

**Bush, No Show at the White House Conference On Aging,
News Brief, December 14, 2005**

BUSH BECOMES FIRST SITTING PRESIDENT TO SKIP WHCOA

WASHINGTON -- Even though the subjects of Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid are high on President Bush's radar screen, he elects to not attend the White House Conference on Aging, a once-a-decade event in which thousands of seniors and aging-related program administrators from around the nation are gathered to discuss policy initiatives affecting America's growing population of seniors.

Bush's decision not to attend the WHCoA or to even address conference delegates by way of video teleconferencing technology makes him the first sitting U.S. president in the conference's half-century history to miss the event.

It was no accident the president chose not to make a physical appearance at the conference. Sources close to the administration say the president was advised by the Secret Service to avoid the event because of security concerns. That does not, however, explain the president's decision not to address the WHCoA delegates using video teleconferencing technology.

Activist delegates at the conference say Bush avoided the event because he didn't want to deal with seniors' heated -- often hostile -- responses to the administration's aging-related policy decisions.

Still, President Bush was not about to let the week slip by without at least a token acknowledgement of seniors.

Even as the WHCoA began its second full day at the Marriott Wardman Park Hotel in Washington, DC, a White House motorcade traveled across the Potomac River to visit a high-end gated retirement community in suburban Virginia. That's where President Bush met with residents and staff at Greenspring Village to talk about the government's new Medicare drug benefit. "It's a good deal for our seniors, and so one of the reasons we have come today is to encourage people to see what is available in the new law," the president told his small audience.

The White House team handpicked the seniors who met with President Bush at the closed meeting.

For more about this and other important developments from the WHCoA, be sure to read the upcoming edition of Aging News Alert , your leading source of information for and about developments affecting America's seniors.

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ACTIVIST DELEGATES AT WHCOA HARSHLY CRITICAL OF EVENT

WASHINGTON -- A large group of activist delegates attending the 2005 White House Conference on Aging are making no secret about their anger and frustration over the lack of opportunity for open debate about issues they believe should be discussed but are not included on the conference's three-day agenda.

At issue for the 50 delegates, who also are members of the Alliance for Retired Americans, is the WHCoA Policy Committee's refusal to allow any non-agenda resolutions to be publicly discussed and debated at the conference.

"We may live in a democracy, but this is the anti-democracy administration," says Alliance President George Kourpias. He also notes this is the first WHCoA in which a sitting U.S. president has not addressed the delegates.

"The public input process for this conference died once it reached the White House, and what emerged is nothing short of a sham," says Kourpias. "You'd think the president who envisioned the Medicare drug benefit to be the center of his compassionate conservatism, or made privatizing Social Security the pillar of his domestic agenda, would care to hear from real seniors about real issues of concern."

The activist delegates are urging:

- * That any efforts to alter the fundamental structure of Social Security be rejected.
- * That the Medicare drug benefit (Part D) be amended so that affordable and accessible drugs be available to all seniors.
- * That the enrollment period for the new Medicare Part D be extended without penalty to Dec. 31, 2006.
- * That vital programs such as Meals on Wheels have funding to meet the needs of a growing senior population.
- * That pension funds live up to their obligations to provide for retirees.