



SPECIAL EDITION

JAMAICA SERVICE PROGRAM FOR OLDER ADULTS, INC.

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"a total community working together to serve the elderly...since 1972"

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NEWSLETTER



White House Conference on Aging: Report from Executive Director Carol Hunt, New York State Delegate

On, Sunday December 14, 2005 I arrived in Washington, D.C. as a New York State delegate, chosen by Representative Gregory Meeks, 6th Congressional District, to the White House Conference on Aging (WHCoA).

I remember my own excitement in 1995 when JSPOA held its own mini-WHCoA at York College and wanted to be among the delegates at that time to further carry the message of our resolutions to Washington, D. C. In 1995, more than 400 conferees developed broad resolutions to be considered among the many that would finally be in the top 20 to provide direction to the United States Congress over the course of the next 10 years.

Here I am, 10 years later, armed with the results of our own conference held in April, 2005, ready to meet other delegates from across the United States to choose resolutions that will guide public and private policy until 2015.

My experience over the course of four days is mixed with hard work, excitement, disappointment, realism and appreciation. Let me give you a bird's eye view of each of these feelings with a real dose of facts.

First. Hard Work. The structured formatting of the conference was well designed but not always well executed. Our smaller group meetings to discuss the merits of the 73 *already* determined resolutions, in order to reduce the 73 to 30-50, called for hard work with people I had never met before. Oh yes, 50 resolutions were the maxi-

mum we could recommend to the WHCoA Policy Committee. It required a willingness to work together with fellow delegates for the good of all older adults, now and in the future, living in America. And work we did. This consolidation not only happened in the small groups, but also with the NYS delegation. We worked during the day and we worked during the night!

My **Excitement** came when on the "big screen" before an audience of more than 1200 I saw my very own words included in a particular resolution that made it into the top 50. There is little that can beat that kind of affirmation of one's work in real time. The resolution was: *"Implement a strategy and plan for accountability to sustain the momentum, public visibility and oversight for implementation of 2005 WHCoA Resolutions"*.

Our group worked to have this one part of the top ten. This not being the case, at least it is among the top 20.

In terms of **Disappointment**, all delegates including myself felt the Office of the President could have been more responsive to this gathering. The best minds in the aging field were present from hands on workers at the community level, to government workers in state and county offices for the aging, to professors, scientists, elder care lawyers and journalists. The President chose not to bring greetings to the delegates and instead was reported to have gone to a "gated" community of elders in Virginia to present the new Medicare-Part D prescrip-

tion plan. He was the first President not to make an appearance to greet the delegates in the 50 year history of the conference.

The other area of disappointment was the lack of even the appearance of flexibility in delivery of the conference. Everything was very scripted in terms of what issues were of importance, the choosing of the top 73 resolutions, the reminder that this was a conference about aging and not about the current aged and finally the decision not to allow Roberts Rules of Order be considered in reference to a discussion of the point just mentioned.

My dose of **Realism** came in two parts. The first was the successful attempt to silence any attempt by a delegate to question or have an open discussion about the format and handling of the conference.

The second came from the U.S. Comptroller General David Walker. Comptroller Walker is the federal government's chief auditor. He made clear in dollars and cents just where we are headed as a country if we do not figure out a way to continue with our many "benefit" programs without bankrupting ourselves. Of course after listening to U.S. Finances 101 I felt a certain level of depression and hopelessness.

I quickly recovered realizing that there are "stories" behind every number and that balance sheets are inextricably intertwined with our values and priorities as a nation. Yes, there are financial chal-
(over please)

enges, but there is no lacking in money. It is just simply where do we want to put our dollars and cents?

And, now to **Appreciation**. The opportunity to be a delegate in 2005, is one that I will long remember. My appreciation extends to Congressman Gregory Meeks, for selecting me as the delegate from the 6th Congressional District, the New York State Office for the Aging (SOFA) under the leadership of Director Neal Lane, for outstanding performance in information gathering and sharing, the countless delegates I met who share the same passion for our work with the older adults, the education I received in listening to so many voices share issues so important to them and those who listened to me.

My **appreciation** extends to being part of a delegation that did not, in the end, accept the public position of the WHCoA Policy Committee and made its protest in the form of a letter to the Chairperson. To me this demonstrated the true essence of democracy at work in America.

And finally, my **appreciation** to the thousands of older persons whom I read about, listened to, protested

with, planned with and in general enriched my life in such a way that I would, after many years working with and for them, be in a position to be a delegate to the WHCoA in December of 2005.

Top 10 Resolutions Adopted by The White House Conference on Aging:

Older Americans Act. Reauthorize The Older Americans Act within the first six months following the 2005 White House Conference on Aging.

Transportation Options. Ensure that older Americans have transportation options to retain their mobility and independence.

Coordinated Long Term Care Strategy. Develop a coordinated, comprehensive long term care strategy by supporting public and private sector initiatives that address financing, choice, quality, service delivery and the paid and unpaid workforce.

Responsive to Mental Illness. Improve recognition, assessment and treatment

of mental illness and depression among older Americans.

Capacity of the Geriatric Workforce. Attain adequate numbers of health-care personnel in all professions who are skilled, culturally competent and specialize in geriatrics.

Prepared Healthcare Workforce. Support geriatric education and training for all healthcare professionals paraprofessionals, health profession students and direct care workers.

Non-Institutional Long Term Care. Promote innovative models of non-institutional long term care.

Medicaid Program for Seniors. Strengthen and improve Medicaid for seniors.

Medicare Reform for the Future. Strengthen and improve the Medicare program.

Coordination of Aging-In-Place. Improve State and local based integrated delivery system to meet 21st. Century needs of seniors.

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