
Opening Remarks

These opening remarks were made by Max Sherman, Dean of the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, Austin, Texas, on May 6, 1996, as an introduction to the proceedings of the Symposium "Medicare: Advancing Towards the 21st Century."

It is a rare occurrence for the venue of a meeting to be as closely associated with the purpose and topic of that meeting as when the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library and the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs host the symposium celebrating the 30th anniversary of Medicare. We were deeply honored to be invited by the Health Care Financing Administration to be the site for the day-long symposium on May 6. We are grateful for the generous grants from the Commonwealth Fund, the Kaiser Foundation, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, which made the event possible. We appreciate the dedication and support of the HCFA staff and the impressive roster of symposium speakers and panelists. In the following pages, you will find summaries of the contributions made by the speakers.

Lyndon Johnson's vision for America was that of the Great Society, a society with equitable access to the Nation's resources for all. This vision was an expansion of the New Deal of the 1930s; but where the New Deal had been reactive to the national disaster of the Depression, the Great Society aimed at being proactive in providing a government-guaranteed safety net for all. In the mid-1960s, many of us were planning or embarking on our professional careers; we were thinking about the families we were going to have, we were mapping our

lives. Medicare was something worthwhile for our parents, something that one day, in what seemed like a very distant future, would also benefit us. What many failed to realize then, and what is so often missing from the public dialogue, especially the inter-generational dialogue, is the fact that young and middle-aged Americans draw an immediate and substantial benefit from Medicare. Medicare assured us that we would never have to face the heart-wrenching dilemma of paying for our kids' education or our parents' health and nursing care; of having to support our parents, impoverished by illness, at the expense of our young families.

Our country seems to be struggling at the moment with defining the role of government: How much government should there be in our lives? Should government be the guarantor of a democratic, law-based society and provider of last resort, or should government seek to be a partner in a civil society and use its influence in shaping everybody's future? President Johnson adhered to a simple mission for government: Good government is what provides the greatest good to the greatest number of people. While a program like Medicare obviously fits this postulate, Johnson saw clearly that for this program, and all others, to continue to play their role in the lives of all Americans, they could not be allowed to be static; instead, after the initial launch and fine-tuning, it was necessary to re-evaluate and determine relevancy, effectiveness, and purpose. Maybe the notion of "re-inventing government" is not as new as many now seem to think.

The initial formulation of public policy and the on-going monitoring of that policy require people capable of seeing the big picture while focusing on every detail.

The author is with the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs. The opinions expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA).

These processes require people who are trained and educated in a multidisciplinary institution, people to whom the complexities of society in general, and government in particular, are a source of stimulation, not frustration. The government that Lyndon Johnson knew, both in Washington and back here in Texas, was run, by and large, by professionals with law degrees, many of those earned from law schools in the Northeast. While still in the White House, the late President developed a plan for a multidisciplinary school, in his home

State of Texas, to prepare promising young graduate students for careers in the public sector. The Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs is the realization of that plan.

So while we celebrate the 30th anniversary of Medicare, recognizing that the program will continue to evolve in the light of changes in social and fiscal realities, we are proud to be the institution that trains the next generation of policy and decision-makers who will ultimately guarantee the survival of the program into the 21st century.