Lt. Governor's Keynote Address, Opening Session
2005 State White House Conference on Aging
April 26, 2005

Seniors' Impact on South Carolina:
Today and Tomorrow

A college student challenged a senior citizen, saying it was impossible for the older generation to understand his.

"You grew up in a different world," the student said. "Today we have television, jet planes, space travel, nuclear energy, computers..."

Taking advantage of a pause in the student's litany, the senior said, "You're right. We didn't have those things when we were young; so we invented them! What are you doing for the next generation?"

- We are gathered here today under the banner of the South Carolina White House Conference on Aging to help shape our state and our national policies for our senior community over the next decade and into the future. Some of you have been part of the three previous state White House conferences, so you know that we are indeed looking ahead for one generation and laying the groundwork for other generations to travel.

- We are meeting today amid tremendous demographic changes. The number of South Carolinians over 60 will more than double in the next 20 years. There will be more than 1.3 million seniors in South Carolina, all part of change that the Census Bureau has just reported will mean that in just 30 years four out of every 10 Americans will live in the South.

- We'll be talking about the future over the next two days, and we will peer ahead and try to figure out what changes will occur as we explore 10 broad issues, each with the potential to impact our lives in a profound way. From long-term care insurance to in-migration and prescription costs to better advocacy and the emergence of a caregiver society, our state is in a position to lead, not follow, what goes on at the federal level as it relates to seniors.

- Let's remember that we have lived our lives amid change. We have caused that change.

- And perhaps the biggest change confronting us is that we, as individuals

    - can,
    - must, and
    - will change.

- As we take up the big, sweeping subjects today, as we talk about the great issues that confront our senior community in the years ahead, I want us to remember that each of us has the power, through our choices, to make an individual contribution to the ultimate outcome of these large issues.

- One of the driving issues before our time is health care, especially its economic cost and its toll on people.

- Let me share three thoughts. They, and many of the statistics that follow, come from a remarkable document: The State of Aging and Health in America 2004, a richly researched snapshot of the health and aging landscape in America produced by the Merck Institute of Aging and Health.

- The first thought is from the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. ***Poor health or disabilities are not inevitable consequences of aging.***

- The executive director of Merck Institute of Aging and Health says we should ***promote good health, prevent chronic disease and postpone disability for older adults to ensure not just longer lives, but better lives for Americans.***

- The president of the Gerontological Society of America says we must ***help older adults not to simply survive but to thrive.***

- It is no secret that we live longer today. A child born on April 26, 1900, could expect to live to 1947, and likely would die from that era's leading killers: flu, TB, pneumonia, other infectious diseases and acute illnesses.

- A child born today, on April 26, 2005 will live until 2082 and die more slowly from chronic diseases and degenerative illnesses. The top three causes of death for all ages today are heart disease (30% of all deaths), cancer (23%) and stroke (7%).

- The tragedy of these leading killers is they are often preventable. Three behaviors – smoking, poor diet, and physical inactivity – were the actual causes of almost 35% of US deaths in 2000.

- Currently, 80% of older Americans are living with at least one chronic condition, and half have two or more. Chronic – often preventable -- diseases involve years of pain, disability, and loss of function and independence before resulting in death.

- These years of suffering are why two-thirds of current health care costs go to treat chronic illnesses. Almost 95% of health care expenditures for older Americans are due to chronic diseases.

- Here is where the opportunities are created by our choices so we can influence the impact of these larger issues confronting our senior community.

- We can change some of these impacts. By adopting healthier behaviors – physical activity, a healthy diet, a smoke-free lifestyle and preventive health screenings – we can lower our risk for many chronic diseases, especially those associated with the leading causes of death and disability. If so, our individual decisions could collectively lower some of the projected health care costs.

- If we take personal responsibility for our health, we could find that our choices for exercise and nutrition can give each of us extended years of independent living, reduced disability and improved quality of life. Exercise is also associated with maintaining improving memory and brain function, as well as a sense of balance that protects each of us from falls.

- The research is undeniable: The key to successful aging, where we are mobile and independent, is a physically active lifestyle.

- Above all, older people do NOT need to engage in strenuous physical activity to improve their health. A daily walk goes hand in hand with many health benefits.

- That's why I am going throughout South Carolina this summer, witnessing for the YOU CAN exercise program for seniors.

- We are starting our observance of Older South Carolinians Month on May 4 by kicking off the YOU CAN program by inviting the South Carolina senior community to join us on our State House grounds in Columbia for a walk through those historic and beautiful grounds.

- Take out your calendars.

- YOU CAN 2 write down May 4 at 10 am.

- YOU CAN join me at the State House.

- YOU CAN be part of this!

- YOU CAN is part of President Bush's vision of a healthier America, where good choices regarding a healthy diet and physical activity mean older Americans will not just live longer, but live better.

- I think USC's new football coach Steve Spurrier said it well last week, when he used a four-hour workout to celebrate his 60th birthday, the threshold for Older Americans Act services.

- He said: "You know, there's

young 50, ***old*** 50, PAUSE
young 60, ***old*** 60, PAUSE
young 70, ***old 70.*** PAUSE

- He said ***age is just a number.*** It's sort of how you feel, how you talk and how you act. But I feel probably better than I did when I was 40." He said, "I enjoy life and I enjoy feeling good. ... ***Nowadays you don't have to be old unless you choose to be***."

- The coach said that too many people go to rust, and just waste away.

- You can see that I am still a young man. The time for my White House Conference on Aging is still two decades away. But I know the wisdom of preparing for a sustainable quality of life, of eating right and exercising. I know it is never too late to do the right thing.

- YOU CAN join me in my walks around South Carolina.

- YOU CAN join me in the walking groups at the malls.

- YOU CAN join me in eating right and exercising.

- YOU CAN get your friends to join with you, and together,

- WE CAN assume personal responsibility for making the right decisions that will help us lower the cost of health care in South Carolina and in our nation, and

- WE CAN improve the quality of life for our seniors.

- WE CAN carry this back home. In the meantime, we have work to do. Later this morning, you will break into 10 issue workshops to create policy recommendations to carry to Washington in the fall.

- The theme of personal responsibility should permeate our Planning for the Future Workshop. We must define the value in saving for retirement and buying long term care insurance to take care of our needs – and we absolutely must teach these responsibilities to the up and coming generations.

- I encourage the Health Care Workshop to weigh how personal decisions to exercise and eat well can impact health care demands in the future. I am very proud to report that the House has passed unanimously and sent to the Senate legislation to create a loan forgiveness program to encourage more physicians to become geriatricians. We have only 30 in our state to serve 510,000 seniors over 65. That's a ratio of one doctor per 17,000 patients. Still, we need more doctors, nurses and other health-care professionals for the future.

- We have a workshop focusing on long term care and a continuum of care for our frail elderly and disabled. Again, we must encourage personal responsibility as an answer. Government does not have the resources to be the only answer to these issues. Above all, we must value programs and policies that maintain independence and the ability to age in place. This should be a consideration in the housing workshop, especially in considering safety and design issues.

- Caregiving is a very important workshop. Our state and our country are developing a sandwich generation that is caught between meeting the needs of their parents and their children. The workforce issues workshop must confront that millions of jobs will be vacated in a few years by retirees and there will be no one in the workplace available to fill them. And, just as day care for children became a key business issue in the 1970s, tomorrow's business community must understand that families will need workable policies to cope with their parents and children in need of care.

- Our research workshop must grapple with the concepts of best practices, worthwhile outcomes and effective strategies. The impact of Alzheimer's on families, business and government interweaves issues confronting other workshops, as do the in-migration of wealthy mature adults and the need to develop senior friendly communities.

- You have probably heard Nela Gibbons talk about the weather forecast for aging's future. It is modeled on a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation forecast of health and health care in America. These forecasts are tools for making choices. Everything boils down to three scenarios.

- The first scenario calls for **stormy weather**, and it is a product of a do-nothing or a do-too-little series of choices.

- The second scenario is the **long and winding road**, a result of doing things incrementally, of getting by, of tinkering a bit here and a bit there so that we basically keep on keeping on.

- The third scenario is **the sunny side of the street**, and it is an all-American vision of hard work and investing, creating best practices and technological advances, and favorable life-style choices as well as seizing opportunities.

- This is your job today and tomorrow. You must discuss aging's future in South Carolina and in our country. And you must help determine what the weather pattern will be for the next 10 years.

- Unfortunately, my constitutional duty to preside over the Senate requires that I return to Columbia. I will have to leave almost immediately because the Senate

will take up the Appropriations Act. I also want to be there to ensure that our five new long term care ombudsmen are funded.

- Before I go, I want to thank you for your contributing your experience, your wisdom and your time by presenting each of you with a certificate that officially designates you as a delegate to this conference. Kay, do you have those certificates?

- I think we all know Kay Mitchell. She has served our seniors since before I was born. She is an outstanding example of what all our state employees should be. Kay, you have made so many friends over the years, and every one of them knows that beyond a doubt an event like this could not go over smoothly without you.

- That's why so many people have asked that I present you the Lieutenant Governor's Order of the Palmetto Patriot.

- PRESENTATION

- I have to leave. Have a blessed day doing very important work.