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THE WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON FAMILIES: AN UPDATE

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Introduction

The White House Conference on Families is a promise being redeemed in a unique process of national hearings, state conference, other efforts and three White House Conferences next summer. It poses new challenges and unprecedented opportunities for readers of the COFO Memo. The purpose of this brief article is to report on the White House Conference, its process and events and to encourage your participation.

Non-Policy

President Carter has called the White House Conference on Families (WHCF) to address a major gap in the way we make public policy in this country--the lack of conscious or explicit concern for how government policy or major private actions affect families. Policies and programs are too often focused on individuals without regard for family ties or influences or the strength of family in its different forms in coping with problems or opportunities. This "non-policy" has many of the same effects as an "anti-family" policy. It has led to programs which frequently ignore families and occasionally actually harm families. For example some states still enforce welfare laws which permit withholding or reducing payments until and unless the father leaves home. Likewise, the tax code and social security provisions can discriminate against those who marry; medicaid and other policies encourage expensive and institutional care from strangers rather than in-home care by families; foster care policies which pay more and more money the further a child is removed from his home and discourage returning a child to his family or finding a permanent home through adoption. These obvious and well known examples only skim the surface of how neglect of families harms our citizens and increases the costs and difficulty of meeting human needs.

* The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of any of the COFO Organizations.

In closing this gap, President Carter has required the WHCF to reach out to American families themselves as well as scholars, and professionals in identifying the ways in which government and our major private institutions help, hurt or ignore families.

Fears

As we have begun our activities we have encountered two pervasive and unfounded fears about the WHCF:

1. Some fear this WHCF will turn into an exercise in nostalgia---an illusory search for the good old day without recognition of the significant changes in both society and families.

Speaking for the WHCF, this fear is unfounded. We are interested in today's and tomorrow's families and their genuine and pressing problems. The way to help families is not to sit in judgement of them or to ignore the real diversity of families.

2. Others fear intrusive governmental solutions to the pressures families face.

I believe, this fear is also unfounded. We do not want government in peoples bedrooms or nurseries telling them what to do or not to do. But those who oppose any relationship between government and families are decades too late. Government is already deeply involved with our families through state laws on marriage, divorce, adoption and foster care; federal economic and tax policy; governmental programs and policies in education, health care, housing and other social services. One study indicated there were 268 federal programs or policies directly affecting families.

There is no escaping some relationships between government and families. We want that governmental involvement to help not hurt; support not undermine, strengthen not destroy. We want to build on the strengths, vitality and diversity of families and we need to attack the social and economic forces which strain families to the breaking point. We need to provide assistance to those families which have broken.

Hopes

We need to replace the neglect which characterizes the current government-family relationship with a conscious concern to strengthen and support families.

Through the WHCF we want to stimulate a genuine dialogue between families of different backgrounds and situations, and between those who make policy and those who are affected by it. We want to involve professionals with expertise in this area, not to provide easy answers but to clarify choices and help describe the realities we face. We do not seek a confrontation between interest groups or partisans or particular causes, but a genuine dialogue between people with a real involvement in the institution they value most--their families.

In this task we hope to build on the work already underway by many scholars and national organizations. We recognize that the WHCF is neither the beginning nor the culmination of concern for families. Many groups and individuals have been working in this area. But just as previous WHC's have generated action and momentum for the old, young, handicapped, this first WHCF can bring concern for families into the center of policy-making where it belongs.

The WHCF Process

In July of this year a very strong and diverse group of people came together to make some decisions about the goals and activities of the WHCF. The 40 member National Advisory Committee, made up of 20 men and women from across the country, brings a wide variety of perspectives and experiences to the leadership of this effort. They agreed on goals for the Conference which stress broad participation and follow-up on Conference recommendations. They adopted a set of six themes to guide Conference discussions:

- Family Strengths and Supports
- Diversity of Families
- The Changing Realities of Family Life
- The Impact of Public & Private Institutional Policies
- The Impact of Discrimination

- Special Needs of: Elderly Families, Families with Handicapped Members, Single Parent Families, Other Families with Special Needs.

Most significantly they adopted a unique Conference process built around three White House Conferences next June and July rather than the single Washington event which is the traditional focal point for WHC's. They chose this model for two reasons: To encourage the participation of more people given the limited budget of the WHCF and to develop conferences where the scale and size would permit real dialogue, discussion and participation. Leading up to the three Conferences are several major activities which are already underway.

A. Hearings

Six of seven national hearings have already been held by the National Advisory Committee to listen first hand to the concerns of American families. These hearings have been held in Kansas City and Linsborg, Kansas; Memphis and Nashville, Tennessee; Denver, Colorado; Hartford and Stamford Connecticut; Washington, D.C.; Detroit and Oak Park, Michigan. The final hearing is scheduled for Seattle and Yakima, Washington on January 11 & 12 respectively.

The response to the hearings has been phenomenal. Originally, we expected to hear from 30-50 witnesses in a two day hearing. Our smallest hearing was in Kansas where almost 250 people testified. More than 1900 people have testified in the six hearings thus far. The quantity and quality of testimony has been overwhelming. It ranges from personal stories of family strengths or problems to highly developed analysis of issues. The range of issues have been very broad, but some personal impressions can be shared:

*People believe families do not receive the respect or sensitivity they deserve from government, business, media, or other major institutions.

*Economic pressures, particularly poverty, inflation and joblessness are placing enormous strains on families.

*People are deeply concerned about passing on values to their own families in competition with large institutions (government, media, etc.)

*The effects of family violence, adolescent pregnancy, discrimination, lack of quality child care among others are devastating on families.

*There is significant interest in the area of families and the workplace (eg., hours, transfer policies, leave, etc.)

These impressions cannot substitute for a thorough and systematic analysis of the hearings which is in preparation and will be shared with the delegates to the WHC and which will help determine the agenda of the WHC.

B. State Activities

Every state and territory has named a coordinator for the WHCF. States are being asked to carry out 2 minimum activities:

1. A discussion of issues leading to the selection of 10 major topics and recommendations on policy and programs.

2. Development of a plan for selecting a diverse and representative delegation to the WHCF (including a minimum of 30% elected by democratic processes and a minimum of 30% appointed by the governor).

These crucial state activities will yield 90% of the delegates to the WHCF and major recommendations on issues. This is an open process with all the opportunities and risks. States have been given flexibility in developing their plans, but have received WHCF guidelines emphasizing diversity and non-discrimination. Some groups with specific ideological orientation may seek to dominate state conferences. It is crucial that all segments of the community be involved to insure representation of a variety of viewpoints. A list of state conferences as of Dec. 21, 1979 follows. For more information contact your state coordinator (listed in the Summer/Fall 1979 COFO Memo), governor or the WHCF.

C. National Organizations

The Committee was deeply impressed by the interest and activity of a wide range of national

organizations committed to strengthening and supporting families. The Committee strongly affirmed the importance of involving national organizations in the White House Conference on Families and discussed specific ways in which national organizations and their members could participate in Conference activities, including:

- Sponsoring their own activities in conjunction with the WHCF (many organizations are already conducting planning on such activities!)
- Testifying at national hearings to be held across the country this fall.
- Encouraging your members and local affiliates to participate in state and local activities, and state conferences.
- Submitting recommendations on issues which will be compiled and distributed to delegates to the WHC (limited in length)
- Sharing with Conference staff and with issues work groups of the National Advisory Committee, research, issues material and persons with specific expertise from within your organization.
- Attending the WHCF as state or at-large delegates. (The vast majority of delegates will be selected at the state level.)

D. Issue Development

The fourth major activity leading up to the WHC's is the preparation of background material on issues for the delegates to the WHC. Using a Topic Outline adopted by the National Advisory Committee, states, national organizations and others are being asked to submit specific recommendations on a limited number of topics. The National Advisory Committee is being divided into Issue Work Groups to review the development of brief background materials discussing research in these areas, reviewing policy options and summarizing input from the hearings, state activities, national organizations and scholars.

A National Research Forum on Family Issues is being planned for March to focus on what

is known about families and key issues affecting families from a research perspective. This forum will provide valuable background for use by the delegates at the WHC's.

E. The White House Conferences

The three WHC's are scheduled:

June 5, 6, 7	Baltimore, MD
June 19, 20, 21	Minneapolis, MN
July 10, 11, 12	Los Angeles, CA

They are the key forums for the WHCF.

The purpose of the WHC's is the discussion of key issues relating to families and the development of a limited number of recommendations for national action by government or major institutions. The participants would have four resources to draw on in formulating their proposals:

1. The summaries of the hearings;
2. The results of state activities;
3. The priorities and recommendations contained in brief reports submitted by national organizations;
4. The background papers prepared by the issues work groups.

Each WHC would have between 500-700 official participants. 10% would be at-large delegates appointed by the President. The remainder would be delegates selected by a process within each state.

F. National Task Force: (August)

The results of the WHCs will be pulled together into one national product by an ad hoc Task Force. This group will include members of the NAC, one representative of each state (selected in caucuses at the WHCs) and twenty Presidential appointees. Their task will be to identify and highlight areas of agreement in the Conferences and attempt to reconcile differences. This group will be bound by the results of the WHCs; no new issues could be raised. Their task is to bring together the Conferences into one national product.

G. Implementation

A significant share of the WHCF's time and

budget will be devoted to advocacy and implementation. This could include:

1. Presenting report to the President;
2. Requesting meetings and written responses from key Federal agencies;
3. Meeting with Congressional leaders and key Committee chairpersons;
4. Distributing and advocating Conference recommendations with leaders of the private sector;
5. Reporting results to Conference participants; and
6. Providing a clearinghouse on post-Conference activities.

Conclusion

This ambitious process depends for its success on broad and active participation. The issues, delegates and priorities will emerge from those who choose to participate. In this way, we can build not only an agenda for action but a constituency to advocate that agenda as well. Your active involvement is needed. We have a unique opportunity to help strengthen and support American families. I hope we will use it.

STATE CONFERENCE ACTIVITY

Arizona	6 Regional Workshops in Mar. 1980.
Arkansas	March 7-8, 1980
California	Reg. Hearings, Nov.-Dec. 1979 State Conf. pending.
Colorado	Feb. 29-March 1, 1980
Connecticut	March 1, 1980
Delaware	County Conferences-early March & State Implementation Conf. April 25-26, 1980
District of Col.	8 Ward Conferences-Feb. 1-9, City-Feb. 29-March 1, 1980.
Georgia	March (tentative)
Hawaii	March 1, 1980
Illinois	March 7, 1980
Iowa	March 1980 (late)
Kansas	Feb. 28-March 1, 1980
Louisiana	March 14, 1980
Maine	March 17, 1980
Maryland	5 Reg. Conf. Feb 2-16.
Massachusetts	Boston Jan 27; Worcester Feb 3; Springfield Feb. 17 & Boston, State Conf. Mar. 2.
Minnesota	March 16-18, 1980

Legal Definition of the Office

The document which officially defines the purpose and scope of the new Office for Families appeared in the Federal Register on November 20, 1979, page 66693. The very positive and important announcement is reproduced in part as follows:

M. The Office on Families (DOF) provides a focal point for family concerns within the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare through the development and coordination of policies, legislation, and programs which affect families. It is headed by a Director, who reports to the Commissioner of the Administration for Children, Youth, and Families. Establishes and maintains a liaison with other Federal agencies that have programs and policies which affect the functioning and well being of families.

Proposes policies, legislation, and other actions which are responsive to the expressed needs of the family. Obtains recommendations on the needs of families and on potential strategies for meeting those needs from parents and other members of families, providers of services to families, family advocates, academicians, and others knowledgeable about family life.

Promotes the development of a coordinated approach to addressing the strengths and problems of families. Works to increase the sensitivity of the Department to the ramifications on family life of current and proposed programs, policies, and procedures.

Coordinates activities with the White House Conference on Families, will be involved in the implementation of recommendations coming from the White House Conference on Families, and assists in the work of its Interagency Task Force. Coordinates the collection and dissemination of information about families in conjunction with other HEW offices and Federal agencies.

Sponsors research on the family and promotes the coordination of research and other activities aimed at identifying and understanding the issues, concerns, and needs of families. Reviews research findings to identify implications for the family and their relevance to existing HEW policies and programs, and recommendations for changes as appropriate.

Provides technical assistance to national organizations, other Federal agencies, and State, local, and community agencies and groups.

Budget and Staff Projections

Early budget estimates are for a start up budget in FY 1980 of \$500,000 to hire a staff of six persons. In Fiscal Year, 1981, during which implementation of the White House Conference on Families recommendations will be undertaken, a staff of up to 12 persons is projected, with a budget of \$900,000.

The COFO organizations regard this new Office as an important first step in the effort to make government policy-makers more aware of the impact of their actions on families. Accordingly, COFO will continue to monitor closely the legal and political developments concerning this important new Office.

Domestic Violence Legislation: Committee Report

On November 13, 1979, the House Education and Labor Committee published its report on the Domestic Violence Prevention and Services Act, H.R. 2977, (Report No. 95-613).

H.R. 2977 authorizes \$65 million over three years to stimulate efforts by state, local public and private non-profit agencies to prevent domestic violence and assist victims and dependents of victims of domestic violence. The bill was reported out by the full committee by a voice vote.

In this report, the committee reiterated its belief that "it is important that local projects serve the needs of the entire family beset by violence, including the children and the abuser. Indeed, services should be available to support the rehabilitation of families that wish to remain intact." The committee noted a number of programs around the country that serve the entire family of the abused spouse including ones in Knoxville, Tennessee; Suffolk County, New York; New Orleans, Louisiana; and Baltimore, Maryland.

Further, the committee cited evidence that related the abuse of children, the abuse of spouses and violence done to elderly parents. And concluded, therefore, "that services to the different victims of violent behavior occurring in families need not be separated artificially and coordination of these efforts and their resources should be encouraged wherever possible."

The bill was passed overwhelmingly by the House on December 12, 1979, and relatively quick action is expected in the Senate early in 1980.

The committee report may be obtained from the House Education and Labor Committee, Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20515.

White House Conference for Families: Wingspread Conference

In an effort to help prepare appointed WHCF State Coordinators to deal with potential conflict and controversy, the WHCF Coalition and the Institute for Group Pluralism and Group Diversity sponsored a three day workshop entitled: Families and Social Policy: Building Consensus and Reducing Conflict.

The workshop was designed for state coordinators and was sponsored in cooperation with WHCF staff and the Johnson Foundation. Twenty state coordinators attended, plus members of the WHCF's National Advisory Committee and the WHCF staff. The workshop was held at Wingspread, the home of the Johnson Foundation, on November 1-3, 1979.

While emphasizing the variety of life styles, issues and ideas, the workshop leaders stressed the wisdom of building a consensus and managing conflict in order to encourage a cohesive "family movement."

Guest speakers included Carol Stack of the Duke University Center for the Study of Family and the State and Irving Levine from the Institute. Smaller group sessions focused on Ethnicity and the Family, Religion, Families from Traditional to New Life Styles, and Coalition Building.

HEW Adolescent Pregnancy Program

A new budget for Fiscal Year 1981 has been approved by the Carter Administration for \$17.5 million to fund the Adolescent Pregnancy Program. This is much less than had been expected. HEW requested a budget of \$40 million. The Office of Management and Budget did not find that HEW had justified a need for the larger amount. The Congress has been very conservative in its funding of human services programs, and is unlikely to go above the \$17.5 million.

The deadline for grant applications for Fiscal Year 1980 has been set at March 14, 1980. Guidelines for these applications were published in the December 12, 1979 Federal Register.

Mississippi	March 8, 1980
Missouri	Regional hearings--no dates.
Montana	Regional hearings, Feb-Mar.
Nebraska	March 8, 1980
New Hampshire	4 Reg. forums--no dates; State Conf:Mar.
New York	Albany (SUNY) Jan 12; Ithaca (Cornell) Jan 19; Stony Brook (SUNY) Jan 20; New York (Fordham) Jan 27; Buffalo (SUNY) Feb 2.
North Carolina	News Media-Telephone Survey Jan. 1980.
North Dakota	8 reg. workshops. Feb 2 & Feb 9, 1980
Ohio	88 County Meetings, Jan 23 & 26. Mar. 15 State-wide meeting.
Oklahoma	Dec. 11-12, 1979
Oregon	Feb. 16, 1980
Pennsylvania	4 Reg. Conf.:Feb 19, 21, 26, 28.
South Carolina	County Conferences March 7, 1980
South Dakota	Nov. 15-16, 1979
Tennessee	Feb. 29-Mar. 1, 1980
Texas	5 Reg. Conf. Feb 25-March 7, 1980.
Utah	March 24-25, 1980
Virginia	Nov 13-14, 1979
Washington	Late Feb/Mar
West Virginia	March 12-14, 1980
Wisconsin	March 16-18, 1980
Wyoming	Feb. 25-26, 1980

fecting families. It will be deeply involved in implementing those recommendations that are generated by the White House Conference."

The President addressed the historic neglect of families in this country among policy-makers, and reinforced his campaign message of three years ago by noting: "the lack of an explicit conscious concern for how government policies and activities affect families." He also recalled his earlier statement, "...a 'non-policy toward families has the same consequences of an 'anti-family' policy."

Emphasizing the importance to families of a partnership of the government and private sectors, President Carter described a true partnership as "one which involves government at all levels, private enterprise and unselfish volunteers."

The Official HEW implementation document states that the newly established office has been designated by HEW Secretary Harris "to be located within the Administration of Children, Youth and Families. The programmatic scope of the Office is intended to be OHDS-wide (Office of Human Development Services) but it will also provide advice to the Secretary on the broad range of Departmental policy issues which concern and affect family."

President Carter Establishes First Office for Families in U.S. History

The Carter Administration organized the first White House Conference on Families. Now a second step has been taken of equal, if not more importance.

Reaffirming his personal commitment to families as the "foundation of a healthy and vibrant society," President Carter on October 15 announced the creation within HEW of the first Office for Families in U.S. history.

In a speech before the National Conference of Catholic Charities in Kansas City, Mo., the President stated: "I am...announcing today that Health, Education and Welfare Secretary Patricia Harris is creating an Office for Families within HEW. This office, first of its kind, will provide the focal point for the development of federal policies and programs af-

The establishment of this Office for Families within the Administration for Children, Youth and Families (ACYF) occurs at a time when a new Commissioner-Designate of ACYF, Jack Calhoun, is about to take office. His credentials indicate a history of family-focused concern, including his most recent public service in the employment of the State of Massachusetts as its Commissioner of Youth Services.

Recognizing his importance and the significance of the new Office for Families, executives and Washington staffs of the COFO member organizations met with Mr. Calhoun on November 26, 1979. During that meeting, the COFO representatives urged the Commissioner to give the new Office for Families the funding, focus and staff necessary to make it effective in the bureaucracy. Mr. Calhoun indicated his strong interest and support for this Office, and urged COFO representatives to keep him advised of their concerns. All who attended found the meeting to be productive.

'Feminism and the Family: Changes for the 80's as expressed by Betty Friedan in a New York Times Magazine article on November 18, 1979.

The editors of COFO found the above article to be of considerable interest and importance. We wanted to call it to the attention of our readers. In this article Betty Friedan who helped found the feminist movement twenty years ago, explores the fact that "Feminists at the end of the 1970's are moving to a new frontier: the family." She sees conflicts within society today as resulting from the "way the family and workplace have been structured in America."

She is concerned that while the outcomes of American society are focused on industrialization and technology, "...the United States is one of the few advanced nations with no national policy of leaves for maternity, paternity or parenting, no national policy encouraging flexible working

arrangements, and part-time and shared employment, and no national policy to provide child care for those who need it."

She explores the demands of the workplace and the family and the fact that home and job can no longer be regarded as separate worlds. "More and more companies are finding that 'flextime' actually increases productivity and profits while reducing absenteeism." She says that society-wide changes will occur, however, when men as well as women demand them.

She concludes saying that despite the rhetoric "the family has never ranked high on the American political and economic agenda except as a unit to which to sell things... Now that women are beginning to enter the work place, the nation's agenda may begin truly to include the family. Not just because women insist...but because men have a new stake in the family."



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