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EDITORIAL

Glenn F. McConnell
Lieutenant Governor

Contact: Hank Page
hankpage@scstatehouse.gov
803-734-2080

Making the Aging Network Efficient and Accountable

Our state is facing the greatest public health challenge of our lifetime. As many South Carolinians who have worked all of their lives, paid taxes, and been actively involved in their communities are now reaching retirement, they are also at risk of losing everything they've worked so hard to earn.

So how do you go about planning to care for the over 900,000 seniors we have right now and the million more headed our way over the next 15 years? Government did not anticipate today's skyrocketing health care costs, people living longer, or people outliving their resources. The reality is that there is not enough public money to serve the over 900,000 seniors we now have in South Carolina, and federal and state laws fall short in helping us determine how to apply these precious dollars. It's clear to me that we have to modernize a system that has not been changed for years; we have to plan and coordinate services so they are easier to access; and we have to create public-private partnerships to provide the safety net our seniors and vulnerable adults deserve.

First and foremost, I plan to continue upgrading the Office on Aging, assisting the network in their outreach efforts, speaking to civic and service clubs, and developing a strategic aging plan for our state. Office on Aging staff members are working hard to develop more efficient office processes, implement a new procedures manual, improve access to pertinent information on our website, create outreach opportunities, and provide training on-line, among many other things. We've also got to find a way to transport the good ideas and best practices I have witnessed as I've traveled across the state to other areas that need assistance. I have instructed the Office on Aging staff to give flexibility when we can, streamline the system where we can, but at all times remain accountable to the taxpayers of this state. That is where I will not bend.

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I am convinced that home and community-based services are the key to helping keep people independent, healthy, and happy at home, for as long as possible. More importantly, these services prevent the migration to more expensive care. So, as government revenue streams diminish while our senior population continues to increase, we must look for additional funding sources or volunteers to provide for these critical programs.

With the help of community leaders across South Carolina, we can find creative ways to build partnerships to help fill in the gaps. One of the things the federal government got right is that they believe senior services are best delivered at the local level. One size does not fit all for the many unique areas of our state, so it is crucial that we help develop plans, prioritize resources, and reach out to leaders in communities throughout South Carolina for help. Perhaps the power of these types of partnerships was best illustrated when Leadership South Carolina's Class of 2013 chose to highlight senior hunger in our state. You may not realize it, but South Carolina ranks in the top 10 states for senior hunger. Leadership South Carolina's class project was to bring awareness to this issue, and they answered the call by raising more than \$100,000, which included a Public Service Announcement campaign in addition to providing two Honda minivans for use in underprivileged areas in South Carolina that needed help transporting seniors and meals to some of our state's most vulnerable adults. This partnership with Leadership South Carolina was a step in the right direction, and it was a prime example of how various other groups around the state can also become involved to make a difference.

What it all boils down to is this: providing care for our seniors and our exploding senior population will require that we do things differently. Albert Einstein once said that doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results is insanity.

Making the aging network efficient and expanding its capacity to care for up to two million seniors and vulnerable adults over the next 15 years is not going to be easy and it certainly will not happen overnight. Let's approach this challenge as a team. We have a chance to make a big difference and can accomplish far more if we work together.

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