

SPEECH COVER SHEET

MARGARET DIXON

DCN: 016

EVENT

Description: Inaugural Address

Theme: "Shaping Our Future"

Key Participants:

Sponsor: Convention Activities

Date: 5/22/96

Time: 1:00 p.m.

Location: Denver

AUDIENCE

Size/Demographics: 5000 AARP members, volunteers and convention delegates

Comments:

SPEECH

Length/Format: 15 - 20 minute TelePrompTer speech

Subject: "Shaping Our Future"

Comments:

CONTACTS

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SPEECH SYNOPSIS

Length/Format: 15 - 20 minutes TelePrompTer speech

Purpose: Inaugural address as AARP president

Synopsis: Introduction: The name of the frontier settlement, Firstview, Colorado, is used as a metaphor to set the tone for the theme of having a new vision to carry AARP into the 21st Century.

Body: The similarities between the frontier situation facing people who settled in the Rocky Mountain west, and the frontier situation facing AARP today are contrasted: Their frontier was geographic; AARP's is demographic. Their frontier stemmed from the westward expansion of a young nation. AARP's frontier is born of the demographic expansion of an aging nation.

The need for vision starts with how we view ourselves. This is a kind of "mirror test" for AARP members because AARP members reflect what the future will be. As Ethel Percy Andrus said, "...the future is ours...it is in part made by us." AARP members create a "first view" of aging for potential AARP members like the Baby Boomers and for young people such as grandchildren.

Conclusion: The concept of "old" is like the concepts of "truth" and "beauty" — in the eye of the beholder. The need to be a good "first view" of aging for people will be a guiding vision for the new AARP president, to encourage others to accept the goal of "being a metaphor" for how people should grow older in America today. It is in the way that older Americans can help "**shape our future**" -- the future of AARP, the future of the Boomers, and the future of families.

04/25/05 11:26 PM

**Margaret Dixon
President-Elect
American Association of Retired Persons**

“Shaping Our Future”

**1996 Inaugural Address
Biennial Convention
Denver, CO
May 22, 1996, 1:00 p.m.**

Out on the prairie a couple of hundred miles east of here is a place called Firstview, Colorado. It sounds like an unlikely name — and it is. But the early frontier explorers gave it that name for a very good reason.

If you're traveling westward across the flatlands of the Midwest, ultimately you reach a special place here in Colorado where you first can see the Rocky Mountains. It's an incredible experience for the eyes and for the soul — especially after so long a journey westward.

You watch the mountains jump skyward from the smooth prairie floor like a prayer on its way to the heavens. It's not surprising, then, that when early settlers caught their first view of Pikes Peak and the Front Range, it signaled for them the dawning of new possibilities for building a life here in the Rocky Mountain West.

I know how they must have felt, for, at this moment, in my first official role as President, I have a first view. My view is of thousands of AARP members and friends gathered together all in one place. And it signals for me the dawning of new possibilities at AARP for the 21st Century.

I know that, for many of you, this is your first view of an AARP convention. Others may be seasoned conventioners. To each of you, I want to extend a very special welcome. We hope you will take advantage of the informative sessions, the technology center, the exhibits, and the entertainment. Above all, we want you to share the vision of AARP.

Those courageous people who crossed the frontier were not just making a casual journey. To the contrary, they had a vision about what they would encounter.

They traveled westward across the frontier to the high country here because of opportunity and the promise of creating better lives for themselves and for their families. At AARP, we, too, have a vision. We, too, want to help create better lives for people as they grow older.

Toward that goal, our Board of Directors envisions a future where **“AARP excels as a dynamic presence in every community, shaping and enriching the experience of aging for each member and for society.”**

We — like our predecessors — are on the frontier.

- Their frontier was geographic.
- Ours is more demographic.

- Their frontier was filled with unique opportunities for people to work together and to create new partnerships because of the westward expansion of a young nation.
- Our frontier is filled with unique opportunities for AARP to create new partnerships because of the unprecedented expansion of an aging population. The explorers of the old west were profoundly grateful for the pathfinders who preceded them. So it is with me. As I embark on my term as President of AARP, I am profoundly grateful to Gene Lehrmann for his creative leadership as President. I am fortunate to have his continued counsel and advice during the next two years.

Gene has eloquently emphasized the importance of work in achieving economic security. And work continues to be an important issue for today and for the future.

Our convention theme is “Creating New Frontiers.” It reminds us of the challenges that the settlers faced as they conquered the Rocky Mountain West. Further, it tells us that AARP is facing new frontiers as we approach the turn of the century.

We have arrived at a time in which we at AARP are carefully examining ourselves — who we are, what we stand for, and where we are heading.

This is AARP’s opportunity for discovery — discovery of opportunities for self-awareness, for growth, and for partnerships that we may never have thought possible before — especially as we welcome the first wave of the Baby Boomer generation to our membership.

We are inviting the Boomers to join us, and, as we do so, we examine ourselves. We try to see ourselves from two perspectives: First, how do the Boomers see us? And second, how do we see ourselves? Those two perspectives can be quite different, you know.

When we look in a mirror, we see a subjective view. We often see ourselves as we wish we could be, but not necessarily as others see us.

So, we ask ourselves: How do those young people who are approaching the 50-year landmark see AARP members? Do they see in us their own futures? Do we reflect for them a future that they would like to share?

Just like the mirror, we show how things may look one day. We reflect how growing older looks, how it feels, and how people behave as they grow older.

I would dare to guess that there are countless Boomers who want to be like their parents as they age, because they see in their parents:

- individuals who care about health care and have healthy lifestyles,
- individuals who have had opportunities to work and have worked hard, or are still working,
- individuals who have planned for their own retirement,
- individuals who are informed consumers, and,
- individuals who want to help improve the lives of others.

This is why I am saying that we AARP members are the mirror that reflects the future. We shape our future because we show how tomorrow can be.

Our founder, Dr. Ethel Percy Andrus, wrote: “...**whatever many may say about the future, it is ours — not only that it may happen to us, but it is in part made by us. Each generation either brings new values by bringing vitality to our ideals or allows them, through indifference, to decay.**”

Let me assure you that we have an awesome responsibility, as Dr. Andrus suggested to us. You and I are the mirror to tomorrow. What you and I do now — in the present — defines how other generations will deal with aging and with the many issues in society that are influenced by the experience of aging.

I’m thinking about the future of Social Security. I’m thinking about the future of Medicare. I’m thinking about the future of pensions and people’s life savings. I’m thinking about the future of retirement.

We must continue working to strengthen AARP for today’s members, and we must accept our responsibility to shape our future. And this means we must look carefully at the Baby Boomer generation. Specifically, we invite the Boomers, with their new perspectives, to partner with us, and help address the issues on which a bright future depends.

To me, the future of AARP looks very different from the past — especially when you consider the impact of 76 million Boomers. We AARP members are setting the tone, setting the agenda, and setting the vision for tomorrow.

As Ethel Percy Andrus said, our future is made by each of us. We shape the future. If we are truly intent on “**shaping and enriching the experience of aging,**” as our AARP vision says, then it must begin with you and me. Let it begin here. Let it begin now.

In the video you’ve just seen, I shared with all of you a personal experience which helped me see myself in a new light — an experience that made me

begin to get the idea about how I reflect the future, and how all of us can shape the future of AARP.

You heard the story about my grandson's comment. He told me that he didn't perceive of me as a quote — unquote "old" person. I shared this story because I feel it can teach all of us to think about how we communicate to others about aging.

I also feel it can teach all of us to think about what choices we make in what AARP does in these last few years of the 20th Century. How we think of ourselves is the key. How we present ourselves shapes other people's perceptions about us — and about aging.

And, here's where the real significance of shaping our future begins to become apparent. From my grandson's view, I am not an "old" person. Maybe this word — "old" — has similar properties to "truth" and "beauty." Maybe it's all in the eye of the beholder. Think about that.

I have learned one very important fact: I shape the future for my grandson, and for other people's grandsons and granddaughters. I show my grandsons and my granddaughters the way, just like you show the way to those who look at you.

Let us accept what "shaping our future" really means. It certainly means we need to be mindful of how we shape the future of AARP by who we are and what we do.

I suggest that we need to apply our wisdom and our perspective whenever AARP sets goals, takes actions, educates, and provides services.

And, we, as individuals, need to remember one thing: We are the "first view" of an enriching experience of aging — especially to those who look up to us. Whether we're parents or grandparents or great-grandparents, we shape the future for those who look up to us.

We shape the future because of how we present ourselves to them and to the world. This is all about being a good role model and setting a good example, of course. But, there's a lot more to it than that.

We need to accept the responsibility of being a metaphor that works for all generations — for our own, for the Boomers, and also for our grandchildren's generation.

We need to shape the future of Social Security and Medicare by working hard to keep these programs alive and strong, so they will be there when people need them in the 21st Century.

We need to emphasize economic security for people as they grow older, and ensure that older people can continue working if they so choose, regardless of their age. We must re-examine the entire idea of retirement.

We need to shape our future as consumers — aware of our importance as a growing consumer group of older Americans.

We can shape the future of our communities by dedicating ourselves to making them stronger. And we can make AARP's presence in our communities dynamic and dependable for every member. This is our vision.

You know, a vision is a wonderful thing. If we have a clear vision, we always know where we're going. But having that vision — no matter how clear or how well defined it is — is never enough to get us there. We have to take action. What's the proverb say? Even a journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.

And we can all take that step together, today. Whether we realize it or not, we are shaping our future by who we are and what we stand for. And we will go on shaping our future, each in our own ways. I think Dr. Andrus offered some pretty sound advice on how to do that.

She wrote: "Do what you can, with what you have, where you are today." The eloquence of her words lies in their simplicity. But the power of her words lives within each of us.

My fervent desire as President of AARP is to bring these perspectives to the attention of Americans of all ages. As I stand before you now and catch my first view of our future, I invite you to experience it with me and join me.

- Join me in accepting and embracing the responsibility we have to shape our future.
- Join me in facing any challenge that stands in our way.
- Join me in portraying a new vision of what it means to grow older in America today.

And together we will channel the power and the spirit that live within all of us to build a brighter tomorrow. But, we must not wait for the future — we must shape it.

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