

local NEWS

Rhode Island WHCoA Delegates Help Set Future Aging Agenda By Herbert P. Weiss, N.H.A.

Twenty Rhode Islanders were among the 2,217 delegates who gathered last May at the Washington Hilton and Towers in Washington D.C. for the fourth and final White House Conference on Aging (WHCoA) of this century. The resolutions approved by the delegates sent a clear message to federal policy makers: preserve and maintain Social Security and the Older Americans Medicare program; and oppose the block granting of the Medicaid programs.

They also called for universal health care coverage and further development of home and community based services. Increased funding for research was also chosen as a priority.

Post WHCoA meetings are now underway to implement WHCoA resolutions. The resolutions approved at the 1995 WHCoA are not legally binding on the Clinton administration or Congress. The final conference report will be submitted to President Clinton and Congress around the beginning of 1996.

Developing consensus resolutions

Sixty draft Issue Resolution Development Session resolutions (IRDS) were hammered out by WHCoA staff from more than 4,000 recommendations compiled from 800 pre-conference reports. The RI Department of Elderly Affairs developed its report and recommendations by analyzing hundreds of comments received from providers and seniors who attended five state-wide miniconferences.

The delegates were given opportunities

to amend the draft IRDS resolutions in workshops held throughout the event. A vote on the final day whittled down the number of IRDS resolutions from 60 to 40. In addition, ten resolutions initiated and approved by conference delegates were selected out of a total of 39 considered.

Lt. Governor Robert A. Weygand, chair of Rhode Island's WHCoA delegates, called 40 delegates and alternates together for a July meeting to explore how the state could implement the resolutions -- ones that would increase funding and options for long term care services and Alzheimers research. Final papers will be submitted to WHCoA staff in November 1995.

Rhode Islander's view of the WHCoA

"At the WHCoA event, I didn't think that the recommendations were as dramatic as the ones coming from 1961 and 1971 events, specifically those that called for the establishment of Medicare and the refinement of the Social Security program," said Owen Mahony, 69, former Chairman of the Rhode Island Advisory Commission on Aging and one of the official Rhode Island delegates.

Mahony said that delegates from each state were encouraged to conduct post WHCoA workshops to develop strategies on how to implement them at the federal, state and local levels.

Robert A. Weygand, chairman of the Long Term Care Coordinating Council, said that his group has worked with elder care advocates and health care professionals (including the Rhode Island Health Care

Association), to craft the state's first-ever long term care plan.

A key Rhode Island initiative must be the implementation of the LTC Coordinating Council's long term care plan, one that calls for many of the reforms recently adopted by the WHCoA, Weygand said. "I believe that this plan puts us ahead of the curve in developing a unified and comprehensive approach to the delivery of long term care for the future," he predicted.

"We must continue to have our footsteps heard in Washington. We must be ever vigilant about informing Congress of the need to preserve Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid," Weygand said.

Call RIHCA for a copy of the 1995 WHCoA Final Resolutions.

Herbert P. Weiss, NHA, is a Providence, Rhode Island-based writer who covers health care and aging issues.