT TO MENTION LONGER LIFE SPANS. BUT THERE ARE OTHER PROVIDERS TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT. ONLY RECENTLY HAS THE FAMILY BEEN CONSIDERED IN FORMULATING PUBLIC POLICY. WHAT DO THEY NEED IN ORDER TO CARE FOR THEIR LOVED ONES? AND WHAT ABOUT THE LARGE AND GROWING NUMBER OF SINGLE, WIDOWED OR DIVORCED ELDERLY MEN AND WOMEN - WITHOUT FAMILIES, YET WITH ALL THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, NUTRITIONAL AND HEALTH NEEDS OF OTHER OLDER PEOPLE? THEN TOO, AS THE POPULATION GETS OLDER WE MAY SEE A DECLINE IN THE POTENTIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PHYSICAL SUPPORT AFFORDED BY CHILDREN.



- 5 -

IN SHORT - THE PROBLEMS OF ELDERLY AMERICANS DO NOT YIELD TO ANY ONE SOLUTION. SOME WILL REQUIRE HOSPITAL OR NURSING HOME CARE. OTHERS SHOULD SPEND THEIR FINAL YEARS IN THE COMPANY OF LOVED ONES. HOME-BASED HEALTH SERVICES OFFER STILL OTHER INDIVIDUALS A CHANCE TO STAY IN SURROUNDINGS CONDUCIVE TO THEIR PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELL-BEING. AND ANY STEP THAT WASHINGTON TAKES TO EASE UNNECESSARY RESTRICTIONS ON LOCAL EXPERIMENTAION AND LOCAL DIVERSITY IS A STEP FORWARD.

PERHAPS MOST POIGNANTLY, WE OUGHT TO BE SEEKING OUT ALTERNATIVES TO OUR TRADITIONAL WAYS OF CARING FOR THE TERMINALLY ILL. CARING AND CURING ARE NOT ALWAYS SYNONYMOUS - AND NOWHERE HAS THE FRAGMENTATION OF THE OLD, EXTENDED FAMILY HAD GREATER IMPACT THAN ON THE ELDERS AROUND WHOM THAT FAMILY ONCE REVOLVED. WHERE DO YOU WANT TO DIE? IT'S A QUESTION THAT GOVERNMENT OUGHT TO ADDRESS WITH THE SAME SENSITIVITY DISPLAYED BY HOSPITAL AND HOSPICE PERSONNEL. CAN HOME CARE FLOURISH - INDEED, CAN IT SURVIVE - IN A TIME OF FISCAL UNCERTAINTY AND POPULAR SUSPICION OF FEDERAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE HEALTH FIELD? IT'S A QUESTION THIS CONGRESS WILL HAVE TO GRAPPLE WITH. AND IT'S A QUESTION I'M DETERMINED WILL BE ANSWERED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE.

- 6 -

### NUTRITION - A GOOD BEGINNING

THERE ARE AS MANY ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS AS THERE ARE PROBLEMS CONFRONTING THE ELDERLY. EVER SINCE 1935, THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT HAS ACKNOWLEDGED AN OBLIGATION TO THOSE WHO HAD HELPED TO BUILD UP THE NATION. BUT IN MOVING TO ASSUME THAT OBLIGATION ITSELF, GOVERNMENT MAY UNWITTINGLY HAVE ENABLED YOUNGER AMERICANS TO FORGET THEIR ELDERS. WE HAVE YET TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM OF HOUSING - EVEN THOUGH WE HAVE LONG KNOWN THAT MOVING FROM ONE'S HOME IS NEARLY AS TRAUMATIC FOR MANY OLDER PERSONS AS LOSING A SPOUSE. WE HAVE MADE SOME EFFORTS, BUT LITTLE SUBSTANTIVE PROGRESS, TOWARD PROTECTING ELDERLY WORKERS. WE HAVE ONLY BEGUN, RELATIVELY SPEAKING, TO GRASP ELDERLY ISSUES AS A VAST INTERLOCKING GRID OF PSYCHOLOGY AND ECONOMICS AS WELL AS BIOLOGY.

NOWHERE ARE THE PROBLEMS MORE COMPLEX - OR THE POTENTIAL MORE REAL - THAN IN THE NUTRITION FIELD.

PHYSIOLOGICAL PROCESSES TEND TO DECREASE WITH AGE, AND WITH THEM CALORIC NEEDS. BUT SOME THINGS STAY CONSTANT: AMONG THEM VITAMIN, MINERAL AND PROTEIN REQUIREMENTS. THANKS LARGELY TO THE WORK OF PROFESSIONALS LIKE YOURSELVES, LAYMEN LIKE MYSELF HAVE COME TO UNDERSTAND THE BEWILDERING ARRAY OF FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE ELDERLY NUTRITION - EVERYTHING FROM THE LOSS OF TEETH TO GASTRIONTESTIONAL AILMENTS TO CALCIUM SHORTAGES TO THE EFFECTS



- 7 -

OF CHEMOTHERAPY. ISOLATION, EITHER PERCEIVED OR GENUINE, CAN BE A DEADLY DISEASE ITSELF. PHYSICAL HANDICAPS CAN MAKE SHOPPING AN ORDEAL, AND FOOD PREPARATION A CHALLENGE.

#### CRIME AND INFLATION

TWO OTHER FACTORS NOT ORDINARILY THOUGHT TO BE WITHIN YOUR REALM MIGHT WELL BE RECLASSIFIED. ONE IS THE FEAR OF CRIME, PERVASIVE IN MANY URBAN NEIGHBORHOODS AND PARTICULARLY HARD ON THE ELDERLY. THE SECOND, UNIVERSAL IN ITS NEGATIVE EFFECT, IS THE COST OF LIVING. I ASK FRIENDS WHO RAISE DOUBTS ABOUT THIS ADMINISTRATION'S COMMITMENT TO THE POOR OR ELDERLY WHICH THEY WOULD PREFER: A 20% INCREASE IN FEDERAL SPENDING ON THEIR FAVORITE PROGRAMS - OR A 20% DECREASE IN THE RATE OF INFLATION. FOR SOME, IT MAY SEEM A HARD CHOICE. FOR A GREAT MANY OLDER AMERICANS, I SUSPECT OTHERWISE.

#### SOCIAL SECURITY: REFORM THAT IS REAL

PROBABLY NO ISSUE IN RECENT MONTHS HAS GENERATED AS MUCH HEAT AS SOCIAL SECURITY REFORM. THAT'S NOT SURPRISING. FOR ONE THING, SOCIAL SECURITY RECIPIENTS VOTE. AS IF THAT WEREN'T BAD ENOUGH, THERE IS THE EXPERIENCE OF EARLIER THIS YEAR TO TEMPER ANY CONGRESSIONAL TINKERING WITH THE MOST POPULAR SOCIAL PROGRAM EVER CREATED. THE VERY SIZE OF THE PROGRAM OUGHT TO DICTATE CAUTION IN REFORMING IT: SOCIAL SECURITY REVENUES

- 8 -

MAKE UP NEARLY A THIRD OF ALL THE DOLLARS COLLECTED BY WASHINGTON. OVER HALF THE POPULATION PAYS SOCIAL SECURITY TAXES. THIRTY SIX MILLION BENEFICIARIES RECEIVE CASH PAYMENTS.

AGAINST ALL THAT ARE SOME LONG-RANGE TRENDS THAT DEMAND THAT WE TAKE SOME KIND OF POSITIVE ACTION SOON. THE LARGEST OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY TRUST FUNDS - THE OLD AGE AND SURVIVORS INSURANCE FUND - HAS BEEN THREATENED WITH BANKRUPTCY AS EARLY AS NEXT NOVEMBER. THIS IS NO MANUFACTURED SCARE - IT'S FOR REAL. THE REASONS AREN'T DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND. OASDI HAS BEEN PAYING OUT MORE THAN IT HAS TAKEN IN EVERY YEAR SINCE 1975. SINCE 1970, OASDI BENEFITS HAVE DOUBLED EVERY FIVE YEARS. AND WITH DEMOGRAPHICS POINTING TO EVEN MORE BENEFICIARIES, AT THE SAME TIME THERE ARE RELATIVELY FEWER AND FEWER WORKERS PAYING INTO THE SYSTEM, IT'S NO SURPRISE THAT WE FIND OURSELVES CONFRONTING A CRISIS NOW.

NEW TAXES ARE NOT A SOLUTION. I DON'T BELIEVE WE SHOULD EVEN CONSIDER SUCH TAXES. IN 1977, CONGRESS ADOPTED THE LARGEST PEACETIME TAX INCREASE IN HISTORY - TAXES THAT WILL GO UP ANOTHER 15% BY 1990. EVEN THAT HASN'T PROVED SUFFICIENT TO COVER THE SHORTFALL. TO RESTORE OASDI'S SOLVENCY WOULD REQUIRE A FURTHER TAX INCREASE OF BETTER THAN 12% EACH YEAR - TO THE POINT WHERE THE TYPICAL TWO-WORKER FAMILY WOULD FIND ITS SOCIAL SECURITY TAXES INCREASED AN ADDITIONAL \$1,680 A YEAR BY 1986.



- 9 -

THERE IS STRONG SUPPORT FOR INTERFUND BORROWING AS A WAY OF PREVENTING THE BANKRUPTCY OF THE RETIREMENT FUND, OUT OF WHICH SOME 70% OF ALL SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS ARE PAID. THE SENATE PASSED A FINANCE COMMITTEE PROPOSAL LAST WEEK THAT WOULD DO THIS ALONG WITH REALLOCATING TAX INCOME AMONG THE TRUST FUNDS. THIS WOULD ENSURE THE SOLVENCY OF THE RETIREMENT FUND IN THE NEXT YEAR OR TWO, AND WITH LUCK, EVEN LONGER THAN THAT. BUT DRAWING ON THE RESERVES OF THE DISABILITY INSURANCE AND THE HOSPITAL INSURANCE TRUST FUNDS ONLY POSTPONES BANKRUPTCY. NO NEW REVENUES ARE PRODUCED NOR ARE EXPENDITURES CURTAILED: IT AMOUNTS TO APPLYING A BAND-AID TO A SERIOUS HEMORRHAGE. THE HOSPITAL INSURANCE FUND IS FACING A HUGE FINANCIAL CRUNCH A FEW YEARS DOWN THE ROAD.

AT LEAST THE SENATE HAS TAKEN A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION. MUCH MORE SIGNIFICANT ACTION IS STILL NEEDED -- BOTH TO ENSURE BENEFITS CAN BE PAID THROUGHOUT THE DECADE AND TO DEAL WITH THE LONG-TERM FUNDING PROBLEM. ULTIMATELY, IT WILL BE NECESSARY TO RESTRAIN THE GROWTH OF BENEFITS. THE EMERGING POLITICS OF THE SITUATION -- AS PRACTICES BY TIP O'NEILL -- OF COURSE, MAKES THIS KIND OF ACTION VERY DIFFICULT.

I KNOW FROM PAST EXPERIENCE THAT IT ISN'T EASY TO SIT IN THE MINORITY. I KNOW IT'S SOMETIMES TEMPTING TO SAY WHATEVER WILL WIN A HEADLINE OR ADD A POINT OR TWO IN THE GALLUP POLL.

- 10 -

SOME OF MY DEMOCRATIC COLLEAGUES WHO ARE AS UNACCUSTOMED TO MINORITY STATUS AS I AM TO THE TITLE OF CHAIRMAN PERCEIVE IN SOCIAL SECURITY A READY-MADE SPRINGBOARD TO PROMINENCE AND APPLAUSE.

SOME IN THIS CITY HAVE ALREADY SEIZED UPON SOCIAL SECURITY'S FINANCIAL PROBLEMS AS A STICK WITH WHICH TO BEAT THE PRESIDENT'S POPULARITY. BUT I THINK THAT MOST AMERICANS ACCEPT THE REALITY OF THE SITUATION - AND ALL OF THEM WOULD REACT CONTEMPTUOUSLY TO THOSE WHO PUT POLITICAL SHOWMANSHIP AHEAD OF NATIONAL STATESMANSHIP. THE VOTERS WHO SENT US HERE DID SO IN THE EXPECTATION THAT WE WOULD MAKE DIFFICULT DECISIONS AND CAST COURAGEOUS VOTES - AS WELL AS ISSUE PRESS RELEASES AND MARCH BEHIND POPULAR CAUSES. I'M STILL HOPEFUL THAT THE HOUSE WILL COME AROUND AND THAT A BIPARTISAN APPROACH CAN BE FOUND TO SOCIAL SECURITY'S SERIOUS FINANCIAL PROBLEMS.

"THE OCCASION IS PILED HIGH WITH DIFFICULTY," LINCOLN TOLD HIS COUNTRYMEN AT A CROSSROADS IN THEIR HISTORY, "AND WE MUST RISE WITH THE OCCASION. WE MUST DISENTHRALL OURSELVES - AND THEN WE SHALL SAVE OUR COUNTRY." IN 1980, THE PEOPLE OF THIS COUNTRY SIGNALLED THEIR DESIRE TO DISENTHRALL THEMSELVES FROM FAILED POLICIES AND TEMPORARY EXPEDIENTS. IN 1981, THEY HAVE HELPED PRESIDENT REAGAN STORM THE BARRICADES OF "POLITICS AS



- 11 -

USUAL." THEY STAND POISED AT THE BRINK OF RENEWED PROSPERITY AND RESTORED LEADERSHIP IN THE RANKS OF THE NATIONS.

DIFFICULT DECISIONS LIE AHEAD. I AM DETERMINED THAT ELDERLY AMERICANS WILL HAVE A PART IN THOSE DECISIONS, AND IN THE BETTER TOMORROWS I AM CONVINCED THEY WILL LEAD TO. AND I LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING WITH EXPERTS LIKE YOURSELVES, AS WE GO ABOUT THE EXCITING BUSINESS OF MAKING HISTORY. FOR THAT IS WHAT WE ARE DOING. FORGET THIS WEEKS HEADLINES: REMEMBER OUR CHILDREN'S FUTURE. IT IS THAT LONG VIEW WE NEED TO ADOPT, A VIEW EXPRESSED ELOQUENTLY BY WOODROW WILSON, WHO SAID:

"SOMEDAY...MEN WILL COME AND POINT AT THE DISTANT UPLAND WITH A GREAT SHOUT OF JOY AND TRIUMPH AND THANK GOD THAT THERE WERE MEN AND WOMEN WHO UNDERTOOK TO LEAD IN THE STRUGGLE. WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE IF WE OURSELVES DO NOT REACH THE UPLANDS? WE HAVE GIVEN OUR LIVES TO THE ENTERPRISE. THE WORLD IS MADE HAPPIER AND HUMANKIND BETTER BECAUSE WE HAVE LIVED."

I WOULD SUGGEST THAT YOU, FOR WHOM SUCH PROGRAMS ARE DESIGNED, AND WE, WHO DO THE DESIGNING, COULD FIND NO CREDO BETTER WORTH SERVING THAN THAT. AND IF WILSON'S WORDS CAN ECHO THROUGH COMMITTEE ROOMS AND WHITE HOUSE CORRIDORS ALIKE, THEN I HAVE NO FEAR THAT ALL OF US WILL MOVE A LITTLE CLOSER TO THE UPLANDS.

THANK YOU AND GOOD LUCK.