

**Kathy Greenlee Remarks**  
**U.S. Assistant Secretary for Aging**  
**2010 AARP - UN Briefing Series on Global Aging**

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Thank you AARP for inviting me to join you and to Jennie Chin Hansen for introducing me. I worked closely with AARP at the state level in Kansas and now in Washington. I am looking forward to getting to know AARP's International Division. I know I have some new friends here with AARP staff, volunteers, and at least one of your board members. I am very excited to continue our partnership. I understand the critical value in advocating for seniors and the partnership will be strong as long as I am Assistant Secretary for Aging.

I would like to acknowledge Mr. Sha Zukang, United Nations (UN) Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs from China, and say thank you. You have more seniors than we do in your country of China, and we will need to work together you and the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs. I also met Ambassador Barton this morning, and I hope to come back some time soon.

As part of my job, I travel a lot – yesterday I took the train, I fly, a couple of months ago I took a boat (not really) to Richmond, VA as it rained, rained, and rained. That was the first time I met Jennie. It was one of those opportunities when you think: “I like her; what can we do together?” That’s how a lot of partnerships are formed. You find people you enjoy being with and you enjoy working together. It has been a great partnership from the beginning. I will go to San Francisco in a month and see the work that Jennie has done with On Lok – her integrated health model that has become the model for the nation.

I would like to call attention to the people of Haiti. We are glued to the TV and the news. My staff and I have been participating in daily calls with the Department of Health and Human Services and the national response from this country. I am proud of what the U.S. is doing, and I want to tell you about the compassionate people involved who want to help them. There are a number of us trying to find out how to support the people of Haiti. Thank you for paying attention to the seniors who are not normally in the footage. We are listening and watching especially in terms of the seniors.

I just finished seven months on the job. This is the first time I am here at an international venue, but not first time to the UN. I grew up in the middle of the country; I am very proud of it but as I love to travel. I am one of the tourists who came on the tour twice in the same week. I still believe that one of my most valuable possessions is my passport. I love travel and new cultures. If you can't leave the country on a vacation, you can at least visit the UN. I am very proud and glad to be here today.

We have had other speakers talking about what is happening globally - about the number of people who are aging and how this is unprecedented. We are entering a time when

there are more seniors than young people. There are more people sun-setting than people being born. I am fascinated about the new years we have all achieved – the healthy years when we are still active and productive and healthy; still want to be involved and the opportunities that this new aging brings to us. I think that everyone here and our partners around the world will change what aging is. We will make it interesting; and fun and cool because aging will be the norm. There are things we can bring to the table with our wisdom. I am very much looking forward to this time. There has not a better time to work in the field of aging because of how much we can shape our respective nations and the systems we are administering. How much we can help individuals attain their highest health and their highest well being and really be the best people we can be every single day.

When I was in Kansas, I toured nursing homes which are where we provide skilled care for seniors. I always found great inspiration in nursing homes. Everyone for their whole life needs a reason to get up every morning. We need to provide a vibrant and full life so there is still meaning every single day, and I think we have the opportunities to do that. We in the U.S. have wonderful systems to support seniors -- starting from Social Security which provides a modest base for retirement and pension. I know that we are very fortunate in this country, that most of the seniors around the world don't have pensions. This immediately brings up the question of economic status and poverty. You can't talk at a global level about aging issues without talking about poverty, and because of gender differences we must also recognize how many of those impoverished people are older women. So many issues come from not having a secure and stable retirement. Those are things we can work on together.

We have health systems in this country upon which we can depend. Medicare was adopted in 1965 when I was five years old. I am turning 50 soon. Medicare was really the health system we needed to support seniors and people with disabled, which has been another key partnership in working with people with disabilities. The Medicaid program was developed to assist the poor.

You would think that with Social Security, which is retirement, Medicare which is health, and Medicaid to help the poor that we got everything right in 65 with nothing else to do. And that isn't true. There are still things that seniors need that fall outside or in between the systems – we found that there are still seniors who need someone to come help them take a bath, or bring a meal, or fix the meal, or take them to the doctor and these wasn't covered by these huge massive U.S. programs.

So a third program was created in 1965 with very much foresight. And that's the program I administer. It is called the Older Americans Act. It is a different kind of program designed with specific needs of individuals in mind. We aren't doctors but we make house calls. We come to individual homes and we figure out what do you need. We are all aging in different ways and we need different things as we age because of our health and because of what we have around us already.

We developed a system that is very different than any other structure in the U.S. which is honestly often a challenge for me. People expect a federal agency to be like this at the top with these little branches down. That's not us. We have a small top structure and we send money to each of the states and territories who send money to the local communities. And we have always, for 45 years sent most of our money directly to communities so the services are there. Much in line with what the UN is supporting for older persons - "Bottoms Up" but our most similar language is "Grass Roots" to figure out how to support seniors so they can stay healthy and can live longer. These programs are very vibrant and help people on one-to-one basis.

We have learned something in 45 years. That's good as we have more seniors coming. We have learned about family and the role of caregivers in providing care for seniors. 80% of work in U.S. of LTC services is provided by their family. We as a society want to continue to support that because 1) the family wants it, and 2) we can't afford to replace it. So from an economic and just the human/compassionate and loving side, we must continue to support caregivers. We will do more in the U.S., certainly through the Administration on Aging and the Older Americans Act to support caregivers. Yesterday President Obama announced his 2011 budget and requested an initial US\$100 million for our program just to work with caregivers.

There are two parts of the caregiver equation: The person who needs the bath and the person who gives it. So there are programs to help the caregiver – give them a break, go to work or vacation - and people receiving the care. I met yesterday with most of the key advocates in Washington, DC of seniors and AARP was right at the table as we move forward to help caregivers. This is a global issue. The best care is from people who love you and are invested in your health. And no country can afford to pay for it all, even a country as well endowed as the U.S.

Everything we do from top to bottom can be tested by looking at people – one by one by one. I like speaking to people when I travel. My favorites are the seniors themselves so I can talk to them to see if we are doing it right. Are we listening well?

I would like to share with you the story of my great aunt - Verda Nickerson. Well before we started doing this work, my family got it right. I never meant to make her famous but I have. I grew up in Clearwater, Kansas – 1800 people. My family has lived there for many, many generations.

I had this aunt, my grandmother's sister, who lived there her whole life. She was born with a disability – a significant speech impediment. It was challenging to help her, to listen, to support her. When she was a young woman, a preacher came to town and preached about a god who could understand her. Faith shaped her life; it didn't just arrive when she was old. She moved to Chicago for Bible College, pursuing her own life and then her father died. She was the one daughter of the three who was not married, so she moved home and lived there the rest of her life. The rest of us moved away. Her mother became ill, and she lived there as a caregiver. And she lived by herself. Because

she lived in Chicago, she loved baseball; loved to watch the ministers – Billy Graham was her favorite; she was a fan of baseball, painting and travel.

We became concerned when she was in her 80s. We did what many families do. Some do caregiving first hand, but we were hours away. We visited and checked on her. You have to do it in a respectful way. My mom and aunt took her to the doctor who said she was healthy but frail. I checked on the house and she had milk in her refrigerator that had gone bad. Her house needed cleaning. What we did - well before we knew what I would be doing - we called the “Aging Network”. We called the Area Agency on Aging in Wichita and asked if they could help. She only needed meals every day and someone to clean her house several times a month. She could stay independent with those two things. Those are not hard to do and not expensive. She lived at home for about a year with that help.

The one day she went outside in January or February to change a light bulb. She fell and lay outside in the cold overnight. The neighbors found her because they noticed that her window shades hadn't moved. Her body temperature was in the 80s. We took her to the hospital. They found an inoperable brain tumor. She was unable to go back home and lived in a nursing home for 3 weeks before she passed away.

I am making her famous by talking about her a lot because she was such a success story. She got what she wanted. She was a fiercely independent, quirky, and interesting person. She got to stay at home as long as possible. She had family who cared about her; loved her and she had her strong faith on which to rely. She had a community of 1800 people who stayed out of her way when she drove her car. I spoke at her funeral and thanked the community: the bank made sure no one took advantage of her; people who helped her; the people who said can you pay your water bill- can you come down.

The role of faith, however you define it, family, community are universal supports we need to have in place for seniors wherever. And we need to test them one by one by one to make sure we get it right.

We have learned a lot in 45 years. There are more things we need to do and work together. We at AoA are interested in health and science and how to support innovation and practices. So many seniors who are healthy but the longer they live – they often become victims of Alzheimer's disease, cancer and other diseases. How do we help seniors stay mobile and healthy? We can all do together supporting independence. I believe, as I enter the world stage and work with you that we have wonderful opportunities to further a common agenda to support the voice of seniors. That's paramount in advocacy– seniors speaking for themselves, caregivers speaking on behalf of seniors; support for the rest of us as organizations who want to provide good services and policy. I think we have great opportunities to work together. Thank you.