



AGING ISSUES: FEDERAL PERSPECTIVE

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Introduction

- Let's get ready: in just 22 days—all Americans owe it to themselves and their country to make it to midnight on New Year's Eve to scream at top of our lungs "Happy NEW year!"
- 2020 will be the year to remember that we so want to forget
- Three-fourths or more of it has been consumed by the pandemic
- As we close the year we have two things to be hopeful about
 - *Millions of Americans on a priority basis will be vaccinated*
 - The more people who are vaccinated in December, the better for improving public morale
 - *And a new Administration will more aggressively address the pandemic*

The Election

- Start with the election: 3 words—LIKE NO OTHER!
- Sometime next week after the Electoral College has its day—Joe Biden will be officially the next President of the United States
- Who else won in this election
- Kamala Harris—who has the brightest political future in America
- Our Democracy—almost 2/3 of eligible voters voted, the highest total in 120 years..
- Senator Tillis—won election for a second term



The Election: House of Representatives

- Going beyond the White House, what else happened in the election?
- House remains under Democratic control but majority has shrunk considerably and might shrink more as a couple of races not decided and if Biden chooses someone. And one race decided by 6 votes!
- But two important decisions already made:
 - *House Appropriations Committee Chair will be long time champion of older adults and persons with disabilities Rosa DeLauro*
 - *Congressman David Scott of Georgia new Chair of House Agriculture*
- Record number of Republican women elected

The Election: Senate

- Officially unknown until the Jan 5 Georgia run off election
- Unknown—who will be the Majority?
- Scenarios:
 - *Republican 52-48 (win both)*
 - *Democrats 50-50 (win both) and VP Harris makes them Majority*
 - *Split 51-49 R's still in charge*
- For NC, interesting questions are whether Sen. Burr becomes Chairman of HELP Committee and will Sen. Tillis change to committees that more directly impact older adults?



Biden Appointments

- Beginning to take shape
- Key one: HHS
 - *California AG and former House member Xavier Becerra*
- The subcabinet position in HHS are key
 - *Two in particular, CMS and ACL*
- Time will tell on both

Pandemic: THE Issue

- Both in terms of closing out the current Congress and the new one starting in Jan, the pandemic remains the front and center issue without question
- A health care and economic crisis like few others in history
- Are we turning the corner with vaccines becoming available for more and more Americans?
- Vaccines must be affordable, accessible and have confidence of public, especially persons of color and older adults
- The following chart outlines actions taken so far by Congress regarding the pandemic

History of COVID Emergency Bills

January 31
Public Health
Emergency
Declared

March 13
National
State of
Emergency
Declared

March 26
3rd Supp.
Package
Becomes
Law (CARES
Act)

May 15
HEROES Act
Passes House

??????

March 6
1st Supp.
Package
Becomes
Law

March 18
2nd Supp.
Package
Becomes
Law (FFCRA)

April 21
"3.5" Supp.
Package
Becomes
Law (only
extended the
PPP's
funding)

October 1
HEROES Act
"2.0" Passes
House



Key Funding So Far

- Families First: \$250 million for OAA nutrition programs
- CARES Act: Close to \$1 billion in total emergency funds for OAA programs
- And with CARES Act, total flexibility in how funds could be spent and what kinds of meals could be provided
- Testament to value of advocacy and value of OAA programs and services



Updated HEROES Act

- Most recent concrete development was House passage on October 1 of bill called “HEROES 2.0”
- Not currently slated for Senate action
- Includes \$2.2 trillion in relief funding
- \$1.175 billion for ACL, including OAA:
 - \$500 million for nutrition (III-C and VI)
 - \$200 million for supportive services
 - \$150 million for caregivers
 - \$44 million for preventive health
 - \$25 million for Title VII

Where Are We Now?

- Close but so far away? One or the other is true
- Step taken today – passage of one-week extension of the CR
- Needed to keep the government open and regular funding flowing
- It will either be replaced by a further extension for 3 months OR
- A full year omnibus funding bill for all agencies
- Our priorities for omnibus:
 - *Funding of Older Americans Act programs at newly authorized levels (approximately 10 percent increase)*
 - *Passage of 1 year reauthorization of the Elder Justice Act*

Where Are We Now?

- In terms of the next covid emergency package, a new development has occurred
- A bipartisan group of Senators have proposed a compromise between the \$2.2 billion bill passed by House in October and a \$500 billion bill which could not pass the Senate
- Their bill for \$908 billion would address some of the most critical needs stemming from pandemic
- \$26 billion for nutrition (unspecified breakdown)
- We have been working with n4a, Meals on Wheels America, ADvancing States to reiterate our support for more OAA funding

Will It Pass?

- Has a decent chance of passing since all sides agree that something must be passed by the end of the year
- End of year realities to confront:
 - *Moratorium on evictions expires*
 - *Student loan payment freeze expires*
 - *Pandemic unemployment benefits boost ends*
- This week and next should decide the outcome



Another Bill?

- No matter what happens to the compromise bill, another emergency package will be needed and will likely be first bill that Biden signs as President
- We will make concerted push to obtain at least \$1.1 billion for OAA programs in this bill
- Also important to us:
 - *Continued OAA flexibility*
 - *Money for state/local governments*
 - *Increase to SNAP benefits*
 - *Funding for food banks*

Other Aging Issues: Medicare

- Action on Medicare
 - *On one hand, solvency challenge growing more imminent*
 - *While on other hand, efforts to broaden Medicare: Medicare for All or Medicare for More?*
- Medicare for all not going to happen, but lowering to 60 might
- And expanded benefits to include dental, vision and hearing

Other Aging Issues

- Health equity
 - *A centerpiece of Biden-Harris going forward—deeper dive into disparities with focus on older adults who have endured longer durations*
- Social determinants of health
 - *A lot more attention being paid as a result of pandemic. Need to do inventory of existing programs that address SODH, better coordinate the approach and provide sufficient resources*
- And elder justice
 - *Biden and Harris have strong positions on many aspects, including reauthorizing the EJA and promoting better safety and care in long-term care facilities*



Advocacy Going Forward

- First and foremost, keep on doing what you are doing
- It helps advocacy more than you know
- In emergency times, bills can sometimes move quickly
- Having real life information to share with policymakers is key
- That comes from local level on up: you have data and stories that all help make the case for funding
- And then in turn advocate for as much emergency money as is needed

Advocacy in the New Year

- Going deeper into the new year, there will be many issues to put your advocacy talents to work
- On the caregiver front—since Biden’s “21st Century Caregiving and Education Workforce” proposal was given such campaign prominence, can expect action on it by Congress
- Here the powerful voice of the caregiver will be needed to explain why a tax credit would be so important (and overdue)
- Also, advocacy will be needed to support another priority: ending the wait list for HCBS in Medicaid
- More attention will be focused on social isolation and older adults
- Programs that you are involved in that are addressing the issue will be important to share

Sharing With Your Delegation

- Senator Burr, especially if he becomes chair of HELP
- See what changes Tillis has to his committees
- Focus more attention on Rep. Alma Adams—on Ed & Labor and Ag
- Rep. Foxx as ranking member of Ed & Labor



Conclusions

- Presidents come and go but advocacy stays around
- There are always issues that are moved by good advocacy
- Older adult issues are especially important as their numbers continue to increase in NC and around the nation.
- In your day-to-day work you contribute to advocacy with your day-to-day experience.
- Share it—activate it—work toward policy changes that do two things:
 - *Make your work better and*
 - *Further improve the quality of life for older adults*