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ASSEMBLY TAXATION COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING
THURSDAY, MARCH 20, 2003
3:30 P.M. – CASHMAN FIELD

GOOD AFTERNOON, MR. CHAIRMAN AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS.
FOR THE RECORD MY NAME IS LARRY SPITLER AND I'M THE ASSOCIATE
STATE DIRECTOR FOR ADVOCACY AT AARP NEVADA.

AARP IS A NONPROFIT, NONPARTISAN MEMBERSHIP ORGANIZATION
DEDICATED TO MAKING LIFE BETTER FOR PEOPLE 50 AND OVER. WE
PROVIDE INFORMATION AND RESOURCES; ENGAGE IN LEGISLATIVE,
REGULATORY AND LEGAL ADVOCACY; ASSIST MEMBERS IN SERVING
THEIR COMMUNITIES; AND OFFER A WIDE RANGE OF UNIQUE BENEFITS,
SPECIAL PRODUCTS, AND SERVICES FOR OUR MEMBERS. IN NEVADA
AARP HAS OVER 258,000 MEMBERS.

WE'RE HERE TODAY TO PUT OUR TRUST IN YOUR HANDS AS YOU
BALANCE THE NEEDS OF THE STATE WITH A CITIZEN'S ABILITY TO FUND
THE NEEDS THAT YOU HAVE IDENTIFIED. WE REALIZE THAT THE TASK
BEFORE YOU IS MONUMENTAL IN MANY RESPECTS.

HOWEVER, LET ME SHARE WITH YOU SOME THINGS THAT THE
GOVERNOR HAS PROPOSED IN HIS BUDGET THAT ARE CRITICAL TO YOUR
CONSTITUENTS. WE SPECIFICALLY WANT TO ADDRESS PRESCRIPTION
DRUGS AND MEDICAID.

MANY SENIORS ARE LEFT SUFFERING AS THE RESULT OF THE
INABILITY TO PURCHASE NEEDED MEDICATION. AS THE FEDERAL
GOVERNMENT STRUGGLES YEAR AFTER YEAR TO ADDRESS THE NEED OF
A PRESCRIPTION COMPONENT TO MEDICARE, SENIORS ARE LEFT IN THE
DARK – YOU SEE, MEDICARE LETS THEM GO TO THE DOCTOR TO LEARN
WHAT IS WRONG BUT, IN MANY CASES, SENIORS CAN'T GET BETTER

BECAUSE THEY CAN'T AFFORD THE PRESCRIBED MEDICATION. AARP CONTINUES TO WORK ON THAT ISSUE AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL.

AND, UNTIL THE 2001 LEGISLATURE, IN A BIPARTISAN MANNER, ADDRESSED PRESCRIPTION NEEDS FOR QUALIFIED SENIORS 62 YEARS AND OLDER, A SIMILAR PROBLEM EXISTED HERE. NOW, THE GOVERNOR HAS SEEN FIRST HAND THE BENEFITS OF THAT PROGRAM AND HAS RECOMMENDED A GENERAL FUND CONTRIBUTION TO THE TOBACCO-SETTLEMENT FUNDED PROGRAM AND, IF APPROVED, WILL NOW ALMOST DOUBLE THE NUMBER OF SENIORS IT WILL SERVE. THAT IS RECOGNITION OF THE NEED AND COURAGE TO STEP TO THE PLATE TO FACE THE ISSUE HEAD ON. WE SUPPORT THE GOVERNOR'S EFFORTS IN THIS AREA.

THE GOVERNOR ALSO COMPASSIONATELY FACED THE ISSUE OF MEDICAID. WE SUPPORT AND APPLAUD HIS COURAGE TO FUND THE DIVISION OF AGING BUDGET ENHANCEMENTS THAT INCREASED WAIVERS FOR CHIP RECIPIENTS, ELDER PROTECTION, GROUP CARE AND PERSONAL ASSISTANT SERVICES. THESE SERVICES ARE CRITICAL IN ALLOWING SENIORS TO AGE WITH DIGNITY AND IN THEIR OWN HOMES! IN THE LONG TERM THE STATE WILL FIND THE GOVERNOR'S APPROACH FAR LESS EXPENSIVE THAN TRADITIONAL NURSING HOME PLACEMENTS.

THESE ARE JUST TWO OF THE CRITICAL AREAS THAT AARP STRONGLY SUPPORTS IN THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET. YOU KNOW THE GOVERNOR IS REALLY FACED WITH A "DARNED IF YOU DO....DARNED IF YOU DON'T" PROPOSITION. EVERYONE IN THE WORLD IS SECOND GUESSING HIM. HE'S BEEN CRITICIZED, BUT I THINK HE TOOK THE HARD ROAD AND SAID, "I WON'T PASS THIS PROBLEM ON TO FUTURE GENERATIONS OF CITIZENS OR ELECTED OFFICIALS."

SO WHERE IS AARP NOW WITH THE GOVERNOR'S PROPOSALS? WE THINK THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS IS WORKING QUITE WELL. WE'VE WATCHED AS THE COMMITTEES ON FINANCE AND WAYS AND MEANS ARE

DOING THEIR JOB AND EVALUATING THE BUDGET. AND, WE'VE WATCHED AND APPRECIATED THE PUBLIC HEARINGS THAT THE COMMITTEES ON TAXATION HAVE HELD AS THEY PREPARE TO FUND THE NEEDS IDENTIFIED BY THE GOVERNOR AND REVIEWED BY THE MONEY COMMITTEES. WHEN THEY COMPLETE THEIR REVIEW, IT WILL BE TIME TO SECURE THE RESOURCES NECESSARY TO FUND IT. THE CITIZENS OF THE STATE HAVE ELECTED ALL OF YOU TO MAKE THAT DECISION. IN SOME INSTANCES IT MIGHT NOT BE POPULAR, BUT THE BOTTOM LINE FALLS INTO ADEQUATELY FUNDING THE OPERATION OF STATE GOVERNMENT BASED ON YOUR CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE STATE'S NEEDS.

WHEN YOU MAKE THAT DECISION, AARP ASKS THAT YOU REMEMBER THAT THE GOVERNOR'S PROPOSALS, IN MOST INSTANCES, JUST KEEP UP WITH NEVADA'S EXPLOSIVE GROWTH. WE'VE NOTED THAT EDUCATION, MEDICAID AND PRISONS ALONE ARE DRIVING MAJOR COSTS IN THE BUDGET. NO GOVERNOR COULD HAVE IGNORED THAT FACT. NONE OF WHAT THE GOVERNOR HAS PROPOSED IS "WINDOW DRESSING" OR MOVES NEVADA TO THE TOP OF ANY NATIONAL STATISTIC - AND, I OFTEN THINK..."WOULDN'T IT BE WONDERFUL TO BE NUMBER ONE IN AT LEAST ONE OF THOSE CATEGORIES?"

AARP SUPPORTS FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY AND VIEWS TAXES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF FIVE BROAD PRINCIPLES:

1. EQUITY
2. ECONOMIC NEUTRALITY
3. ADMINISTRATIVE EFFICIENCY
4. REVENUE POTENTIAL - STABLE AND RELIABLE PUBLIC POLICIES AND PROGRAMS REQUIRE AN ADEQUATE AND CONSISTENT SOURCE OF REVENUE
5. AND, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC GOALS

WE ASK THAT YOU CONSIDER THOSE PRINCIPLES AS YOU CONTINUE
YOUR REVIEW AND DELIBERATIONS. WE THANK YOU FOR THE
OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE THESE THOUGHTS WITH YOU TODAY.