MY VISION FOR RURAL HEALTH IN THE 1990S

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NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA
I AM PLEASED TO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE A PART OF THE NATIONAL RURAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION'S ANNUAL CONFERENCE.

I AM SORRY I WAS NOT ABLE TO ACCEPT YOUR INVITATION TO SPEAK TO THE CONFERENCE IN WASHINGTON TWO YEARS AGO. ACTUALLY I WOULD PREFER TO BE IN NEW ORLEANS.
WHEN I ACCEPTED YOUR INVITATION LAST FALL I FELT AN INTELLECTUAL BOND TO YOUR CAUSE, BUT DID NOT KNOW A LOT ABOUT IT.

SINCE THAT TIME I HAVE WALKED THE LONELY ROADS OF APPALACHIA, I HAVE VISITED SICK CHILDREN, VISITED WITH RURAL ADULTS, AND TALKED TO WORRIED AND OVERWHELMED HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS.
I HAVE SEEN THE FACE OF RURAL POVERTY, I HAVE SEEN THE GROWING LOSE OF THE CAPACITY AND LOSS OF PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN LOCAL HEALTH CARE DELIVERY.

MY INTELLECTUAL BOND WITH YOU AND YOUR RURAL CONSTITUENCY IS NOW AN EMOTIONAL BOND, AS WELL.
I NOW FEEL AN EMOTIONAL BOND WITH YOU AND YOUR RURAL CONSTITUENCY. WHILE I AM APPALLED AT THE LEVEL OF NEED FOR ALL HUMAN SERVICES IN OUR RURAL AREAS, MY HEART IS WARMED AT THE STRENGTH, COURAGE, AND HOPE OF OUR RURAL CITIZENS.

I HAVE KNOWN WHAT NRHA DOES FOR SOME TIME. NOW I KNOW WHY IN A VERY PERSONAL WAY.
IN THE LAST YEAR NRHA HAS BLOOMED INTO MATURITY.

YOU HAVE BECOME A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH AS AN INTEREST GROUP PROMOTING THE HEALTH AND WELL BEING OF RURAL PEOPLE.
YOU HAVE COME A LONG WAY FROM THE LITTLE BAND OF FEDERALLY ASSISTED RURAL PROJECTS OF THE MID-1970'S.

YOU HAVE ALL THE ELEMENTS OF A MATURE ORGANIZATION. 

FOUNDING FATHERS: DAVID FENTON, MIKE SAMUELS, JOHN CLARK, JOHN LACASE.
YOU EVEN HAVE YOUR MARTYRS: LOU GORIN, FOR WHOM YOUR HIGHEST AWARD IS NAMED, TERRY REILLY, FOR WHOM THE MEMORIAL LECTURE IS NAMED.

A VERY RICH HISTORY INDEED WITH A CLEAR TREND OF DIVERSIFICATION TO INCLUDE ALL CONCERNED GROUPS.
YOU MERGED WITH THE AMERICAN RURAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION TO
ADD AN ACADEMIC AND RESEARCH COMPONENT AND THE JOURNAL
OF RURAL HEALTH, TO SHARE KNOWLEDGE.

I COULD CONTINUE,
BUT THE POINT IS THAT YOU HAVE ACHIEVED A DIVERSITY THAT MIRRORS THE RURAL AMERICA FOR WHICH YOU ARE ADVOCATES.

THE COALITION YOU HAVE BUILT CUTS ACROSS MORE NARROWLY FOCUSED INSTITUTIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS.
MUCH OF THE CREDIT FOR YOUR SUCCESS MUST GO TO YOUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BOB VAN HOOK.

WHEN HE ASSUMED HIS POSITION AS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR THIS ORGANIZATION WAS ON THE CRITICAL LIST. HE BROUGHT YOU OUT OF THE ICU, YOU HAVE RECOVERED AND ARE POST REHABILITATION.
ON YOUR BEHALF HE HAS BUILT NRHA INTO A STABLE BROAD-BASED ORGANIZATION OF NEARLY 2000 INDIVIDUAL AND INSTITUTIONAL MEMBERS AND A WELL DIVERSIFIED BUDGET OF OVER $1.5 MILLION.
THIS STRONG COALITION OF PRIMARY CARE CENTERS, HOSPITALS, CLINICIANS, ACADEMICS, RESEARCHERS, AND COMMUNITY PEOPLE HAS SUCCESSFULLY ENGAGED THE POLITICAL PROCESS.
YOUR FRIENDS INCLUDE, AMONG OTHERS, SENATORS HARKEN, 
AND AS WELL AS 
BYRD, HOLLINGS, DURENBEGEER, DOLE, PRESIDENT CARTER, AND 
VICE PRESIDENT MONDALE.
YOUR ALLIES INCLUDE THE ACADEMY OF FAMILY PHYSICIANS, THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF NURSE PRACTITIONERS, AND THE AMERICAN HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION, AND NOW ME.
YOUR CONFERENCE THEME "EMPOWERED TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE"
"REFLECTS THE CAPACITY YOU AS THE NATIONAL RURAL HEALTH
ASSOCIATION HAVE BUILT OVER THE LAST THIRTEEN YEARS.

YOU ARE EMPOWERED, INDEED!
LAST YEARS SENATE APPROPRIATION LABOR, HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES SUB-COMMITTEE REPORT WAS CALLED " THE RURAL CHRISTMAS TREE ".

AND YOU HAVE CONSISTENTLY SCORED WELL FOR RURAL HEALTH INTERESTS IN THE PAST THREE BUDGET RECONCILIATION BILLS.
YOU HAVE INFLUENCED THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A FEDERAL OFFICE OF RURAL HEALTH POLICY AND ARE FORTUNATE TO NOW HAVE JEFF HUMAN AS A STRONG VOICE FOR RURAL HEALTH INSIDE THE BUREAUCRACY.

WITH EMPOWERMENT COMES THE STEWARDSHIP AND ALL THE RESPONSIBILITIES THAT GO WITH IT.
HOW CAN YOU BEST SERVE RURAL AMERICA?

SO OFTEN MATURE MOVEMENTS PERPETUATE SELF SERVING POLICIES AND FORGET THAT IT IS NOT THEMSELVES BUT A CONSTITUENCY THAT MUST BE SERVED.

CLEARLY YOU HAVE DONE A GREAT DEAL TO FOCUS ATTENTION ON THE HEALTH NEEDS OF THE RURAL POPULATION.
YOUR CONTINUING LEADERSHIP TASK IS TO FORMULATE AND REFORMULATE A COLLECTIVE VISION FOR THE HEALTH OF RURAL AMERICA.

MY ASSIGNMENT FOR TODAY IS TO THINK ALOUD WHAT THAT VISION LOOKS LIKE FOR THE 1990'S.

ADDRESS)

IN THINKING ABOUT THIS SPEECH I WONDERED, WHAT CAN I CONTRIBUTE?
I WAS BORN AND GREW UP IN NEW YORK CITY AND LIVED MOST OF MY ADULT LIFE IN URBAN PHILADELPHIA.

AS YOU KNOW, HOWEVER, RURAL IS A STATE OF MIND AND BESIDES MY HEART WAS ALWAYS IN RURAL NEW HAMPSHIRE. AMERICAS’ SOUL HAS DEEP RURAL ROOTS.
LIKE JEFFERSONS' DREAM OF A NATION OF SMALL FARMERS, AND THE LURE OF THE 1/4 SECTION OF LAND (160 ACRES) THAT BROUGHT OUR LANDLESS PEASANT ANCESTORS FROM EUROPE,

OR THE DREAM OF "40 ACRES AND A MULE" THAT ENTICED SLAVES RECENTLY FREED TO HOMESTEAD AFTER THE CIVIL WAR.
RURAL AMERICA PROVIDES THE BREAD FOR OUR TABLES, THE FUEL FOR OUR CARS, AND THE WOOD FOR OUR HOMES, AND INCREASINGLY, THE SMALL MANUFACTURED PARTS THAT MAKE MOST THINGS GO.

PERHAPS THE MOST IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION OF RURAL AMERICA, HOWEVER, IS ITS VALUES OF RESPECT FOR OUR PRECIOUS FARM LAND, AND AN UNQUESTIONED BELIEF IN THE FUTURE.
THE AMERICAN DREAM AND THESE HEADY, SOMEWHAT ROMANTIC 
THOUGHTS DON’T SQUARE WITH MUCH OF WHAT I SEE AS THE 
REALITY OF MODERN RURAL AMERICA.

BUT THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THESE THOUGHTS DO BIND 
TOGETHER THOSE WHO COULD HELP CHANGE IT FOR THE BETTER.
I WILL FIRST PREACH TO THE CHOIR AND OUTLINE WHAT I BELIEVE ARE SOME MAJOR RURAL ISSUES, SOME IMMEDIATE ACTION STEPS THAT COULD BE TAKEN.

AND THEN CONCLUDE WITH SOME BROADER VISIONS OF DESIRABLE CHANGE.
A MAJOR ISSUE AND THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND THE CURRENT SUPPORT FOR RURAL HEALTH IS THE THREAT TO THE CONTINUED EXISTENCE OF SMALL RURAL HOSPITALS.

THE CLOSURE OF A RURAL HOSPITAL MARKS MORE THAN A LOSS OF HEALTH CARE CAPACITY FOR THE COMMUNITY.