

Address to Senior Citizens

(Not Given)

I am very pleased to be here and to join with you in the activities of the 1971 Senior Citizens Week at Lake Junaluska.

Though from the activities I have witnessed the title Senior Citizens Week is a misnomer - Active Citizens Week would be more appropriate. Which all goes to prove that aging in the human being is relative.

I can see, too, by your very presence that you do not adhere to the rather wistful philosophy of the late Douglas MacArthur that "old soldiers fade away." While I am a great admirer of General MacArthur I do not necessarily agree with this philosophy, nor do I really believe he did as he was in his seventies when he made this statement. I believe rather that those of you here today adhere to the philosophy that after retirement the "rest of your life can be the best of your life."

Too often, our senior citizens will not lend their talents. But it is obvious that you want to participate, to be involved, to accept responsibility .. to be a voice, and by your action to be heard.

And, there are enough of you to be heard. At the time of the 1970 census, there were approximately 20 million people 65 years of age and over. Twenty million is enough to populate the 21 smallest states combined, and life expectancy keeps climbing. Imagine during the Revolutionary Period the age expectancy was 37 years old for men and 35 for women. Now, a man 37 years old is in his prime.

So, you see, if because of retirement at 65, you suddenly decide that you are old and useless and have nothing else to contribute and you are merely going to "fade away" you are not living out your entire life - you have lived just a portion of it.

And we need you - we need you to jog us to the fact that you are there and a force that should be listened to. You have needs that should be met as the youth of our nation should be listened to and provided for.

In recent years our nation seems to have been preoccupied with the demands of our young people - perhaps simply because of their loudness and exuberance, and I would be the first to admit that they should be listened to; however, you, too, have a voice.

While it may not be quite as loud, it can be forceful, and it can carry enthusiasm.

Frederick Williamson expressed the conviction that "The longer I live, the more certain I am that enthusiasm is the most important of all traits or qualifications."

An excellent example of combined effort and force was the passage of the Mass Transit Bill through Congress last October. There was an amendment attached which reads as follows:

"It is hereby declared to be the national policy that elderly and handicapped persons have the same right as other persons to utilize mass transportation facilities and services; that special efforts shall be made in the planning and design of mass transportation facilities so that the availability to elderly and handicapped persons of mass transportation which they can effectively utilize will be assured; and that all federal programs offering assistance in the field of mass transportation should contain provisions implementing this policy."

I was privileged in May to speak to the Governor's Conference on Aging. This is another way for you to get involved, to participate, to accomplish goals that will help not only you, but will help generations to come. While life expectancy has been increased by medical science, we have lagged behind in the sociological needs of our older citizens.

The Governor's Conference on Aging is the result of the first National Conference on Aging that was held 21 years ago - August 1950. This conference was called to try to solve some of the sociological needs brought on by increased life expectancy.

Progress has been made. Today, there are 55 states and territories with agencies on aging with their own budgets and staff.

This State meeting I spoke to was the result of community hearings on problems of the aging; then regional hearings and now the White House Conference in November will hold hearings on the cumulative facts that first started with hearings last year on the local level.

We profit by experience - let us profit by your experience as active retired persons. As the Roman sage Cicero so aptly put it and something we must remember clearly:

"People who declare that there are no activities for old age are speaking beside the point. It is like saying that a pilot has nothing to do with sailing a ship because he leaves others to climb the masts and run along the gangways and work the pumps, while he himself sits quietly in the stern holding the rudder.

"He may not be doing what the younger men are doing, but his contribution is more significant and valuable than theirs.

"Great deeds are not done by strength or speed or physique; they are the products of thought and character, and judgement. And far from diminishing, such qualities actually increase with age."

Act in concert. Another good example of concerted effort is the bill passed by the 1971

General Assembly to grant property tax relief to certain aged and indigent persons.

The day the public hearing was held on this bill the Legislative was brimming with interested elder citizens. The bill in question concerned property tax relief on the first \$5,000 in appraised value of real property held and used as a principal place of residence and the owner has a disposable income of not more than \$3,500. I had an opportunity to talk with a lady who was interested in this bill. Though, she was one of our older citizens the bill had no effect on her as her financial position disqualified her, but she wanted to become involved - to participate - to help those of her group who were not quite so fortunate.

There is nothing new in this philosophy of keeping active. At 78, Paderewski played the piano superbly before large audiences. Grandma Moses, who began painting at 79, was the most outstanding primitive artist of our time. At 90 Mary Baker Eddy

founded the wordl-famous Christian Science Monitor.
Stradivarius made his finest violins between 60
and 70 and continued making them up to his 93 year.

Michelangelo painted the ceiling of the
Sistine Chapel in his late eighties.

While all of us are not blessed with the
talents of these individuals, we all have talents.
~~While~~ It may take a little imagination to find
them after you have retired from directing all
your talents toward one field, and you may have
to compromise if you are faced with a limited
situation, but we need you - don't retire. If
the young forget you are there, maybe you haven't
reminded them.

In my last quote of wise Cicero, he was
probably rapping the knuckles of the young for
discounting the experience of the old, in a later
statement, he reminds those of years:

"Age will only be respected if it fights
for itself, maintains its own rights, avoids
dependence, and asserts control over its own sphere
as long as life last."