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OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
AT THE  
SWEARING-IN CEREMONY  
OF THE  
FEDERAL COUNCIL ON THE AGING

THE EAST ROOM

11:18 A.M. EDT

Secretary Lynch, Dr. Fleming, members of the Federal Council on Aging and a very special and distinguished guest, I would particularly like to welcome Mr. Blackistone, who is 105 years old. We hope you have many more opportunities and occasions to join us here at the White House.

Let me welcome to the White House this morning for this swearing-in five members of the Federal Council on the Aging. The sixth member, the Honorable Bertha Atkins, who is the Chairperson of the Council-- she is being sworn in at this time in Augusta, Maine, where she is addressing Governor Jim Longley's Conference on Aging, and I just learned that she had a problem with some inclement weather and she had to drive several hundred miles to make it. So, Bertha hasn't changed. She is a driver and a goer.

In the two years since its foundation, the Council has made very substantial contributions to the well being of our older Americans, particularly in making recommendations designed to improve tax policy and coordinate benefit programs for our older citizens.

Earlier this year I had the opportunity to call to the attention of all Americans one of the Council's most significant achievements, a Bicentennial charter for older Americans. The charter is a bill of rights for America's senior citizens, a testament of our nation's heartfelt concern for our older citizens.

It has been said that history judges a society on how well it cares for its older citizens. In America in recent years, the Federal Council on Aging has led the way to a record of solid progress in helping many of our older citizens lead independent, satisfying and healthy lives.

MORE

Since the 1971 White House Conference on Aging first focused national attention on the problems and the concerns of older citizens, Social Security benefits have risen by 50 percent, a new national network of State and area agencies on the aging has been established, nutrition projects for the elderly have been established and are now serving over 300,000 hot meals each day, special housing programs for older Americans have also been set up around the country.

This is a good start, but our efforts on behalf of older Americans have only begun. Our first priority must be to protect the retirement income of older Americans. Inflation, which hits those on fixed incomes the hardest, is the foremost threat to the stability and the value of retirement income. We have cut inflation in half, but if our older citizens are to fully enjoy their latter years, it must be cut further, and it will.

We must, of course, strengthen the financial underpinnings of the Social Security system. Congress adjourned without acting on proposals I submitted, which would have insured the fiscal integrity of the system.

I will urge the Congress to make this a first order of business in January 1977. I will also urge the new Congress to enact proposals that I submitted early this year to provide older Americans with protection against the devastating financial aspects of extended illness.

Another area of great concern to older Americans is the special threat to their well-being posed by crime. Our older citizens have earned the right to live securely and to walk the streets without fear. That is why I was particularly gratified by a provision in the Crime Control Act, which I recently signed. This new provision requires that State crime control plans deal specifically and very firmly with the criminal attacks which are made against our senior citizens.

All Americans can count on the Administration and the Federal Council on Aging to continue to see that these and many other issues which particularly concern our older citizens are met head-on.

I look forward with great confidence to the leadership of Mrs. Atkins, Mr. Martin, Monsignor Fahey, Mr. Winston, Mrs. Devereux and Mr. Holland. They will provide outstanding leadership in the months and years ahead.

Now, Justice Stevens, will you please swear in these distinguished members of the Federal Council on Aging?

(Justice Stevens administered the oath of office.)

END (AT 11:25 A.M. EDT)