



DELLINGER FIRST TO RELEASE PROPOSALS TO ASSIST NC SENIORS

CANDIDATE FOR LT. GOVERNOR SEES “AGE QUAKE” AS **A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY** FOR SENIORS AND YOUNGER GENERATIONS

BACKS RATING SYSTEM FOR ADULT CARE HOMES, LONG TERM CARE INSURANCE TAX CREDIT, EXERCISE AND VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS

(3/2/07) Wilmington – Hampton Dellinger, Democratic candidate for Lieutenant Governor, released proposals today focusing on the health, safety, and community life of older North Carolinians. As part of the unveiling, Dellinger joined Wilmington senior leader Betty Ann Sanders-Sourwine for a tour of the Adult Day Services center she operates.

According to UNC’s Institute on Aging, the number of North Carolinians over 65 is expected to *double* between 2000 and 2030. Dellinger sees the explosive growth of the state’s aging population as one of the most pressing issues facing North Carolina today, and believes it creates a responsibility and an opportunity for the state.

“We must do more to care for North Carolina seniors by focusing on their health, safety, and community lives,” Dellinger said. **“I see the benefits of inter-generational interactions daily as my children are blessed to have all of their grandparents nearby, independent, and eager to share their love, advice...and ice cream. Better care for our surging senior population is not just a government responsibility, it is an opportunity to benefit from their experience, wisdom, and vitality.”**

Dellinger is the first candidate for Lieutenant Governor to set forth detailed policies to assist North Carolina seniors. **“Voters want candidates with the values and vision to recognize serious challenges, and the fortitude to take and articulate clear positions on how to meet them,”** Dellinger said. **“I hope all candidates for statewide office in 2008 will follow my lead and offer positive, substantive proposals on how the state can better serve seniors and all North Carolinians.”**

Dellinger’s proposals to assist older North Carolinians include:

- Support for a consumer-friendly rating system that would provide seniors and their families with easy-to-understand assessments of adult care homes across the state;
- Tax credits for citizens who purchase long-term care insurance, a cost-effective way to help seniors -- especially those with lower incomes -- obtain coverage;

- Increasing funding for home-based and community-based health services through the Home and Community Care Block Grant, Housing Trust Fund, and Community Alternative Program for Disabled Adults, thus giving more seniors the option to remain in their neighborhoods;
- Improving the safety of adult care homes for those seniors who are in institutional care, by ensuring the appropriate placement of individuals with mental illness;
- Ways to better protect seniors from frauds, scams, and elder abuse;
- Preparing for future health care needs by urging care providers' participation in the NC New Organizational Vision Award (NC NOVA) program, which gives a special licensure to providers meeting high standards for the training and support of their direct care workers;
- Encouraging opportunities for active seniors to volunteer in public schools, where students could benefit from their experience and guidance and seniors could remain involved with their communities; and
- Having state agencies -- such as the Division of Motor Vehicles at the time of license renewal -- provide exercise information to seniors while also increasing support for senior wellness centers and local safe group exercise activities.

Hampton Dellinger's full plan -- **A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY: Proposals to Assist North Carolina Seniors** -- is attached.

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A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY
Proposals to Assist North Carolina Seniors
Hampton Dellinger
Democrat for Lieutenant Governor

March 2007

Introduction

Meeting the needs of our rapidly growing senior population is among the most important challenges facing North Carolina in coming years. These needs will be felt statewide, and particularly in our western and coastal counties where retirees are increasingly drawn. I believe that caring for North Carolina's aging population is not just our responsibility, it is an opportunity to benefit from their experience, wisdom, vitality, and commitment.

I see the benefits of inter-generational interactions everyday as my children -- ages 6 and 9 -- are blessed to have all four of their grandparents nearby, independent, and eager to share their love, advice...and ice cream.

Statewide, the population of seniors 65 and over increased by 21 percent between 1990 and 2000 -- a rate of growth well above the national average -- and North Carolina's senior population is projected to *double* between 2000 and 2030. Within the next few years, millions more baby boomers will be taking well-deserved retirement, entrusting the rest of us with care of the neighborhoods and communities they helped create and sustain even as they stay active themselves. The best way we can repay our debt to them for blessing us with this rich inheritance is to support them, just as they have supported us throughout our lives.

As Lieutenant Governor, I will make the health, safety, and community lives of North Carolina's seniors a top state government priority.

I. Health

Promoting the good health of our aging population is critical. It is an investment that pays off financially by helping elder North Carolinians maintain their health long-term and avoid costly intensive care. And, most importantly, it is the right thing to do. Seniors should be entitled to remain in their homes, close to their families and part of their communities. I strongly support health initiatives that strengthen home health services. These initiatives are particularly important for African-American seniors, whose proportion of North Carolina's senior population is double the national average and who generally suffer more years of ill health.

A) Long-Term Care Insurance Tax Credit

In 1998, the legislature enacted an individual income tax credit for the purchase of long-term care insurance, a credit which helps seniors with the cost of daily activities at home, respite care, home health care, and other necessities. Such insurance makes it easier for seniors to invest in their own futures, and is the “ounce of prevention” that saves our state millions of dollars in Medicaid. Two-thirds of our \$1.8 billion in Medicaid expenditures for the elderly go directly to long-term care, and a 2002 study by the Health Insurance Association of America projected savings of \$5,000 per policy holder for Medicaid, and \$1,600 for Medicare.

In 2003, the General Assembly let this smart investment expire. North Carolina needs to re-instate the tax credit as soon as possible, and I support current legislative initiatives to do so. We need to reward seniors who invest in their long-term health, especially low income seniors who would otherwise struggle to obtain coverage.

B) Improving Home and Community-Based Health Services

Alongside the long-term care tax credit, I support improvements in the home and community-based health services which allow seniors to keep control over their lives, and continue living in the homes and communities they built. But as the need for these services grows, so does the waiting list. We must do more.

That is why I support enhancing the Home and Community Care Block Grant, which supports the simple but crucial services -- like a home-delivered meal (which, in reality, often supplies ½ or more of the day’s nutrition for a home-bound senior), adult day care, and respite services for family caregivers -- that help older adults who choose to stay in their homes. These cost-effective services are absolutely essential for the people who rely on them. Seventy two percent (72%) of seniors receiving Block Grant services are unable to manage on their own, and half of recipients live alone and are low-income.

Just as much as they need good health care, seniors must have safe, accessible, affordable housing. The Housing Trust Fund, which addresses that very need, has paid huge dividends for the state and for the program’s participants, and as Lieutenant Governor I will continue to support the Fund. After all, why should anyone have to leave the home they’ve maintained for 50 years just because there are cracks in the chimney? The Trust Fund helps pay for emergency repairs, and it also helps finance new construction of safe, affordable senior housing. Increasing funding for the Housing Trust Fund should be a top budget priority.

A third part in this home-and-community health program is the Community Alternatives Program for Disabled Adults (CAP/DA), which helps

older and disabled adults remain in their homes when they might otherwise require institutionalization. Unfortunately, current Medicaid policies and practices undercut CAP/DA's effectiveness. I look forward to working with the legislature and the Commission on Aging to enhance CAP/DA services and put control where it most belongs: with seniors and their families.

C) Planning Ahead

In addition to addressing current needs, *we need to start planning ahead to meet tomorrow's challenges*. North Carolina will need an additional 20,000 nurse aides over the next five years just to meet the minimal needs of our state's seniors. My education proposals -- including raising the mandatory school age to 17 or beyond -- will help ensure that the young people get the basic education needed to serve seniors well. And the NC New Organizational Vision Award (NC NOVA) - - a special licensing program for organizations that strongly support their direct care workforce -- has been successful in pilot programs over the past year. I would expand the program further, making it easier for employers to participate and benefit from improvements in the training, pay, and retention of their direct care workers. Since professionals in many other fields receive continuing training to keep up with job-related developments, we should not ask for anything less for the people directly responsible for the care of our seniors.

And just as we take advantage of technology in so many other areas of life, we must do more to turn its power towards improving senior care. To take just one example, advancements in technology make it easier to telemonitor and care for seniors in rural areas, where *half* of North Carolina seniors live but traditional senior services do not always reach. Technology also makes it easier for us to provide a uniform screening mechanism for seniors across the state, and better distribute information and assistance. NC Care Link, a new web-based software system, helps connect seniors, people with disabilities, and their families to appropriate long-term services, simplifying and improving the selection of care providers. Such programs are only in the pilot stage. State leaders need to be prepared to utilize them statewide to the extent they improve the ability of medical providers to monitor and respond to seniors' health needs, especially those seniors who live in rural areas or far from direct medical care.

We can -- and should -- also take simple, proactive steps to improve seniors' health. Researchers at UNC-Wilmington have pioneered a Memory Assessment and Research Services ("MARS"), which could lead to an innovative new kind of "memory check up" that would help seniors monitor their *mental* health as well as physical health. As Lieutenant Governor, I will work with health care providers and insurers to make sure that effective intelligence and mental health protocols are available to patients statewide.

With regards to physical health, only 25% of North Carolina seniors get the amount of exercise that doctors recommend (30 minutes of walking, five

times a week), ranking us in the bottom ten of all states. We can do more to address this issue, by providing exercise information and suggestions to seniors renewing their driver's licenses, for example, or by encouraging senior wellness centers and safe group exercise activities.

Helping seniors stay active not only gives them the energy to keep up with their grandchildren and enjoy all that our communities have to offer, it also wards off some of the leading causes of death for seniors, such as heart disease and chronic respiratory disease (the number one and number four killers of North Carolinians 65 and older).

II. Safety

A) Safe and Adequate Institutional Care

As a complement to NC NOVA, I support the creation of an easily understood star rating system for adult care homes, so that seniors and their caregivers can make informed choices about long-term care options. This system would draw together basic information about safety, cost, and services so that the market for adult care services can be easily understood by all of those who participate. Consumers will benefit from the increased flow of transparent information, while providers of adult care will benefit as increased consumer confidence, and a better understanding of the market, lead more people to feel secure in seeking such services. At the same time, we must give providers adequate financial resources to serve low-income seniors well, clear guidance on how to attain high-rated certificates, and an efficient and fair grading system.

We must do more to ensure the safety and wellness of seniors who choose to live in nursing homes or other institutional care. First, we need to commit ourselves to eradicating elder abuse and neglect in nursing homes. Second, we must address the differing needs of seniors and those with a mental illness. As facilities for the mentally ill have become increasingly scarce, the number of people with mental illness in North Carolina rest homes has risen by 15% in the past four years alone. This does a disservice to the mentally ill – who need specialized care – and to seniors, who unfortunately are sometimes endangered.

Good institutional care lets seniors live active lives that keep them involved with their communities. That's why I support innovative new nursing home programs like the Eden Alternative, the Green House, and Eldershire which help seniors maintain active, independent, involved lives including pets, children, and meaningful activities.

B) Scams and Elder Abuse

When I was in the Attorney General's office I fought against predatory lenders, scam artists, and perpetrators of elder abuse. Such predators continue to prey on our aging population – most fraud victims are 50 and older, and some victims lose their entire life savings to scams and identity theft. Across America, aggressive, illegal telemarketers take advantage of seniors' courteousness to bully them into frauds and scams which cost \$14 *billion* dollars annually. These unscrupulous telemarketers sometimes claim to be a long-lost relative, or prey on seniors' need for health care and help at home, and then shame or intimidate their victims into silence.

In addition to prosecuting these frauds to the fullest extent of the law, we can do more to help seniors protect themselves. For example, North Carolina law allows people to voluntarily freeze their own credit so that it cannot be abused if a social security number falls into the wrong hands. Educational programs like the Attorney General's 'Scam Jams' spread information to combat frauds, and I would like to see such programs be fully resourced. We need to make it easier for seniors to take advantage of such effective, straightforward, and affordable protections.

I support the recommendation of the Study Commission on Aging that North Carolina's adult protective services statutes -- including guardianship provisions -- need updating to ensure that our laws are focused on the safety and functional capabilities of seniors.

In terms of deterring violent crime against seniors, continued and enhanced training for prosecutors and judges on North Carolina's criminal elder abuse and neglect statutes is critical to ensure that the laws are not only tough on paper but also result in tough sentences for guilty perpetrators.

III. Community Life

My goal as Lieutenant Governor is to help create inclusive communities that allow seniors to be healthy, safe, and involved in the world they helped create and shape. Along with addressing our seniors' health and safety needs, we owe it to ourselves to take advantage of their commitment and wisdom.

The struggles younger adults and their children confront today, North Carolina's seniors went through yesterday. We sell ourselves and our children short if we do not try to benefit from the lessons our seniors learned by making it easy for them to stay involved in the community. A recent report -- *Reward of Giving: An In-depth Study of Older Adults' Volunteer Experiences in Urban Elementary Schools* -- confirms what we already knew to be true: senior citizens take on community service and demonstrate deep commitment to the volunteer programs they choose to participate in.

Many of our school districts -- from Thomasville to Chapel Hill -- have established formal programs connecting seniors and students. Thousands upon thousands of senior volunteers have participated in these programs, and hundreds of thousands of students have benefited from their contributions. By increasing school volunteer opportunities for seniors, we could truly make education into the life-long enterprise I believe it should be.

Grandparents play an increasingly important role not just in volunteering in their communities, but in maintaining their own families. North Carolina has over 100,000 multi-generational households, one of the highest percentages in the nation. And half of all grandparents in North Carolina who live with their grandchildren say that they have primary responsibility for their grandchildren's care. State policies must take into account this changing family structure, and tailor services accordingly. For example, we need to reach out to grandparents who have primary child-rearing responsibilities as part of identifying and enrolling children in the Child Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

While many seniors have an increasing responsibility for child-rearing, at the same time one in five North Carolinians has cared for a senior in the previous month, well above the national average. But we must make that care easier both for seniors and for their caregivers. I support initiatives like Project C.A.R.E. which help families with caregiving and respite. The federal grant is set to end in June 2007 however, and we must seek alternative funding sources.

We all owe our seniors a debt for creating the wonderful state we are lucky to call home. As Lieutenant Governor, I will do my best to repay the debt by championing their health, safety, and community involvement.

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