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# LPN

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Politics and Aging



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*LPN-Q, The Quarterly Journal of the Life Planning Network* is produced by members of the Life Planning Network, a community of professionals from diverse disciplines dedicated to helping people navigate the second half of life.

The Life Planning Network is the leading association supporting professionals who assist people at this life stage. We intend to bring into everyday use proactive and purposeful planning for the second half of life. Learn more at [lifeplanningnetwork.org](http://lifeplanningnetwork.org).

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## Introduction

*“For some reason, every stage in this advancing season has brought with it a feeling of incredulity.”*

Strangely, that sentence was not meant to describe the 2016 presidential election campaign. Verlyn Klinkenborg wrote it a few years ago as the first line of a chapter about the month of November in *The Rural Life*, his year-long meditation on the beauty of ordinary life and the American landscape. It was difficult not to be struck by the unintended and irresistible irony of its summation on a cool, fleeting autumn morning before Election Day. Further down the page, Klinkenborg writes, “November already.” *You mean November, at last!* I spat, with an exhaustion shared, I believe, by my compatriots, Republican and Democrat alike.

Yes, three cheers of farewell to this political season. And yet, there’s reason for regret at its ending. Sure, we will be glad to have escaped the funhouse of this year’s politics. Glad to reclaim imaginations now bloated with bile from the consumption of unsavory exhibitions of misogyny and sexism, hacked emails, toxic rhetoric, and fevered imaginings of intemperate fingers on nuclear codes. But those of us aware of how thoroughly the seismic forces of the greying of America will reshape the U.S. economy and challenge our communities and families also know we have witnessed a sordid squandering. We have lost an opportunity to reflect upon changing realities, have critical discussions, and set the kind of priorities required for any ‘life planning’ for our nation.

In “The Invisible Revolution: How Aging is Quietly Changing America,” in *The Atlantic*, Derek Thompson points to the wasted opportunity, too, and anoints the 2016 election a “steampunk campaign,” a campaign in which Donald Trump has promoted a vision of the future that starts in the distant past. He compares Trump’s promises to revive the steel industry and to send coal miners back to work with the talk of business leaders like Elon Musk or Jeff Bezos, who conjure images of Mars colonization and instant product delivery. “What if presidential candidates took a CEO approach to future-planning? Perhaps they’d spend less time talking about America’s old industries and more time talking about America’s old people,” Thompson writes.

The thrust of Thompson’s thesis is that 20 percent of the population of the U.S. will be 65 or older by 2050—more than double its size in 1950 at the height of American manufacturing supremacy. As a result the workforce will be less productive (a 10 percent increase in the fraction of the population ages 60+ decreases the growth rate of GDP per capita by 5.5 percent) straining the economy to support programs such as Medicare and Social Security. At the same time, the fastest growing occupations will be in health, personal care aides, registered nurses, and home

health aides. Making an average annual wage of \$23,000, home health aides are underpaid, have no union, and “instead of white men who make stuff, the group is increasingly made up of minority women who serve people,” writes the [New York Times’s Binyamin Applebaum](#). One third of these workers are immigrants, one in five undocumented, according to one estimate. The bottom line of his calculations: it won’t be long before a “minority-white labor force will be supporting the majority-white retirees.”

Bob Blancato, executive director of the National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs and chair of the American Society on Aging, recently expressed his grave disappointment that the issue of long-term care and the services that support it was left unaddressed during the campaign. Hillary Clinton, he says in his [NextAvenue.org article](#), has proposed a family caregiver tax credit and would restore lost Social Security credits for family caregivers’ benefits. “She also authored the first law on respite care ever adopted,” he writes. “Donald Trump says he would repeal the Affordable Care Act (ACA), a law which expanded our largest program providing long-term care support—Medicaid.”

Amid the absence of media coverage of such serious issues, there is something that might surprise you. “There were questions about caregiving at the Town Hall debate. You just didn’t see them being asked,” Blancato writes. The Presidential Open Questions Internet platform, from which moderators selected questions, included ones on caregiving and on Alzheimer’s research. The public demand for answers is there, he says, though the ratings-driven moderators and anchors may not have believed those answers could compete with more salacious responses.

It was *LPN-Q*’s intention that this issue might fill a bit of the void, or that it might point to some of the political conversations that need to take place. The contributors focused less on the polemics that have poisoned and paralyzed the body politic, and more on how we might influence the future positively by having the courage to stand up for and shape the possibilities. They responded more hopefully, more practically and more profoundly.

Activist Lynne Iser asserts that by claiming our elderhood “we can create a government that responds to and cares for the welfare of all and for the unborn of our nation.” Reflecting his political lineage, Thomas P. O’Neill III, former lieutenant governor of Massachusetts and chairman of Tufts Health Fund Foundation, in an interview with *LPN-Q* remains undaunted by partisanship and confident that politicians can create policy to support healthy aging and environments. It only requires educating our leaders, our public and our children to the need and benefits.

LPN Founder Meg Newhouse investigates in “Where Have All the Elders Gone?” and is surprised by the support GOP presidential candidate Donald Trump is receiving from elders over 65. Her findings challenge her assumptions and suggest that the best allies for wise elders may be in other generations. Meanwhile, Roger Landry, MD, author of *Live Long, Die Short: A Guide to Authentic Health and Successful Aging*, responds to the health risk of stress caused by the election itself and prescribes self-administered treatment.

In his alarming article, Chuck Yanikoski illuminates an emerging concern for the future: Americans with long-term cognitive disabilities, such as Down Syndrome and autism, living longer and aging into Alzheimer’s—and a society unprepared to discuss, let alone deal with the issue. With America’s cities on the front line of aging, Paul Irving, chairman of the Milken Institute for the Future of Aging, calls on U.S. mayors—faced with a federal government hamstrung by partisanship—to sign the Institute’s Pledge to improve life for the largest-ever population of older adults.



Finally, Encore.org Vice-President Jim Emerman writes that the time has come for the White House Conference on Aging to realize John F. Kennedy’s charge to Congress in 1963 to not only recognize our nation’s obligation to the well-being of our older members, but to create a society of reciprocal responsibility in which older adults “contribute their life experience and wisdom to the well being of all.” As Jim and LPN’s other contributors agree, a raucous election season may be

ending, but we have the power to create a new season for positive aging. The time to seed that future is now.

**- Bruce Frankel, Issue Editor**



## Elderhood, Politics and Responsibility

Speaking in the public square on behalf of future generations and the planet

Lynne Iser

**I**f politics functioned at its highest and most beneficial level it would be based on love—not romantic love but love of others, as in the Biblical commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself.”

Now, when many of us feel baffled, distraught or disappointed about the political process in our country perhaps it is time to take a fresh look at what politics can be, most especially if it’s influenced by those of us who are elders, in the third part of their lives.

Politics enables the members of a society to collectively achieve important human goals they cannot otherwise achieve individually.<sup>1</sup> Politics is about governing and are the systems that we, as citizens, create to make decisions together. These decisions impact our safety, the provision of services and insure the general welfare of our fellow citizens—our neighbors.

Our challenge is to clarify the collective values that form the basis of our decision-making.

Imagine if the central tenet of our governance was to care for our fellow citizens, our neighbors, as we would want to be cared for ourselves. That would be a radical departure from how we currently conduct our affairs of state. There is good evidence that our government is not functioning very effectively—whether we judge that by the national debt, the rate of poverty, wealth inequality or by the increasing rates of addiction and gun violence. Radically assessing and adjusting our governance and politics processes would likely produce a more positive outcome for the benefit of all our citizens.

The Iroquois Nation—those first nations that inhabited the lands upon which we now live and from whom we learned democracy—wrote in their constitution, “*In all of your deliberations in the Confederate Council, in your efforts at law making, in all your official acts, self-interest shall be cast into oblivion.... return to the way of the Great Law which is just and right. Look and listen for the welfare of the whole people and have always in view not only the past and present but also the coming generations, even those whose faces are yet beneath the surface of the ground—the unborn of the future Nation.*”





Isn't it obvious when we look around the world that we need to reconsider how we make our decisions?

Is our country or our world being governed...  
... for the welfare of the whole people?  
... for the vitality of our communities?  
... for the well being of future generations?

No! It is being run for the short-term profitability and growth of multinational corporations whose profits lead to little or no taxes and/or minimal benefits for our citizens.

While the United States is considered by some to be a great and successful nation, it is clear that we do not look out for the welfare of the whole people. Too often, due to lobbying and the influence of money in our political system, the needs of the corporations and of the rich take precedence over the “welfare of the whole.” Nor do we consider the “unborn of the future Nation,” for if we did we would not be polluting our water, earth and air, and we would insure that our great grandchildren would enjoy, as we do, the beauty and diversity of this precious planet that provides for all of our needs.

As Elders it is our responsibility to speak for the “seven generations”—our great, great, grandchildren. We have the resources and the wisdom to insist that our government consider the future generations, our descendants, in their decision-making, and, that decisions be made to insure the vitality of our communities and the health of our planet.

As President Franklin Delano Roosevelt suggested, “Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are prepared to choose wisely.” Are we choosing wisely in the choices we make as a democratic country? Are we insisting that our elected officials utilize their wisdom when making decisions, rather than their political, or partisan pressure?

Our future and their future depend on a thriving and sustainable world, not only the earth upon which we reside, but also the relational world in which we live. Again we would be wise to remember that we “must love our neighbor as ourselves” and in doing so create a socially just world for all.

Social activist and CNN commentator Van Jones defined a socially just world as one *“in which, if you had to draw a lot, and it would put you anywhere in that society, you would feel perfectly confident; you wouldn’t be worried, because you knew whatever lot you drew would be a good lot. It doesn’t mean everything’s equal. It just means that every single person in that society has a decent shot at living the fullest life that they can.”*<sup>2</sup>

Social justice and a thriving environment are more important than short-term goals for profitability and growth. When there are no more natural resources what will support and nurture the lives of our great, great grandchildren? As the slogan says, “You can’t drink oil.”

We—as Elders—must claim our rightful place, using our long-term durative perspective in speaking for those who do not have a voice. That long-term view is the wisdom that comes with being an elder.



Why Elders? Why is this the role of Elders, those in the last third of life? Elderhood is one of the three stages of human life, the first two being childhood and adulthood. We live in a culture where the role of an elder has been lost, and has become muddled or murky. We have the opportunity, in our contemporary world, to reclaim what it means to be an elder, to explore and to discern the role, the work, of an elder. This is the time of our life in which to ask ourselves, “How do I transmit my years of life experience?”

Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi inspired us with this vision, in his groundbreaking book *From Age-ing to Sage-ing*, when he wrote, “Elders feed wisdom back into society and guide the long term reclamation project of healing our beleaguered planet. Once Elders are restored to position of leadership...they will function as “wisdomkeepers” inspiring us to live by higher values that will help convert our throwaway lifestyle into a more sustainable, Earth cherishing one.”

That is the vision I hold for myself. To stand and speak for what is true; and, to use my energy, resources and wisdom to create a thriving and just future for our great, great grandchildren. To reclaim my voice, as an elder, and to speak in the public square for the welfare of all.

Elders have the demographic size, the “age-wave,” to be the tipping point to that thriving and just world. Sometimes I think that our age cohort is Nature’s “immune response” to the runaway greed and short-term goals that now power our world.

There are many ways in which we can embrace and express our elder self and discover our voice, as an elder:

We can become activists and march in our state capitols.  
We can become citizen advocates and lobby our elected officials.  
We can write resolutions and support each other.  
We can study together and form action groups.

We can use the internet for petitions and to connect with each other.  
We can write letters to the editors, and letters to our grandchildren.  
We can learn new ways to live together in community and care for each other.  
We can deepen our understanding of our interconnectivity.  
We can support each other and create a movement of engaged, active elders.

We can create a government that responds to and cares for the welfare of all and for the unborn of our nation. That would be a good way to use our elder years, our years of life experience and the wisdom that we have achieved.

***Lynne Iser***, is an elder-activist whose professional passion is working with others to create a thriving and just world for future generations.

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1. [www.reference.com/government-politics/purpose-politics](http://www.reference.com/government-politics/purpose-politics)

2. *Ecopsychology: Advances from the Intersection of Psychology and Environmental Protection*; ed. Darlene G. Nemeth, Robert B. Hamilton, Judy Kurlansky; pg 237

# Why the 2016 Presidential Campaign is Toxic to Our Health

What you can do to reduce its harmful stress

Roger Landry

**T**he election season has been long and rough. There are many serious issues affecting older adults on the table. However, I feel the need to address the deeper, more fundamental issues relating to our collective human experience, our management of controversy, and our health, particularly as older adults.

I have not often felt elevated by the rhetoric of this political open season, and I know I'm not alone. I know this not only because of conversations with my friends and acquaintances, but also because our very roots as a species have programmed us to want and need more. This isn't just about wanting to hear more from our better angels, it's about wanting to hear more of what's consistent with our very DNA, and more of what will help me age in a better way. I know at this point you're puzzled so allow me to explain.

## **We are not wired for this political campaign**

For most of the time we've walked the earth, over ninety-nine percent in fact, we've organized ourselves into small groups, villages or towns. We succeeded as a race because we did this and because we adopted certain principles of social intercourse. One of these principles was the primary role of the common good as an overriding rule of conduct. Societal and individual action was guided, for eons of our history, by an indisputable respect for what was best for the group over the individual. Actions that chose individual gain over what was best for the greater number, in fact, often resulted in exile from that society.

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**“Concern for others and the common good has also been associated with a better aging experience.”**

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The characteristics of our ancestors, ones that allowed them to survive, have been passed on to us and are the very basis for our health and successful aging; characteristics including abundant daily movement, continued learning and growth, strong social connection, and meaningful roles for all ages. *Concern for others and the common good has also been associated with a better aging experience.* Data from the Wisconsin Longitudinal Study, a long-term effort that has studied a cohort of more than 10,000 high school graduates until the present day, found that those who

volunteered for reasons involving helping others had less mortality than those who did not volunteer AND those who volunteered primarily for motives involving self. In recognition of these advantages, the United Nations, as well as many European governments, are encouraging more citizens to volunteer, particularly for larger reasons, such as public health and safety.

Our current political scene seems, however, to be dominated less by what is good for the greater number, than what is good for me. In fact, single issues are often cited as the reason for preferences of one candidate over another with little consideration of other, more far-reaching, policies. This *Me-versus-Us* view is at least partly responsible for many of the less than inclusive policies proposed by candidates as well as the passionate support of one candidate or party over another. It is also the antithesis of both the behavior that has characterized previous human societies, and what has been shown to be an important basis for healthy aging.

### **Breaking news: Politics can hurt us**

One of the more powerful research-documented characteristics associated with successful aging (staying at high levels of performance for longer and longer) is high meaning and purpose. The ten-year long MacArthur Foundation Study on Aging found purpose to be a necessary component for a better aging experience. My nearly twenty years of experience with more than 25,000 older adults, has taught me that robust *meaning and purpose* that promotes healthy aging, almost always involves other living things...the greater good. Ellen Langer, a Harvard researcher in psychology, has shown us that simply taking care of a plant improves mental and physical health as well as life expectancy. We are in a health-risk minefield when our personal issues conflict with that of the common good.

Immersed in a political environment filled with acrimony, accusations, and fear mongering, we are in a swamp of negativity. The strong emotion of this election has become, more than I have experienced in my many previous elections, an overt disdain for the non-preferred candidate. This disdain, rather than a positive attraction, is the motivating force for choice of candidate.

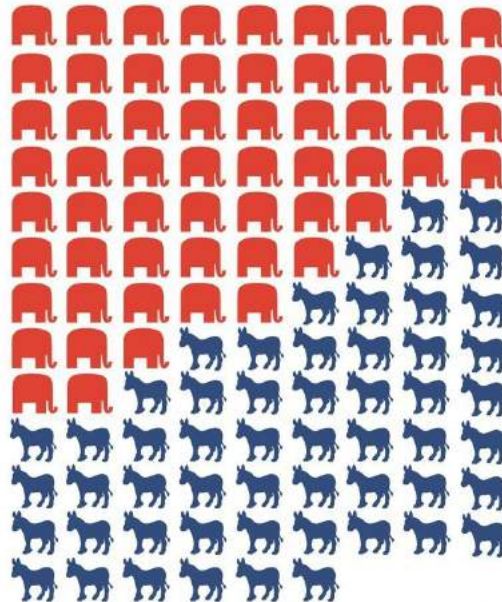


# ELECTION STRESS IN AMERICA

52%

OF U.S.  
ADULTS

say the 2016  
U.S. presidential  
election is a very  
or somewhat  
significant source  
of stress.



59% OF REPUBLICANS | 55% OF DEMOCRATS

Republicans and Democrats are  
**EQUALLY LIKELY\*** as one another to  
say the election is a very or somewhat  
significant source of stress.

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\*The 4 percentage point difference is considered statistically equivalent.

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**Republicans and Democrats are equally likely to say the 2016 election is a significant source of stress.**

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The research is clear: those with a *positive, optimistic view of life* and its events live seven years longer than those who slog along on the dark side. To me, *that* is the lesser of evils.



Stress has been solidly linked to increased risk for heart disease, cancer, dementia and depression, whereas a *mindful, compassionate view* of others is associated with healthier outcomes. A polarized view of issues or candidates (savior vs. demon) leads quickly to a black-and-white view of the future...my way or catastrophe...and a consuming, destructive stress at the thought of the “wrong” candidate being elected.

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**Stress has been solidly linked to increased risk for heart disease, cancer, dementia and depression, whereas a mindful, compassionate view of others is associated with healthier outcomes.**

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If a self-absorbed view of the issues, negativity, fear, and stress characterize our current presidential campaign, and we are all the worse for it, what do we do?

### **Consider...**

This election IS important. Whichever way it goes will indeed reflect our values and affect the lives of many. That said, answer these questions:

- Do you truly feel you can change the opinion of someone on the other side of the issues?
- How do you feel when you are immersed in a political discussion?
- Do you have confidence in our democratic process?

Your answers will, I hope, provide some overarching perspective on this election. Allow me to offer some suggestions on surviving this political assault on our health and aging experience.

### **What to do about...**

**Stress:** When faced with any stressful situation, realize that the stress is mostly self-induced. There is a challenging situation, and it is how you’re responding to it that creates the stress. There are only three rational ways to respond to these situations:

- 1) Fix it or make a plan to fix it.
- 2) Walk away.
- 3) Accept it.

So, relative to this election:

- 1) VOTE! Perhaps work for a candidate. Concentrate on telling the story of your candidate’s positive qualities rather than smearing the opponent.
- 2) Don’t listen or read the election drama and dirt. You probably know by now whom you’re voting for so take a break from it all.

- 3) Accept that candidates, as all humans, have flaws. Accept that our political process is a dehumanizing mess, and there's nothing you can do to change that.

**Me vs. Us:** Look beyond how you might be affected by the election of a particular candidate and investigate how those in your wide circle of family, friends, acquaintances and colleagues would be affected. Definitely look beyond your social-economic peers. And how about the world situation? No matter how you slice it, the United States plays a major role in the world. We cannot focus only on domestic issues. Look for the greater good.

**Negativity & Fear:** Realize that these are now—unfortunately—acceptable tools for bashing your opponent. We wish it weren't so, but here it is. Take that break mentioned above. Resolve to vote not so much against the negative qualities, but FOR the positive qualities. This is a less emotional, more rational, and less dangerous approach.

The Buddha told us we are what we think about; that all that we are arises with our thoughts; and with our thoughts, we make the world. What kind of world do you want?

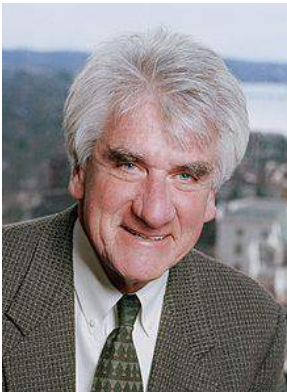
***Roger Landry** is a preventive medicine physician, president of Masterpiece Living, and the author of *Live Long, Die Short: A Guide to Authentic Health and Successful Aging*.*

## LPN-Q Interview with Thomas P. O’Neill III

Bruce Frankel

*Few people are better positioned to talk about the intersection of politics, public policy and aging than Thomas P. O’Neill III. A former Massachusetts state legislator and lieutenant governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (1975 to 1983), he also bears an extraordinary political legacy—as the son of the late Speaker of the House Thomas P. “Tip” O’Neill.*

*As the founder and chief executive officer of O’Neill and Associates, he heads one of New England’s leading public relations and government affairs consulting firms. His expertise spans the public and private sector in areas that include transportation, healthcare, higher education, financial services and nonprofit development.*



*A longtime leader in Greater Boston’s health care sector, O’Neill has served in prominent roles on several health care governing boards and currently acts as chair of the board for Tufts Health Plan Foundation. Its mission is improving the health and wellness of the diverse communities it serves. It has given more than \$21 million to Massachusetts and Rhode Island nonprofits that improve healthy living with an emphasis on older adults, has begun funding programs in New Hampshire and is focused on funding programs that move communities toward achieving age-friendly policies and practices. O’Neill graciously agreed to a last-minute phone conversation with LPN-Q Editor Bruce*

*Frankel about politics, policy and aging.*

**The health and longevity of older adults has increased greatly. Many people are living active, healthy lives well into their 80s and beyond. Still, from a political and government policy perspective, we continue to lump this active majority with the much smaller group of frail and dependent elders. This has the effect of ignoring the interests and needs of people at retirement age who don't fit the stereotype. What can we do to change the narrative among politicians, government agencies or, more broadly, society?**

That is the charge of the Tuft’s Health Fund Foundation. Its mission is healthy aging. We’re learning an awful lot about neurology, sure, but we’re also learning about habitat, education, eating habits, how people have come to a point that they have

grown older with varying degrees of success. It has to do with education; it has to do with genes, certainly; it has to do with where you live; it has to do with who you occupy your time with; it has to do with how you keep your mind operating and busy.

### **Can you flesh that out a little?**

Take the average person living in Holyoke, Massachusetts. It's a poor community with a disproportionate share of people living below the poverty level. Education is among the lowest in the state. Its ethnic breakdown is as diverse as one will find. People work as hard there as anywhere and for as long as they possibly can. If you live in Holyoke and you're age 65, chances are that you're on five meds. By contrast, if you're living on Beacon Hill in Boston, where by chance you're likely to be better educated, had a more professional life, have occupied your mind and kept it busy, you're likely to be on only one to two meds, on average.

Those things are scientific in art form. But I think this narrative needs to be told and written to tell people that fact of life. It will help decision makers—elected and appointed—to draw conclusions—if not in a different way, at least in a more enlightened way—about changes that have to be made within society. We have to educate people. We have to feed people appropriately. We have to tell them that the end of life cost of healthcare can change if we pay attention to it. And we can legislate that. But what we need to do is create a great, informed policy and then watch legislation change.

### **So, is the thrust that we have to educate legislators?**

Educating leaders, including our religious leaders, our business leaders, and the elected leaders, of course, because they're the ones who will eventually be responsible for policy.

### **Are leaders uneducated on this subject?**

Uneducated is a harsh word. I would say that need to be better informed. In part, today, legislators are so overwhelmed by so many things that somehow you have to get through the chaos, so that they can understand better than time has allowed them to focus at this point.

### **Is there anything that might crystallize their focus, such as the Massachusetts Healthy Aging Data Report (from Tufts Health Fund Foundation, which provides data on 121 healthy aging indicators in 351 cities and towns in Massachusetts)?**

Yes. It was the first of a series of reports issued. We have leaders from the various communities, various subdivisions of government, various leaders of the business, come together to understand it, to talk about it, to digest it. And to have it become part of the policy so that when the mayor of Boston puts out an RFP (request for proposal) for 2030 to figure out what the city is going to look like and how its makeup is going to be composed, he actually added in aging health as a component to be discussed by business, medical, religious leaders and professionals who were on that commission and who understand how to develop future policy.

**Are you hopeful that that kind of educational process can make a difference?**

I'm quite convinced that it not only can, it has made a difference. From the first report that was issued legislation was drawn up and passed creating more money for communities to plan for healthy aging. Now, that's just the tip of an iceberg that needs to be floated to a more general sphere of water, but it proves the point.

**As has been well demonstrated, older adults have the experience, power, skill and motivation to contribute in significant ways to solutions to longstanding social challenges and to private enterprise. Why is it so hard to get decision-makers to acknowledge, engage and mobilize this human capital resource?**

If you're talking about a new (government) program, it's because a new program will cost something, and that would be a challenge for an elected leader. But broadly speaking I don't find that it takes that long. It takes an incident to make government move because, generally speaking, it better performs when it's reactive. And again, the panoply of issues that the average legislative leader or governor is confronted with is so numerous that there's just a lot of noise on the way to the railway station. It's difficult.

So, these reports, these meetings of leadership coming together, lending themselves to focus on the issue of aging—and aging healthy—and what needs to be done within the community for quality of life, what needs to be done in our educational circles, what needs to be done in medical circles, is important stuff. But it gets through.

**Is there any way to incentivize companies and corporations to look beyond the stereotypes of age to employ, train, and appropriately take advantage of the skills, experience, and knowledge of older adults?**

It's a fascinating question. The answer is that the most enlightened of our business leaders see it. Oftentimes, leadership comes from the public sector, and what you find is the longest-serving civil servants tend to get rotated out of work because

they're the most costly employees a public system has. So, you're asking a question about a situation that happens in the private sector as well. The most costly portion of business is the employees' salaries. And the most costly employees are the longest-serving ones. It's a cultural challenge that needs to be dealt with—or dealt with in another way.

We have people here, with my company, who have been here 25 and 30 years. I find that hard to believe. But it's true. In one way, they're the best performing. They're certainly the best thinkers, the most wise. But in other ways they're slowing down. So what we try to do is rearrange the deck chairs a little bit so that they understand that they don't have to come to work five days a week, they can come to work two and a half days a week, for half the pay, but we keep them involved.

### **Can government help craft those kinds of incentives?**

I don't know where public service unions come down on this. But it seems to me that if there were a way to do this, the entrepreneurial leader in a public place would find a way. I believe that.

When I was in office, we had kitchen cabinets of people. We wanted to get their sense of things and their intelligence, but we couldn't appoint them to jobs, for any number of reasons. Either they worked or they were retired, but they had something to say that made sense and you needed them. Or you'd reach out to people who served in positions earlier who were now retired and maybe bring them back—maybe not be paid—but you at least wanted to show them that you appreciated their wisdom. I think that happens as well.

The fundamental issue about growing old with less medical complications really sits at the seat of primary school education.

### **Could you elaborate on that?**

Sure, the further one goes in school, the healthier you're going to be. The more you learn, the healthier you're going to be. And the sooner you learn that and understand it and make the progression through educational life it's going to benefit you. That's a proven. If you feed kids three meals a day, they have a better chance in life.

## **Is there a role for government to play in reuniting generations, creating more robust intergenerational communities?**

Yes, sure. That's particularly true for those in the role of the well-conditioned and smart mayor or the governor or the local congressman, or the person who has their hand on fiscal policy or budgetary policy at the local, state or federal level. This is how I get to it:

As a legislator, I was only responsible for one major piece of legislation. It came as an amendment (to a proposal to build an extension the Red Line (rapid transit line) in Boston. (Kevin White, the mayor then, first promoted it because he realized that if he did that, people who could afford in Quincy (a suburban city), though not in Boston, could come back into the City of Boston and work. I met with planners and they convinced me that if you can move people around in a compatible fashion by using people movers so that the young can get to school and the old can shop, go to a church, go to a hospital, find their way to friends, whatever it might be, you would keep the city and the quality of life viable. It not only worked, it saved (now- vibrant neighborhoods) Porter Square and Davis Square. It took 60,000 automobiles off the streets. But it also gave a quality of life. It was just one feature of quality of life. That's what public policy can do.

## **What's most important, from a political point of view, and what's the central concern of the Tuft's Health Fund Foundation regarding Age Friendly cities?**

There are the things most people think about and have a need for: It's about transportation, it's about housing, it's about aging people having mobility and understanding that some people can't afford it. And when they can't afford it, what then do we do? Make sure that people have walkways, bicycle ways, ways to get up and do exercise, and make sure that a home is affordable at the same time.

## **Can a mayor or elected official really do something about that?**

Yeh, they really can. They can give more affordable housing units and force developers to put them into every concentrated major development deal that's being done within the city. It's taking as many people movers as we can possibly muster from neighborhood to neighborhood so that people can have that mobility that we talked about so they can shop or go to a doctor's office or go to the dentist or go to church or whatever. So that they can have as normal a life as one city can possibly afford to give them without breaking any budget. There's a terrific amount of thought being given to it today, especially as the population ages.



## **Does making cities age friendly pay for itself?**

By keeping families together, I know it pays for itself. I know it's healthy for the community. The family unit being kept together, with contact of itself, so there's communication, so that people see family members and friends. That's tremendously important for mental health.

## **You're now 72. What's your personal experience with aging? What lessons have you drawn from your personal experience?**

I was in Washington the other day, running, when I received your call. I'm an old jogger. And I remembered the day I turned 60. In those days, I ran five miles a day. And on that day I wound up running as far as an old cemetery, in Harwich, where what happened to catch my eye was the inscription on a tombstone which said, "Here lies Captain Jacob Doan"—a fabulous old Cape Cod name, whatever it was—"who died of age in his 60<sup>th</sup> year." Jesus! How life has changed!

I was talking to another writer just last week, and I asked him, on turning 70, what his finding was. "You know, Tom, I've never thought more clearly or better than I do today," he said. I've been thinking about that all week. I found his statement to be true of me as well. I've never thought more clearly. Now, I don't know if that's a summation of being fortunate enough to be healthy, have a long working career, have the benefit of travel, reading, some level of sophistication, and an accumulation of events and experience. I'm sure that has something to do with it. But it also has something to do with the working mind that stays active.

***Bruce Frankel** is Editor of LPN-Q, Editorial Director of Redstring, LLC, and the author of *What Should I Do With The Rest Of My Life?**

## Where Have All the Elders Gone in 2016?

Assumptions about the wisdom of older turned upside down

Meg Newhouse

**I**n most traditional societies until recently—and in indigenous cultures still—elders had a special status and role as wisdom-keepers, stewards of the earth for future generations, mentors, advisors and even activists and leaders in the public arena. Their life experience, accrued wisdom, ability to consider all sides of an issue from a detached place gave them a weighty, if not the sole, voice in resolving disputes and making major policy decisions for the tribe or nation. That role has eroded in most western industrial societies, perhaps most here in the U.S.

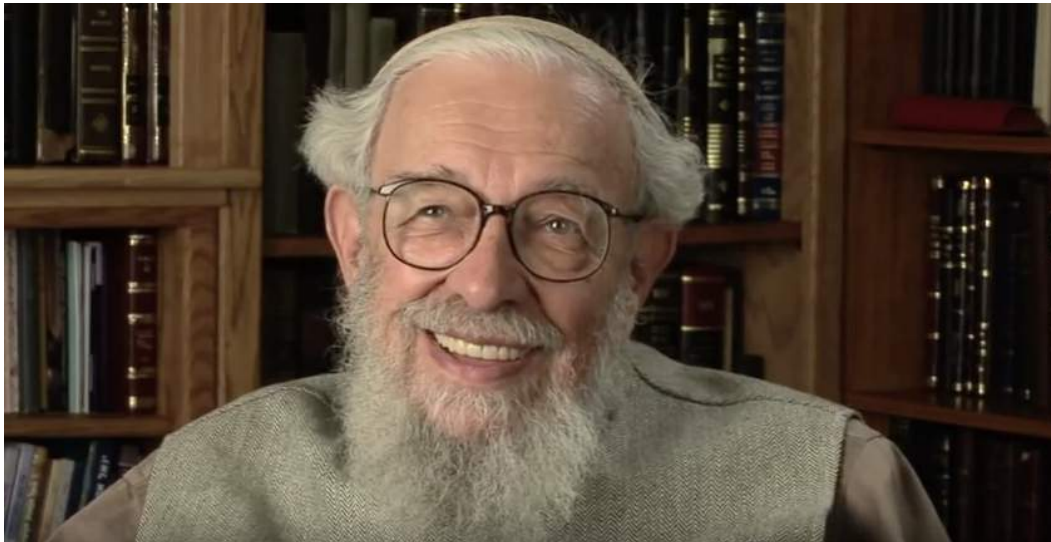
Those of us carrying a banner for positive or conscious aging—for example LPN, the Conscious Elders Network, Sage-ing International, and many other like-minded organizations—want to reclaim the traditional role of elders. We want to rally a change in our culture of pernicious ageism. We want to enlist other elders in the urgent and critical task of addressing fundamental rifts, issues and problems that exist in our society, both domestically and globally. You know the litany: violence, genocide, bigotry and bias (all the “isms”), economic and educational inequality, injustice, climate change and mass extinctions, and....

Most of us have read the adult development literature describing the developmental imperatives of seeking meaning and purpose (“significance over success”), transcending ego, and giving back for the sake of future generations. I have a vision of the wise elder who, as Sage-ing pioneer Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi urged, has done the inner work of life review and repair (making amends, healing, forgiving), facing mortality, legacy work, and stepping up to be a mentor and steward for future generations. We know that not all older people are interested in doing this work, but we assume a trend to a broader, longer, more tolerant view of people and the world. We would hope that trend translates into elders taking public actions as volunteers in various non-profit organizations and citizens of their towns, states, and country and perhaps their planet.

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*The late Rabbi Schacter-Shalomi provided a path to moral political stewardship.*

I became interested in testing this assumption in the context of the 2016 Presidential election. In my view, there is a stark contrast between the candidates and an imperative choice for all citizens, but according to the reasoning above, especially for conscious elders.

Both candidates are flawed products of a deeply flawed political system and civic culture and both have personality flaws. But, to my mind, Donald Trump's go beyond flaws to pathological narcissism, lying, and bullying.

If we are wise elders, we are presumably looking for a candidate who will preserve and promote peace, not threaten or impulsively start a war; one who will work to meet the severe climate change challenge, not exacerbate the problem; one who will work to promote bridging differences and divisions, not vilify and exclude minorities. We presumably prefer a leader with seasoned and relevant experience over a huckster who flaunts his lack of knowledge, one who inspires us to become our better selves rather than our basest selves. Given the stakes of this election, I expected to find a majority of older people voting for Hillary Clinton, or at least not for Donald Trump.

So I was curious to examine statistics from current polls. Unfortunately, for various reasons, I had to fall back on a superficial analysis of a few semi-adequate polls (Ideally, I would have had the most recent polls and multivariate analyses of the different dependent variables I thought might indicate civic wisdom: belief in and concern for climate change, racial tolerance, and trust in government as an instrument for needed change, and hence a preference for Clinton over Trump.) Unfortunately, the results of my back-of-the-envelope analysis don't support my hypothesis that elders will tend to be more conscious voters.



Older voters were more likely to support Trump (41%-33% for ages 50-64 and 42%-39% for those over 65). Younger voters split favorably for Clinton but were much more likely to support third-party candidates, so that her percentages were only a little better than among the “olders.” Note that none of the other variables like party affiliation, education, income, gender, race/ethnicity were controlled, so we don’t know whether the age effect was independent of those other

demographics. For example, it is plausible that the older voters are more likely to be less-educated, lower middle class, white, Republican, evangelical or mainline Protestant males, all of which characteristics are correlated with Trump support.

However, when I looked at trust and attitudes toward climate change, I found a similar disheartening pattern, and this time there were some multivariate analyses. Whether measured by age or generational cohort, the younger respondents were more trusting of government. In an environment where trust in the federal government is at an all-time low (19%), almost twice as many of the 18 to 30-year-olds as the over-65s trusted government some or most of the time (27% to 15%).

Moreover, the younger survey respondents and more likely to think climate warming is real, caused by human activity and requiring government action to combat. The effect of age was significant even after controlling for gender, education, political party and ideology.

An extensive 2016 Pew Research Center study measuring concern with climate change found women somewhat more likely than men to “care a great deal about the issue” (55-45%), Democrats much more likely to care deeply (72% to 24%), and those over 65 slightly less likely to care deeply than the three younger age groups (20% to 26%). (A late Summer 2016 iteration of that poll, which analyzes concern with and beliefs about climate change among registered voters, shows Clinton and Trump supporters “worlds apart,” with Clinton supporters much more likely to “care a great deal” about the issue of climate change—56% Clinton to 15% for Trump—and associated beliefs. But there is no analysis by age.)

So what to make of this? We can look for a rigorous study with reliable and nuanced conclusions on how age impacts political attitudes and behavior. In the meantime, it looks like those of us who believe in the potential of conscious elderhood to make meaningful political change have our work cut out for us in educating and

mobilizing our own cohort. And our best allies could well be the Millennials, who seem to understand that they have a great stake in their own future and that of their grandchildren.

**Meg Newhouse** is the founder of *The Life Planning Network* and author of *Legacies of the Heart: Living a Life That Matters* (2016).

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### 1. **Conscious Aging/Saging:**

Contemporary champions of this idea include the late Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi with his classic 1995 book with Ronald S Miller, *From Age-ing to Sage-ing: A Profound New Vision of Growing Older* (New York: Warner Books, 1995; revised edition, 2014)

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### 2. **Adult Development:**

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Gene Cohen, *The Creative Age* (New York: Quill/HarperCollins, 2000) and *The Mature Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 2005)

Mary Catherine Bateson, *Composing a Further Life* (New York: Knopf, 2010); Bill Plotkin's *Nature and the Human Soul: Cultivating Wholeness in a Fragmented World* (Novato, CA: New World Publishing, 2008).

### 3. **Polling Sources:**

Election preferences: <http://www.people-press.org/2016/08/18/1-voters-general-election-preferences/>

Trust in government: <http://www.people-press.org/2015/11/23/public-trust-in-government-1958-2015/>

Climate change issues, with controlled variables:

<http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/07/01/chapter-2-climate-change-and-energy-issues/>

Climate change, simple correlations: <http://www.pewinternet.org/2016/10/04/public-views-on-climate-change-and-climate-scientists/>

Climate change Clinton vs. Trump supporters: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/10/10/clinton-trump-supporters-worlds-apart-on-views-of-climate-change-and-its-scientists/>

# The Politics of Aging for Americans with Long-term Cognitive Disabilities

A new, growing and barely visible issue

Chuck Yanikoski

It used to be that people with long-term cognitive disabilities rarely lived long enough to become aged. But things have changed and are driving a significant emerging concern for the future.

Before autism became the most common cognitive disorder in children, Down Syndrome held that distinction. But no one worried about these kids reaching old age. According to the U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC), the life expectancy of a baby born with Down Syndrome in 1960 was a mere 10 years. By 2007, the average person with Down Syndrome was living to age 47.<sup>1</sup>

This also means that half now live past age 47, and therefore many of them are or will be entering true old age.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the brains of people with Down Syndrome appear to age more quickly than others in at least one respect: early incidence of Alzheimer's Disease. The best current estimate is that 90% of 70-year-olds with Down Syndrome will have already developed Alzheimer's.<sup>3</sup> So they present a particular challenge for families and care providers.



Image courtesy of the Down's Syndrome Association



Autism will eventually offer even greater challenges. Autism wasn't even defined until 1943, and at the time, and for decades afterwards, it was considered a rare condition. But the CDC has most recently estimated that one in every 68 American newborns will land on the autism spectrum.<sup>4</sup> People with milder forms of autism have a somewhat lower long-term survival rate, largely because of suicidal actions presumably taken because of their social isolation.<sup>5</sup> It is not clear, however, that those impaired enough to be oblivious to their social situation face significantly greater mortality than the general public. Most of them will grow up, grow old, and be difficult to care for because of a combination of intellectual, speech, social, and sometimes sensory and physical complications.

So overall, while only about 5% of Americans age 65+ (in 2010) had an intellectual disability (other than Alzheimer's or other forms of senility),<sup>6</sup> we can expect this percentage to grow significantly in the future.

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Alzheimer's research is well funded, and while that's also reasonably true for autism, the emphasis in autism research continues to focus on genetics and on childhood issues. We may have some hope that a method of prevention or even a cure for Alzheimer's can be found in the next decade or two, but this is unlikely for autism. And even if autism eventually can be prevented in newborns, the hope of a cure for those who already have it seems remote, and in any event certainly cannot be counted on.

There are already hundreds of thousands of people diagnosed with autism with significant intellectual impairment in the pipeline—mostly in early intervention or school programs, though the number of adults with these conditions is also increasing. Eventually most will fall into one or another category of the medically very needy elderly.

Others are already there. If we count emotional disabilities as cognitive rather than physical, other generational bubbles already exist. For example, about 15.2% of all male Vietnam veterans (and 8.5% of females) exhibit post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).<sup>7</sup> These men and women are mostly already in their 60s. Another significant group from Iraq and Afghanistan will be coming along later. And there's at least anecdotal evidence that aging and retirement can increase the severity of PTSD, perhaps because the increase in free time means more opportunities to brood over and relive the past.<sup>8</sup>

There is also the simple fact that the Baby Boomers are now all in their 50s and 60s, except the very oldest, who are turning 70 this year. The impact of this age cohort



on caregiving and medical needs for the disabled is already very noticeable, but it's still in the early stages of a dramatic increase. Even if this group exhibits only the normal level of cognitive disability, the burden in terms of competent caregivers and dollars invested in facilities, staff, and treatment will be immense.

This essay is not attempting to address the needs of people who develop cognitive disabilities when they are already in or near their elder years. But the likely large demand for services for these Boomers will probably make it harder to find the funding and the skilled staff needed to care for those with even greater problems.

### **The impact**

Why are those with long-term disabilities, despite their smaller numbers, a looming problem that's distinct from the larger group of Baby Boomers who will develop senility of one kind or another? Consider that:

- The long-term disabled group remains under the radar. Hardly anyone is thinking about them, other than those directly involved.
- They're broke. For the most part they have had little or no earnings during their many years of disability, and they lack savings, insurance, and other assets to help offset the costs of care.
- They have little family help. People with lifelong cognitive disabilities rarely marry and have children, so the first line of defense for most people with senility is absent for most members this sub-group. By the time they themselves are aged, their parents are long gone, and any siblings they might have are also aging. Relatives or friends good-hearted enough to help with care have probably been doing it for years, even decades, and their capabilities and good will are often tapped out.
- Their needs are often greater than the needs of those with age-related dementia. Though both groups typically require 24/7 supervision, unusual or difficult social behaviors are more common with people on the autism spectrum or people with PTSD or other emotional imbalances. Those with serious IQ deficits in addition to the other cognitive and physical problems of old age can be very much in need of closer supervision and more intensive care.

Few facilities are set up to provide such care. In connection with my own work as former President of SAGE Crossing Foundation (and husband of its founder, Linda H. Davis), I've had the chance to observe the experience of the premier provider of services to adults with autism in the U.S.—Bittersweet Farms, in Whitehouse, Ohio.

They've been doing this work for over 30 years, and a couple of their earliest and oldest residents have recently needed to go into nursing home care. However, it's has been very hard to place them, or for them to remain long in a placement, because their speech and behavior are well outside the norm, even for people in

memory care, and most care providers don't know how to deal with them and are not legally required to try.

Eventually, when the numbers grow larger, perhaps special facilities will be created for elderly adults with these conditions. But that will cost money, and will require caregivers—and plenty of them—with special training.

### **The politics**

It's fair to say that this problem, though it already exists, is barely visible on the political landscape. In all likelihood, that's because the problem is still mostly in the pipeline, manifesting itself only in scattered cases that don't attract broad attention.

It would be nice to think that as the problem grows, the issues will be addressed in a compassionate and effective way. But there is no assurance of that.

The 2016 Republican Party platform stands against discrimination because of disability, opposes the non-consensual withholding of care or treatment from the disabled, supports the ABLE Act (enabling the disabled to have tax-advantaged savings of up to \$100,000 without being disqualified for government benefits), and supports other measures beneficial to children and working-age adults with disabilities.

The 2016 Democratic Party platform also affirms the rights of people with disabilities, and offers a wider array of specific supports for them. Among these are pledges of government funding to “support the millions of people paying for, coordinating, or providing care for aging relatives or those with disabilities,” and “tax relief to help the millions of families caring for aging relatives or family members with chronic illnesses or disabilities.” (Note, however, not specifically for relatives who are aging *and* disabled. Such citizens aren't being excluded here, but they're also not being recognized.)

These platforms are consistent with the underlying philosophies of each party, including Republican preferences for small government and individual self-reliance, and Democratic preferences for more active government and taking care of the disadvantaged.

Even so, official platforms do not always reflect the priorities of actual candidates for office, let alone elected officials. Near the beginning of 2016, Equal Entry, a firm marketing technology and training materials for the disabled, searched key terms relating to disability on the websites of the two main Republican and Democratic

Presidential contenders. This produced two hits on the Donald Trump campaign site and three on the Ted Cruz site, compared to 36 on the Hillary Clinton site and 144 on the Bernie Sanders site.<sup>9</sup>

However, disability (like LGBT identification) crosses party lines, and just as we have seen many Republicans begin to support LGBT rights when a close family member came out, others have taken up the cause of the disabled when it cropped

up close to home. Nor is this is unique to politicians. In a needy world full of great causes, concern about the disabled naturally tends to be greater among those with an affected child or other close relative. (This was not a particular cause or interest of my own, to be honest, before my autistic son Randy was diagnosed.)

The positive side of this is that with cognitive disabilities, especially autism, becoming more commonplace, there are both the hope and the likelihood that more politicians will put some of their focus on these issues.

PTSD among veterans may be at the leading edge. This has already been a hot issue in both the press and the Veterans Administration, and to some extent in the 2016 political campaigns. While the particular needs of aging Vietnam vets with PTSD have rarely been addressed or even acknowledged so far, we can probably expect interest to develop and ameliorative steps to be taken in coming years.

Other aging adults with long-term cognitive disabilities will probably have to wait, perhaps a long time. Meanwhile, it will be up to the families and guardians of these citizens, the advisers to those families and guardians, and to the caregivers who are on the front lines, to make the best of what is typically a very difficult situation.

***Chuck Yanikoski*** is the founder and president of *Still River Retirement Planning Software, Inc.* and its consumer subsidiary, *RetirementWorks, Inc.*

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1. CDC Data and Statistics on Specific Birth Defects: Down Syndrome, <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/birthdefects/downsyndrome/data.html>.
  2. As it happens, I used to have a first cousin with Down Syndrome who lived well into her 50s. But when her mother, who took care of her (and vice versa) died at the age of 99, my cousin Meg was put into institutional care and died soon thereafter.
  3. "Researchers Study Alzheimer's Disease in People with Down Syndrome," Columbia University Medical Center, November 24, 2015. <http://newsroom.cumc.columbia.edu/blog/2015/11/24/researchers-study-alzheimers-disease-in-people-with-down-syndrome/>
  4. CDC Data and Statistics on Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/data.html>
  5. Sallie Bernard, "The Other Public Health Crisis." [https://www.autismspeaks.org/sites/default/files/docs/the\\_other\\_public\\_health\\_crisis.pdf](https://www.autismspeaks.org/sites/default/files/docs/the_other_public_health_crisis.pdf)
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## **A Call to U.S. Mayors: Take the Pledge to Help Cities' Older Residents**

Cities are the front lines, with 80 percent of Americans 65-plus

Paul Irving

**A**s the Milken Institute Center for the Future of Aging prepares to release the latest version of its widely followed “Best Cities for Successful Aging” rankings index, our Advisory Board is once again calling on U.S. mayors to sign the Center for the Future of Aging Mayor’s Pledge. The upcoming “Best Cities” report will publicly recognize mayors who join their colleagues across the country to promote purpose and well-being in their communities.

The stakes are clear. With a federal government hamstrung by partisanship and politics, the time is now for mayors to demonstrate their commitment to better lives by signing the Pledge. Their leadership is critical as the aging population grows at an unprecedented rate across the United States and the world.

By 2030, one in five Americans will be 65 and over. Worldwide, this age group will outnumber children under 14 by midcentury, due in large measure to declining birthrates and increasing longevity thanks to advances in science and public health.

Cities are on the front lines, with more than 80 percent of Americans age 65-plus living in metropolitan areas. Nearly 90 percent of older adults in the U.S. want to age in their homes and communities, according to AARP research. Enabling these residents to age with dignity, opportunity and access to services and supports is a central issue for the future of urban environments. The Pledge unites forward-thinking leaders around a commitment to enhance life for the largest-ever population of older adults, and for generations to come.

From the first signatory in late 2014, 140 mayors of cities large and small have signed the Pledge. And they are taking action. At the 2015 White House Conference on Aging, then-Iowa City Mayor Matt Hayek told policy and business leaders about the programs and services that make his heartland city such a vibrant place for mature residents. With his colleagues on the Los Angeles County

Board of Supervisors, Eric Garcetti, the mayor of L.A. and the first to sign the Pledge, announced Purposeful Aging Los Angeles, a multisector initiative to improve lives in this massive and diverse region. We look forward to many more mayors signing the Pledge and to the reports of their plans and progress.



*LA Mayor, Eric Garcetti*

As the Pledge recognizes, mayors can ensure that their evolving cities include welcoming neighborhoods that are physically, economically and socially attuned to the well-being of mature residents. These centers of population, culture and commerce must optimize health and security as well as engagement and productivity, offer housing and transit options, social services and opportunities for education, work and social interaction.

They can provide innovative technology and communications solutions that allow people to age independently in their homes. Mayors who take the lead in developing these attributes will profoundly influence older residents' ability to age well and enjoy healthy and fulfilling lives.

But mayors can do more. Cities are economic engines and enablers of purpose. Mayors can ensure that older residents contribute to the economy and strengthen society, applying their abilities and knowledge to keep their cities vibrant. Rather than focusing on the stereotypes of decline and disengagement, mayors can recognize the potential of older adults as assets rather than burdens.

The Pledge acknowledges that elders have much to offer people of all ages. Their wisdom and experience enriches their families as well as business, educational and social institutions. They offer mentoring and training in workplaces and perspectives that enhance intergenerational connection. As entrepreneurs, they boost economic growth. In encore careers, teaching and volunteer activities, they contribute to society's well-being.

The Pledge calls on mayors to promote the involvement of older residents in volunteer and paid roles that serve others, to help them train for and transition to those roles and to recognize this growing age group for the value and potential it represents.

The goals of the Pledge promise vast opportunity for our cities, and an increasing number of mayors are demonstrating vision as they build coalitions and plan for a

new demographic future. Their ground-level experience opens the door to solutions that can be replicated at the state, national and global levels.

This is a unique opportunity for mayors themselves, as well as their cities. We call on them to join together in civic leadership by signing the Pledge, and we look forward to celebrating their efforts to create a better future of aging for all.

**Paul Irving** is the chairman of the Center for the Future of Aging at the Milken Institute and Distinguished Scholar in Residence at the University of Southern California Davis School of Gerontology.

*Editor's Note: This column first appeared October 19, 2016 in the Huffington Post.*

## Time for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century White House Conference on Aging

With an encore-stage president, an encore opportunity agenda

Jim Emerman

*“This increase in the life span and in the number of our senior citizens presents this Nation with increased opportunities: the opportunity to draw upon their skill and sagacity—and the opportunity to provide the respect and recognition they have earned. It is not enough for a great nation merely to have added new years to life—our objective must also be to add new life to those years.”*

Thus wrote President John F. Kennedy in a special message to Congress on the needs of the nation’s senior citizens—more than half a century ago, on February 21, 1963.





Two years earlier, the first White House Conference on Aging had been convened by President Eisenhower and attended by more than 3,000 leaders, representing nearly 300 organizations. The original goal of the conference was "to provide a forum for representatives of older Americans throughout the country to discuss and propose solutions to the unique problems facing the elderly in this country."

And indeed, that first conference was an extremely generative event. Out of it came:

- The 1961 Social Security amendments, which increased both the fiscal strength and the flexibility of the entitlement program, lowering the age of eligibility from 65 to 62;
- The Senior Citizens Housing Act of 1962, which provided low-interest long-terms loans and loan insurance to enable rural residents over 62, on farms and in small towns, to obtain or rent new homes or modernize old ones;
- The Community Health Services and Facilities Act, authorizing new programs for out-of-hospital community services for the chronically ill and the aged, and increased Federal grants for nursing home construction, health research facilities, and experimental hospital and medical care facilities; and
- A trinity of programs that undergird U.S. policy on aging today—Medicare, Medicaid and the Older Americans Act.

More than five decades later, these remain the seminal policies on aging.

Yet only a couple of years after the first White House Conference, Kennedy envisioned a very different perspective on the relationship of older adults to the national polity—one that recognized not only the obligations of our society to the well-being of our older members, but also envisioned a reciprocal responsibility of older adults to contribute their life experience and wisdom to the well-being of all.

Kennedy's vision began to be realized in federal policy when, as part of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, a few programs began to draw on this reservoir of older adult life experience and wisdom.

In 1965, the Foster Grandparent Program was piloted. Today, Foster Grandparents:

- Help children learn to read and provide one-on-one tutoring
- Mentor troubled teenagers and young mothers
- Care for premature infants or children with disabilities
- Help children who have been abused or neglected

Three years later, in 1968, the Senior Companion Program began as part of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare and Administration on Aging. Volunteer Senior Companions provide assistance and friendship to older adults who have difficulty with daily living tasks, such as shopping or paying bills, allowing them to remain living independently in their homes.

RSVP, the third program that is now part of Senior Corps, started with a project run by the nonprofit Community Service Society of New York and involved a group of volunteers serving the Staten Island, New York, community. The success of these efforts led to an amendment to the Older Americans Act, creating RSVP as a nationwide program in 1969.

As described on the Senior Corps website, RSVP members provide a wide range of volunteer services, including:

- Organizing neighborhood watch programs
- Tutoring and mentoring disadvantaged or disabled youth
- Renovating homes
- Teaching English to immigrants
- Assisting victims of natural disasters

Consistent with their origins as part of the LBJ's war on poverty, Foster Grandparents and Senior Companions who meet income eligibility requirements can receive a small stipend for their work.

But, with the exception of encore provisions in the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act of 2009, which expanded national service to explicitly address the opportunity of engaging older adults in Americorps (and which was never fully funded by Congress), the full expression of JFK's vision has yet to be achieved at the federal level.



Fast forward to the White House Conference on Aging of 2015.

This was the first White House Conference since the oldest Baby Boomers began moving into their 60s, in 2006. As such, it represented an unprecedented opportunity for progressive public policy to focus on the windfall of talent that this huge cohort, 76 million strong, could bring to solving

problems in our country, making Kennedy's vision manifest at last.

Five regional forums were organized in the lead-up to the WHCOA, which took place in Washington, DC, on July 13, 2015. Two issues were consistently raised at the regional forums (as reflected in a highlights reel shown at the July event): a strong call for vital, active older adults to use their skills and experience to help younger

generations thrive, and a need for policies and programs to support such intergenerational efforts.

Alas, the WHCOA was a missed opportunity in this regard, despite the explicit desires of grass-roots participants.

While one panel was entitled “Intergenerational Connections and Healthy Aging,” the promised intergenerational connections component got little more than lip service. A new intergenerational program, a collaboration between the Public Health Administration and the YMCA for walking activities and other forms of exercise, was featured in a session otherwise limited to the health concerns of the frail elderly – an eminently deserving cohort, but far from the entire constituency of older adults in the U.S. today.

No consideration was given to ways to expand the involvement of experienced adults in what has come to become known as the ‘encore’ stage of life, in Americorps or Foster Grandparents.

No recognition was offered of the need for older mentors in programs across the country serving at-risk kids.

No expanded opportunities for older tutors in literacy programs like Experience Corps were presented, as ways to support older and younger Americans.

Not even something as straightforward as the need for new research on the benefits of intergenerational engagement on older adult health was mentioned in the session on intergenerational connections.



It's understandable that these White House Conferences on Aging focus on critical issues for frail and vulnerable elders. Alzheimer's disease, income security, the caregiving workforce, new assistive and home care technologies, elder fraud and abuse—the major themes of the 2015 meeting—represent great and growing needs. And well-developed constituencies exist to advocate for many of these issues getting national attention.

But given the historic role that the WHCOA has played in developing federal policy for an aging society, it's time to augment the traditional agenda, and call for a whole new White House Conference, one focused on the Encore opportunity. A new White House Encore Aging Conference (WHEAC) could become a venue for designing the policies for the next 50 years, ones to finally realize JFK's vision of adding years to life by drawing on "skill and sagacity" of encore-stage adults.

The WHEAC could take up these important but thorny issues:

- Financial policies to encourage people to plan and save for encore careers of 20 years (or longer), after a primary career
- Policies to make continuing encore education affordable
- Lowering the barriers to encore service in schools and communities
- Incentivizing and investing in innovative products and services to connect encore talent with opportunity and community need.
- Developing the research base to support an array of programs for encore-age adults.

Will our next administration rise to the challenge? Can the generation whose idealism and activism changed social norms around civil and human rights make the imperative impossible to ignore? With an encore-stage President inevitable in our near future, the timing may never again be so ripe to press for real change.

**Jim Emerman** is Executive Vice President of *Encore.org*, a nonprofit spearheading efforts to engage millions of people in later life as a vital source of talent to benefit society.

## Contributors



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In 2014, Irving was honored with the Janet L. Witkin Humanitarian Award by Affordable Living for the Aging.

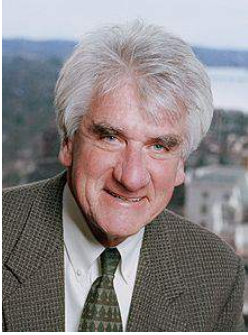


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