

# THE OLYMPIC NEWS

The Monthly Newsletter of the Olympic View Community Church of the Brethren  
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**October 2007**

## Living the Word

by Ken Miller Rieman

Few of the outreach efforts of Olympic View have required more hard work or sacrifice than the building of Northaven Retirement Community, and few of our efforts have made such a difference in the daily lives of so many people. Quality, affordable senior housing is something people of all stripes and colors care about. But building Northaven took more than Olympic View. It is a shining example of what can happen when people of faith partner with the government to invest in the common good. The public funds disbursed by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) matched the capital raised by the church and continue to provide a subsidy that makes it possible for Northaven to serve low-income residents.

Sadly, proposed funding cuts by the administration and the mounting costs of the war are placing these much needed subsidies in jeopardy. That means that we who have a vested interest in the ongoing mission of Northaven need to make our voices heard. But how can we hope to make a difference? Who would listen to us?

William Minnix Jr., President of the American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging (AAHSA) represents Northaven and similar non-profit interests in Washington D.C. He describes the shape of the bipartisan conversation on this issue in our Capitol and has some very specific suggestions for how we, together, can have a much stronger voice with the people who need to hear it.

Northaven Director, Darlene Storti and I will be organizing a response to this crisis in the coming months. If you share our concern, I hope you'll read the article below, with its suggestions for action, and keep a lookout for organizing events still to be scheduled.

### It's About Political Will

Excerpts from an article by William Minnix Jr., Sept. 13, 2007.

How do we stake political will? Yesterday, I had the privilege of attending an event co-chaired by Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) and Senate Steering and Outreach Committee Chair Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.). A dozen other Senators made an appearance. Governor Kathleen Sebelius of Kansas was a featured guest. Forty or so ag-

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ing-services leaders were there. The hour-long meeting was billed as an "idea exchange about our common priorities for the 110th Congress, as we work toward our shared goal of making quality long-term care more accessible and affordable for our seniors."

Senators Kennedy (D-Mass.) and Rockefeller (D-W. Va.), the Senators with the most seasoned experience on health and aging issues, reflected their deep interest in values-driven care: quality, access and respect for paid and family caregivers. Senator Rockefeller reminded all of the Pepper Commission, on which he served. He reflected on the strong sentiment a generation ago for an integrated plan for long-term care that was funded as an insurable circumstance in life. He lamented that little progress has been made on that agenda.

Senator Kennedy's CLASS Act, recently introduced in the Senate, was mentioned several times by Senators and participants alike as a potential model for insuring for disability, allowing the benefits to follow the person — not the provider. The CLASS Act is consistent with AAHSA's thinking about the transformation needed in the financing of long-term care.

All who spoke voiced a commitment to lead health care reform, but Senator Kennedy pointed out that not one presidential candidate has included long-term care as part of that reform. Yet, several commented that health care be reformed without long-term care

Another poignant reflection came from Senator Lincoln (D-Ark.). A relative newcomer, Lincoln is an impressive voice for our issues. She has recently authored bills related to elder justice and chronic care integration. But her most moving comments were about her personal experiences growing up in Arkansas "within walking distance of both sets of grandparents." She went on to say, "I didn't know at age 15 that I was a caregiver, but I was..." In fact, several who spoke talked of their personal experiences with elders who needed care — especially at home and the role facilities play in caregiving.

Governor Sebelius reported on an aggressive commitment to home-and-community-based services in her state. She reported on success in terms of choice, quality of life and cost control related to Medicaid. She stressed the pressure on states to adequately fund Medicaid on constricted budgets in addition to education, roads and other state responsibilities.

An overarching topic was the fact that these issues have been discussed for many years. Too much talk, too little action. The tone was a blend of hand wringing with urgent concern about addressing an emerging crisis for society in a national climate of war. One Senator said that the President threatened to veto spending bills on the children's insurance program, yet is asking for 200 billion dollars more for the war.

[I shared with them] that AAHSA has a plan to finance long-term care, that we must support caregivers because staffing is the best proxy for quality and that is it time to finally solve these issues — and that politically, they are indeed solvable.

Karyne Jones, CEO of one of our housing members, *The National Caucus and Center on Black Aged*, reminded the group about the importance of affordable housing and the issue of racial and socio-economic disparities to be addressed in reform.

I also stressed to them that we are not-for-profit. I told them many of your organizations have been in their communities for generations. You represent religious, fraternal, civic, government and locally-sponsored organizations who have stood the test of time. I reminded them that we can help them with the health and long-term care policy agenda that is so desperately needed.

As the hour came to a close, Senator Stabenow concluded with an encouraging comment: "it's about the political will it will take to make these changes..."

These Senators want our help in generating political will. How do we stake it? You'll be hear-

