The Politics of Aging, Diversity and Disability: Can America Create a Healthy Longevity?

By Fernando Torres-Gil, MSW PhD

UCLA Professor Emeritus of Social Welfare and Public Policy
Director, UCLA Center for Policy Research on Aging
Co-Chair, UCLA Academic Program Review Committee
Adjunct Professor, USC School of Gerontology

With special acknowledgment to:
UCLA Undergrad Major in Cognitive Science and Communication,
Ms. Siqi Wang,
for invaluable research assistance and conceptual contributions.

Introduction
- A pleasure and honor to "gerontologize" this illustrious organization
- Welcome to my home area (Salinas and the Monterey Bay)
- Much like the Central Valley but with an ocean
- The Speaker's background—implicit/explicit bias, opinions and values
How might this title have relevance to your work?

- What is it about today’s contemporary events that ties meaning and urgency to:
  - Addressing social, health, and mental health in an aging and diverse nation
  - Examples of current policy/politics debates
  - The “silly”—when is one too old to be President?
  - The Serious—what type of social safety net should we have, if any for
    - A society with serious social, economic, retirement, and health disparities

---

**The Demographic Realities of an Aging and Diverse Nation**
Addressing Impediments and Opportunities

• For health, mental health and long term care.
• How might the realities of politics and policy create tensions yet perhaps give hope and opportunities, now and in the future?
• ...

Historical Background

• A little historical background might help – “the Way Back Machine”.
  • “We’ve been through this before”
  • From the “good ole days” prior to the Great depression, to the 20th century crisis and social transformation
  • Wars, geopolitical challenges, environmental
  • Shifting public narratives – deserving and undeserving.
  • The unique nature of the USA Constitutional form of government
  • Hard to get things done, enables all views (however divisive), yet
  • We have always found a solution/redress/escape from chaos
  • Health and Mental health pendulum swings over the last 70 years
“isms”: Ageism, Ableism, Sexism, etc.

- What can overarch differences and divisions?
- The great equalizers
  - long term care shortcomings, homelessness and public insecurities — we will all get old and seek health and retirement security
- Who will care for us and the inevitable need for foreign workers?

Caregiving—Long Term care—End of life

- The rise of “>85 years and the increased reliance on caregiving.
- ...

Note: data extracted from American Community’s 1-Year Estimates Subject Table. The data was calculated using the following formula: population aged 65+ years old with any disability = estimated civilian noninstitutionalized population * percentage of people with any disability in the 65+ years old age group. The results were rounded to the nearest integer. The 2020 data was not available because only 5-Year Estimates Table was released for that year.
Caregiving—Long Term care—End of life

- The rise of >85 years and the increased reliance on caregiving.
- The myths and realities of long term care and caregiving.
- The “Forgotten Middle”—Medicaid/IHHS—Self-Pay-LTC insurance
- When no one is available for your ADLs

“The Perfect Storm”

- When demographics, public narratives, self-interest come together.
- Baby Boomers and Millennials: at the Vacuities of aging.
- Al Jan Poo—the prophet—Biden Administration support
- The demise of the Long term Care work force.
- Aging, Long Term Care and End-of Life are non-partisan issues

The California Master Plan on Aging

——Hopes and Opportunities

- Building on Washington State—State funded LTC and
  - The latest Federal effort: the CLASS Act
- California: Aging, Majority-Minority, Innovative
- THE MPA Process, Recommendations, Achievements
- Equity Lens, Intergenerational, Aging AND Disability
Back to the Question:
“Can America Create a Healthy Longevity?”

- Answer: “Yes, But…..”
- Refining the question: What constitutes “healthy” and “Longevity”
- Life Span, Health Span, Mental Health, SES, Zip Code
- Addressing Social, Health/Mental Health, Economic Inequalities
- Redressing the “isms”
- YOUR ROLE IN ALL THIS

Optimism and the Next 20 Years
—When it all comes together

- Rough seas but safe harbors
- Constitutional Democracy and American Pendulums
- It’s your world now

References


References


