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THE WHITE HOUSE

Washington

August 12, 1950

U.S. Federal Security Agency, National Conference on Aging.  
Message from President Harry S. Truman:

Dear Mr. Ewing:

I am very pleased that leaders from all parts of the United States are meeting in Washington to consider the special problems and special interests of our older citizens.

The National Conference on Aging -- the first meeting of its kind -- is recognition of the fact that we have been undergoing a quiet and far reaching change in the composition of our population. Medical science and constant improvements in our standard of living have greatly lengthened the life of the average American. There is today a far larger proportion of older people in our country than ever before. Our older men and women, in achieving a longer period of physical and mental vigor, have pushed "old age" in the old fashioned meaning of that term far into the later years of their lives.

As the Delegates to this Conference know, however, we cannot be satisfied with merely extending normal life expectancy. The real problem is to enable the older men and women among us to make full and happy use of their added years. The great gift which medical science and an increasingly healthy society have given us should not be more years on the shelf, but more years of productive activity. This requires action along several lines.

First, I am convinced that we should find ways whereby more older persons can continue to work at their regular jobs if they want to. Arbitrary age limits deprive us of some of our best workers. This is especially unfortunate at a time like the present when we need increasing production to insure our national security. For those who do not wish to, or cannot, continue their regular jobs, I believe ways can be found for them to be useful in part time or consulting capacities. And I trust that still others will find the excitement of entirely new lines of work -- perhaps in various fields of social service, or education, or in recreational or religious work. The one fact that is clear is that all of us greatly need the contribution which our older citizens can make.

Second, I believe that we need imaginative thinking about the special problems of health, housing, and recreation that older people face. Our modern way of life has created conditions that too often deprive older people of the place in the community which they used to have. Much needs to be done to enable our older citizens to participate more fully -- as they want to do, and as they are capable of doing -- in family and community life.

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Third, we need to give increasing study to improving the financial situation to which people can look forward in their later years. Our social security system enables our people to contribute, in their earlier years, toward a minimum standard of living on retirement. We have far to go yet before the social security system is satisfactory -- and even then social security will be but the foundation for financial security in old age.

In all these fields we stand in need of the experience and ideas which this Conference can provide. I would like to emphasize that the work of this Conference is of great significance to the strengthening of our democratic way of life. Our country is committed to the proposition that there should be opportunities for every person in it to use his abilities to the utmost as a member of his community. As we increase the opportunities for our older citizens to stand on their own feet, and live out their lives in self respect, free from fear and want, we shall be helping to fulfill the promise of our free society.

Very sincerely yours,

(Signed) HARRY S. TRUMAN

Honorable Oscar R. Ewing,  
Administrator,  
Federal Security Agency,  
Washington, D.C.

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