

SPECIAL MESSAGE.

OF

GOVERNOR ELMER L. ANDERSEN,

MARCH 4, 1963

*@ 6 p.*

To the Members of the Legislature:

One of Minnesota's prime concerns is for a priceless human resource, its growing number of senior citizens, age 65 and over.

They represent no less than 10.4 per cent of our population, and as a result Minnesota ranks eleventh across the nation in numbers of senior citizens.

Just as the population of older people is growing in Minnesota, so the average life-span is stretching.

In 1900 the average Minnesotan lived only 40 years, an age which is virtually on the threshold of achievement for many of us today.

In 1962 the span extended to 72.

No longer is the two-generation family over 65 rare. Happily an eightieth birthday is no longer unusual, and the newspapers of our state record that the 100-year age mark is being attained with some regularity in community after community.

The growing number of older citizens provides two-fold testimony that Minnesota's future is bright.

FIRST, longer living Minnesotans testify to our invigorating climate, superb recreational advantages and excellent medical care, and serve as living inducements to others to come to this State to work and build their futures.

SECOND, our older people serve as great moral and intellectual ballast, providing matchless experience, stability, maturity and wisdom gleaned from useful living.

It would be tragic if this great resource were not more fully utilized. The task of building a better Minnesota cannot be conceded solely to the young. We need the benefit of those who have gone before to shape the new dimensions of the future.

Minnesota has benefited from a sound program for the Aging. The state program is based on two principles, that problems should be solved on the local community level and that the older citizen should be allowed to live as independently as possible.

These are wise guidelines. Within this framework much has been done to meet our responsibility to those who are older.

The responsibility has been met with savings to the State, and resultant benefits to our people. I am thinking particularly of one county where an ailing elderly couple faced the possibility of entering a nursing home at state expense, but who were provided more individual attention and personal care in their home by means of a homemaker program undertaken with the county public health nursing service.

The result: In human terms which is always the first concern, the couple received dutiful care in the familiar surroundings of their own home. In economic terms, consideration of which in these days of rising costs is also a factor, a net saving of \$2,400 per individual was effected.

Since the Legislature created the Governor's Citizens Council on Aging, much has been accomplished within the framework of individual independence and state-local action.

There are 33 local or county committees on aging. Operation of day centers, planning of leisure time activities, organization of "Golden Age Clubs" and surveys of community resources, including housing needs, constitute a well-balanced program for older citizens.

The value of this program can be best seen on a local scale. The Aitkin County Committee on Aging has pointed out that since the opening of its day center, there have been no commitments of elderly persons to state institutions.

Minnesota must move ahead to further implement the program in view of the growing numbers of older people. To meet these needs, I recommend the following program which adheres closely to my proposed budget:

1. HOUSING. The housing needs of the elderly are many and varied. There is a significant lack of appropriate housing for the older citizen, particularly in the low income group.

While urban areas have taken great steps to provide for public housing, the rural counties represent the highest incidence of older citizens (about 17percent).

The power to establish public housing within Minnesota is limited to cities, villages and boroughs. Therefore no county can provide public housing to meet the needs of its low income older citizens, many of whom have most inadequate housing.

Therefore I recommend remedial legislation to include counties in the definition of the Municipal and Housing Redevelopment Act to enable many counties to provide local communities with the potential for meeting the housing needs of their low income elderly.

The Department of Health is continuing to give meaningful guidance and assistance to those who are planning and constructing nursing homes in our state. It further has a concern and interest in the development and distribution of boarding care homes, as well, which include homes for the aged. It is interesting to note that presently there are 13,584 nursing home beds in Minnesota, that there are presently 3.97 beds per thousand, and that the Public Health Service recommends 4 per thousand.

2. MEDICAL CARE FOR THE AGED. Minnesotans can be proud of the fact that our state program of Old Age Assistance allows senior citizens under Old Age Assistance to receive full medical care as it is required.

The fact that many first applications for Old Age Assistance stem from a medical emergency or prolonged illness leads to the conclusion that the Medical Assistance Act (Kerr-Mills) could cover the cost of such emergencies and illnesses, allowing older citizens to remain otherwise independent.

As this legislation could provide for some 30 per cent of our older citizens, I urge the Legislature to adopt legislation to implement this program in Minnesota.

3. OLD AGE ASSISTANCE. To comply with the new Federal regulation, legislative action is required which would exempt up to \$30 per month of earned income in determining the grant of an old age assistance recipient. The ceiling on Old Age Assistance should be removed. It serves no purpose. Where aid above the present ceiling is necessary it is at total county cost instead of having State and Federal sharing.

4. TAX RELIEF. Tax relief for the older citizen is a recurring concern. The Housing Committee of the Governor's Citizens Council on Aging has given detailed study to the problem.

The Council has recommended that modification of the laws for the 55-year-old homeowner was advisable and recommended the following, which I wholeheartedly endorse and urge you to consider:

The age 55 homeowner could receive, upon application, help in paying one-half of his homestead tax assessment, not to exceed \$200 in any one year. That the county Treasurer accumulate the total of these unpaid taxes and be reimbursed upon application to the state from a fund accumulated for this purpose from other tax sources.

**5. PROFESSIONAL STAFF.** In my budget an appropriation was made for \$118,681 for the activities of the Council on Aging and the staff on Aging for the biennium.

This request includes the present staff of the Consultant on Aging, the present two regional coordinators serving the western part of the State. It includes an appropriation for two additional coordinators, one to be obtained in 1963-64 to serve the northeast area where there is increasing activity in behalf of the aged, and a coordinator to be retained in 1964-65 for the south-east area. It included an assistant to the Consultant as well as increased allocation for Council expense.

It must be restated that the present budget of \$23,000 does not reflect actual expenses of the aging program. The Department of Welfare now provides for one stenographer, all communication expenses and \$1,000 of the Governor's Conference expenses.

Minnesota is indebted to Mrs. Walter Walker, the Chairman of the Governor's Citizens Council on Aging, as well as to the chairmen of the Council subcommittees who pay for many expenses of Council activities.

Quite obviously if anyone in State Government has served "above and beyond the call of duty," it is Mrs. Walker, who has filled the post of Consultant on Aging at no cost to the State. The fact that she has voluntarily assumed the responsibilities of the consultant on an interim basis has enabled the present staff to be retained for the balance of the year.

As Mrs. Walker can well testify, the funds requested are urgently necessary to keep the vital Aging program going. She has written to me, "The limitation imposed by lack of personnel to meet the demands has resulted in programs that can treat symptoms rather than causes.

"Programs are developed on an emergency basis...The rapidly increasing demands from the local communities and counties for consultation ...are not presently being met, since the total of 33 committees presently endeavoring to develop program and study needs require all the time of the personnel presently available. The addition of two regional coordinators, plus an administrative assistant, will enable the program on aging to make optimum use of existing resources and to develop maximum local responsibility."

She concludes, "If our State is truly committed, as it indicates that it is, to the conviction that we wish our elderly citizens to live as independently as possible, if it is truly committed to the concept that the problems and needs of the aged can best be identified and met in his local community, then the program and planning as presented here can provide the means by which the local community's planning...can be implemented vigorously and soundly."

I urge your consideration of these recommendations.