

## **MY CENSORED ARTICLES**

# **GEMA G. HERNÁNDEZ**

**TELLING THE TRUTH**

**MADE THE FORMER SECRETARY OF THE  
FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF ELDER AFFAIRS  
A "CONTROVERSIAL" ADVOCATE**

Here is a selection of her incisive articles in her struggle to defend the rights elders.  
A biased press, going away from investigating journalism, prefers not to challenge the  
untouchables, and has rejected these articles.

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## **IS THERE A CHOICE FOR ELDERS?**

Gema G. Hernández

President Bush has made things very clear to us for the next elections. We either chose to live in a country where individual rights are paramount or we continue to live in a country where individual rights are being lost on a day-to-day basis.

Since early in his presidency we have seen a conflict between what is being said to the public and what is being done. While the message used in his re election campaign has been to reduce the role of government and to advocate for a smaller government. The realities are different. Since President Bush took over, government is now interfering in our most personal decisions from when to die, to when to be born, from when not to retire to what we should do with our spare time.

The message to reduce the role of government has been lost and the reality is a more intrusive government, a more dogmatic government. This is what is emerging right in front of our eyes. If we like the interference of government in our personal affairs, then President Bush is the right choice, and while we are choosing him, please don't forget to dispose of your living will because the end of your life in the case of a vegetative stage will be determined by the court and not by you.

President Bush wants smaller government, and this campaign message has definitely been fulfilled. Unfortunately for us taxpayers the reduction in the government workforce and the devaluing of government workers are allowing companies like Halliburton to overbill the taxpayers for the work they do now for us. It also has allowed some community based agencies to use their funding to "rewards" their CEOs instead of feeding the elders.

The privatization of a number of government functions has generated financial anomalies that were not here before, anomalies that government workers are afraid to audit for fear they will lose their jobs. The alternative to government control in the private sector has allowed private corporations to create monopolies with public funds without accountability and control. Again, if you think Halliburton is doing a great job in Iraq and the privatization of most of the federal and state functions are the way to save money, Bush is your man.

We have a clear choice for president when it comes to protecting and honoring Social Security. We either choose a president that is going to honor Social Security

for generations to come or choose a president that is going to change the Social Security system as soon as he gets his second term in office. If you think President Bush is not going to change the retirement age or the benefits, think again.

In 1983, President Reagan changed Social Security without a lot of publicity or no publicity at all. It increased the normal retirement age from 65 to 67 and reduced early retirement benefits payable at 62 from 80% to 70%. The message is there when Alan Greenspan suggested that to deal with the irresponsible and huge federal deficit this president has created the nation should look at cutting the benefits of future retirees.

The president's response was that he would not do it to the present retirees or those who are close to retirement, but with future retirees is another issue. He failed to clarify how close you need to be to retirement to be "grandfathered" to the existing Social Security program. As usual, the devil is in this detail because close to retirement could be one year into the future, meaning that all those baby boomers that are counting on their social security monthly check will not see one.

The fact that our President has been followed Reagan's economic ideas almost to the last detail support the assumption that Social Security will also be modernized in such a way that the new normal retirement age will be 70 and early retirement benefits could be payable at age 65 at 60% benefit.

I am not rich so that I don't need social security. I am counting on Social Security to be part of my financial strategy to survive in old age without becoming indigent. I don't have 5, 10, 15 or more years to invest and learn a new social security system and play by the new rules this government will be creating for me. If you are in your forties fifties or sixties this is your only chance to protect what you have earned. The sad part is that the individuals that are proposing these changes to Social Security do not need the income to survive and they cannot relate to the common person.

We either choose a president and a vice president that understand the need to fight for the creation of jobs in America or a president and vice president who believe in helping corporations generate more profit. Sometimes the creation of profit comes with taking our jobs to other countries regardless of the effect this has on us, and on our families. Cheap labor increases profits, no health care benefit to the workers increases profits and offering workers no pension plans also increase profits. Weakening the protection of workers in a variety of areas, including the

reconsideration of the Family Leave Act also increases profits at the expense of the family, the same family unit we are trying to strengthen,

The choice is clear; do we want to protect corporations? Do we want to allow HMOs to control individual choices of medication and medical care? Do we want to be forced to work until we die because there is no Social Security and financial safety net to protect us in old age? Do we want families to carry the burden of caregiving with no Government help? Do we want government to run our private lives? If you answer yes to all the above you will re-elect President Bush but if you answer no, John Kerry is your candidate.

The choice is clear. It is time to bring another leader to the White House. It is time to make sure the dubious plan about records, appointments, services, educational degrees, deficits and lucrative deals end. For some of us in the baby boom generation this is the most important election in our lives; it will determine if our old age will be filled with dignity and control or whether it will be the scariest years of our existence.

## **A Dubious Plan For Elders Is Coming To Your Senior Center**

By Gema G. Hernández

As an advocate for the elders I am concerned with activities that misinform, confuse and use the goodwill and trusting nature of elders for political purpose. It is one thing to put political advertisements on TV targeting seniors and paid by a political party, but it is another thing to use taxpayers' dollars to put together political rallies at Senior Centers that favor one politician versus another or that promote pharmaceutical products.

The latest brainchild of the Bush administration is the conversion of the Elder Day at the Capital into the Ambassador for a Day program. I designed the original event in my capacity as Secretary of the Department of Elder Affairs in 2000. The purpose of the event was simple; bring elders to the state capital to ask for more funding. The event caught the attention of the legislature because elders from all walks of life came to the capital prepared with legislation in hand.

The group spent the day lobbying their local legislators for more equitable funding. They did this with dignity, confidence and honor. They did this in a true non-partisan and intergenerational spirit because children and individuals with disabilities were included in their request. They did it because they wanted a better life not only for them but also for their children and grandchildren.

The results were terrific, 94 million dollars in additional money was obtained in three years. A record in funding that has not been matched. What was positive and uplifting about Elder Day at the Capital has been lost with its transformation.

The new program, Ambassador for a Day, has been converted into a political rally for the Bush administration that will last two days. The program is now using Senior Centers as a way to bring credibility for a group of politicians to the eyes of elders and as a way to convey in a subtle way that Senior Centers support the message this group of pre approved politicians will be delivering to the unsuspecting elders.

Using the Senior Centers to promote the event is very similar to the direct mailing strategy used in 2002 by Jeb Bush when he mailed to thousands of elders his accomplishments for seniors with the AARP logo. For the seniors receiving the information the perception was that AARP was supporting the Governor. Now for

seniors attending or reading about the event the message is that the Florida Association of Senior Centers fully supports Viagra, the modernization of Medicare and any other message those politicians will deliver to elders.

The fact that elders are being directly targeted by name and address has also raised some concerns as to whether or not a government agency, in this case the Florida Department of Elder Affairs, is allowing its database to be used to promote a political party or pharmaceutical products.

Pfizer, the company that promotes Viagra, sponsors ambassador for a Day. In compensation for Pfizer's picking up Mr. Bob Dole's speaking fees, the pharmaceutical company has obtained an exclusive deal that allows them to market its products to 90,000 elder Floridians. The company's name and products will be prominently advertised in the official newspaper of the Department of Elder Affairs, the *Elder Update*.

This newspaper is financed by a grant from the Administration on Aging. The purpose of the grant is not to promote Viagra or any other product, but to educate and inform seniors about Medicare, Health Care and Long Term Care issues. The use of the newspaper to market products is another example of misused taxpayers' dollars.

I am intrigued by the fact that the City of Tallahassee, the entity that administers the local Senior Center, has shown no concern with the fact that its facility is being used for such a political event, especially since Senior Centers should be apolitical in their activities and message. I am also concerned that a pharmaceutical company is allowed to soft sell its products to a captive audience at the Tallahassee Senior Center when pharmaceutical companies and HMOs are not allowed to do direct marketing to seniors within a certain distance of Senior Centers.

To complicate things further the event is also co-sponsored by the Association of Senior Centers. So the violation of using a Senior Center for a political rally is now extended by default to all Senior Centers in Florida who are advertising and supporting the political rally.

To make sure the two days' event, first the pep rally and then the day at the Capitol, are well attended, the Department of Elder Affairs has scheduled many "mandatory" meetings in Tallahassee with a variety of agencies, senior groups and service providers. This way, the travel expenses for the political event can be charged to a government grant. To pay for the cost of hotels, buses, meals and

incidental expenses agencies will be allowed to divert some of the cost, if not all, from services for our frail and vulnerable people. Hotels are being booked and buses rented from as far as Miami to as close as Wakulla county.

Unless Senior Centers nationwide begin to realize the political ploy behind events like this, a similar event will be coming to a Senior Center near you. If we want our Senior Centers to maintain a non-political policy, it is up to you to make the National Association of Senior Centers provide the “Credentialed Senior Centers” the appropriate warnings. It is up to us to let our city or county officials know we don’t want our taxes supporting Senior Centers if they are going to allow those centers to become an open marketplace for pharmaceutical products.

At a time when we need to stand together to get access to “truly” affordable medication we should not be using taxpayers’ dollars to support the marketing of pharmaceutical companies. Be a true Ambassador for Aging and stop the use of our senior centers for other than their original purpose.

## **ELDER LIVING "LA VIDA LOCA"**

*What is wrong with this picture?*

By Gema G. Hernández

In the 1980s a number of newspaper articles began referring to the older generation as the Greedy Geezers. The name and the label attached to older individuals detracted from society recognizing how much elders do for their communities, their families and the nation. The contributions of our elders were ignored because of the unfortunate portrayal of elders just enjoying their lives, living "la vida loca" not caring for the needs of others.

With the help of organizations like the Older Women's League, the Association for Retired Americans, and AARP, the Greedy Geezers image began to slowly but surely change. Educational campaigns, both formal and informal, were launched to combat ageism and to present a more appropriate image of the many activities our elders provide their communities.

With a lot of work and constant reminders of how elders advocate for children, abused women, juvenile offenders, education and the environment the negative self absorbing image of elders disappeared and in its place a more positive and compassionate image of elders emerged: Elders fighting for better schools, elders teaching children, elders helping the homeless veterans and elders lending a helping hand to the less fortunate.

To combat the perception that elders were indifferent to the needs of children and other human suffering and to show that they worry not only about their needs but the needs of others, intergenerational programs were created and organizations like Generations United were born. Now, 14 years later, the image of elders as founding mothers and fathers of our society is in danger of reverting back to the Greedy Geezer days. This is happening in Florida on March 3, 2004 when hundreds of elders will come to the capital to tell legislators they don't need help. They are doing fine thank you.

The event called Ambassador for a Day is the brainchild of the Bush administration to replace the Elder Day at the Capitol. Both events have totally different meaning and objectives so therefore they should not be confused.

At a time when the President called for commitment and sacrifices; a time when the needs of the many should continue to supersede the needs of the few, elders in

Florida are being misled. Yes, there are many elders that can dance and sing without worrying about income. Yes, there are many elders that do not need home care, home delivered meals or transportation to go to the doctor and yes, there are many elders that have no caregiving responsibilities but unfortunately not all elders are like that. If you feel you have the need to dance and sing in the Florida capitol please do so, but do it in a way that do not detract our lawmakers and the media from paying attention to those in need.

The Ambassador for a Day event raises a number of issues one of which is: Why are we supporting some Senior Centers and Area Agencies if they have the funds to travel to the State Capitol and the funds to invest in dancing and singing lessons for their participants? Shall we continue to invest in singing and dancing lessons for elders? Maybe this event raises the need to re evaluate the government funding strategy and program priorities.

This is the year to advocate for the necessary funding to deal with the growing needs of elders, children and families. Our country is still at war. Our country has soldiers at risk in two occupied nation. If we stop for one second to evaluate the unintended consequences of our celebration at the Capitol in March we will see a different outcome than the one we would like to achieve. Unfortunately, the image of the Greedy Geezer may come back to haunt us.

This year the federal budget for programs that help elders has been frozen. Our own Department of Elder Affairs is projecting a 10 million over expenditure; excuse me over achievement, in the Nursing Home Diversion Program by early April. The paper increases in the proposed 2004-2005 state budget for Medicaid waiver funding may be just that a paper increase, a mirage to showcase in an election year. This is particularly true if the Federal Government is proposing to Block Grant Medicaid or is unwilling to increase Medicaid waiver funding in their budget. Our Medicaid waiver increase will have no federal match to make it a reality.

Instead of dancing at the capital in an event sponsored by the Funeral Industry we should quietly call or visit your Legislators and Congressperson and ask about their position supporting elder care programs, health care for children and programs for veterans. This is the year to show solidarity with children, caregivers and abused elders and lobby for more support for them. If you are a caregiver for an elder or for a disabled child or for a wounded veteran this is your year to make sure the Caregiver Initiative program comes with proper funding. Instead of dancing in the

Capital used to time to question why we are diverting \$600,000 from services to an advertising campaign to attract more wealthy elders to Florida.

There is a time and place to celebrate positive aging, but that time is not now, and that place is not at the steps of our capitol. If we don't want the image of the Greedy Geezers to come back we should analyze the silent message we are sending with our carefree actions. A true Ambassador for aging is not about singing and dancing but about advocacy for all.

## **FLORIDA'S PREGNANT CHAD II**

Gema G. Hernández

Elected officials in Florida are very satisfied with the new voting electronic system that in their minds will prevent another embarrassing situation like the one in the 2000 presidential election. Their confidence is based on the fact that with an electronic system in place hanging Chads are a thing of the past or is it?

Consider the following: The upcoming elections are not elder ready. There are 2.3 million elders in Florida, most of them living a positive and active life with no impediments in their activities of daily living. However, not having an impediment in their activities of daily living is one thing and having difficulties with vision, reading a busy screen, hand tremors and minor cognitive difficulties is another.

While the new voting system in Florida represents a state of the art election machine for the thirty something cohort, a closer look reveals something much different, something that could be a bigger fiasco than the 2000 election because it will be harder, not easier, to detect. As of this writing if you are legally blind the State of Florida has no audible clues or alternative system that would allow you to vote on the 2004 presidential election unless of course you become totally dependent of a third party to touch the screen for you.

Who that third party is going to be will determine the outcome of your vote and the outcome of the election. It is sad that no blind person was asked to test the new electronic system. It is also sad that a Governor that claims he invented the Elder Ready Florida never thought of developing an alternative option for those unable to see the screen and for those unable to have a steady hand.

If you suffer from Parkinson's disease or if you have a tremor as a result of medication it may be difficult for you to touch the screen at the precise location where the name of your candidate is posted. You may be voting for the person under or above the name of your candidate depending upon the sensitivity of the screen to human touch. No one thought of testing the sensitivity of the screen to the touch of one finger, or several fingers at a time.

No one thought of the space you should leave between names so a person touching the proximity where a name appears will not represent a vote for the other candidate. At this time it appears that the location of the candidates' names on the ballot could provide by default an advantage in the poll. A name in the middle of

the page could have advantages compared to a name at the top or at the bottom of the page.

For those of us facing the challenges of light, contrast and size of typesetting the electronic voting system is not for us. It is important to make sure that a magnifying glass or reading glasses are available at the poll in case someone forgot their reading glass or the glare of the screen or poor light prevent them from reading the information correctly. The typesetting used to print the ballot is not big enough to make reading the names of the candidates easy for the voter.

This is an electronic voting system, and the computer, not a paper and pencil or booklet that you punch are the mechanisms used to exercise your right to vote and I know plenty of individuals that are afraid of the computer. They believe that touching the computer may self-destruct. These individuals prefer not to face an electronic system and in some cases may choose to vote absentee.

If I were a candidate in this year's election I will put special emphasis in making sure the absentee ballots were properly recorded, accounted, and more importantly, verified. In the last gubernatorial elections volunteers canvassed the predominantly elderly neighborhoods volunteering to mail the absentee ballots on behalf of elders. The plan was very simple, tell elders that they can save on the postage by just giving the volunteer the ballot and the volunteers will mail the ballot on their behalf at no cost to them. Hundreds of elders did just that and more elders will do that in the next election because of the uneasiness they feel with the electronic system or unwilling to face long lines.

One other component that concerns me on this and the last election is the human component. The Miami Times published an article on August 2001 identifying how a former senior center director was appointed to a very high administrative position in the George Bush administration because of the alleged role she played in securing votes for the president. While this may or may not be a true story the role senior centers and in home services providers played in pushing the candidate they like is well documented.

Candidates visit senior centers and congregate meal sites even though the sites are supposed to be politics free, but they are not. The magazines each agency publishes are a mechanism to send subliminal if not direct endorsements. Agencies providing services to the elders have become so influential in Florida that they actually tell the head of the department that funds the program what to do and if they don't like an audit report, that audit report just disappears or is changed to satisfy them.

Senior centers are now precincts; therefore, 100% of their participants do vote on any and all elections. The social workers and case managers who in casual conversation can tell the person calling in for services a message about their need to support the incumbent wield a much higher influence.

The fact that these quasi government agencies in Florida have direct access to databases with information about elders and caregivers is something to be investigated. I propose we begin our investigation with the My Florida. Com and with the Florida Department of Elder Affairs, *Elder Update* newspaper mailed to 125,000 elders in Florida and emailed to thousands more. Check the political messages and verify if the taxpayers in Florida are paying for the Secretary to travel to visually support the President every time he comes to Florida

While the Democratic candidates are still focusing on one another and while none of the candidates has published a platform on issues affecting caregivers and elders, the Republican Party has been promoting their candidates indirectly and directly for months using our tax dollars. Pregnant Chad has given birth to an electronic system that disenfranchises the most vulnerable among us, leaving behind the door open for another fiasco.

## **THE *e*Governor HAS LOST ACCOUNT OF FRAIL ELDERS**

By Gema G Hernandez

The phrase *e*Governor was first introduced in 1999 when Governor Bush introduced the first *e*Budget in the history of the state. In a simple diskette the entire budget was recorded. Under the leadership of Roy Cales, millions of dollars were invested in making sure the data collected was accurate, that the information from agencies was timely and appropriate, and most importantly, that individuals in need of services were able to be properly counted. We all thought the days of duplicative client counts, missing clients and waiting lists that were three and four years old were over. We were wrong.

It is therefore sad to see that after millions of taxpayers' dollars invested in Management Information Systems, the Department of Elder Affairs is having a very difficult time counting the number of frail elders in the state. This difficulty is exemplified by the inability of the Department to identify 1400 frail elders to divert from nursing homes back to the community. In a state of 2.3 million elders it is hard to believe there are less than 1400 elders in need of services. Not having an accurate record of who is frail is a serious problem or perhaps an intentional plan to divert the attention of the public from unmet needs to well to do elders dancing and singing at the Capitol.

Think of the following: If there is no waiting list for services and no elders waiting for the results of the Medicaid waiver evaluations so they can access services, then there is no need to ask the legislators for additional dollars. Why ask for more funding when the funding the department got is not being used?

For the record, the Department has already missed their first deadline of 12/31/03 to use 40 million dollars to provide community-based services to 1200 frail elders. They have asked for an extension and are now facing their second deadline, 6/30/04. If there are no frail elders in need of these services the State will return the portion of the 40 million they have not used.

The return of the dollars to Washington will create a precedent that may limit the State of Florida's ability to ask and receive additional dollars. While the investment in sophisticated data collection mechanisms appears to have failed, elders all over the state continue to enter nursing homes or are dying without services, but no one is noticing or reporting on these new trends.

It has been alleged that the Department of Elder Affairs has shred thousands of documents containing the name of thousands of elders since October. Reasons for the destruction of documents range from the client's records being duplicative, data collected being poorly recorded and assessment deadlines to revisit the cases has been missed for months and even years at a time. To avoid embarrassment, witnesses have told us that the Department has contracted with a company to come and shred the papers away from the public's eyes.

This is of course must be an urban legend because such actions, if they happened, are completely prohibited by state law. The shredding of public records in the Sunshine State is a felony, or so I thought unless of course there is a Terrorist connection at which point all elimination and expunging of records is acceptable.

In the meantime the *e*Governor should place closer attention to the use of technology in all of the departments under his direct supervision unless of course the plan all along has been to eliminate, erode, eradicate and end any data contrary to the administration's propaganda.

All along we thought that the *e* stands for electronic, but instead we are finding out that the *e*Governor stands for expunging, eradicating and eliminating any documents that disagree with their perception of truth. Perhaps the most appropriate reporter to cover the story should be Mary Ellen Klass who was excluded for the governor's media briefing at the end of this year.

## **DO WE NEED MORE ELDER DRIVERS ON THE ROAD IN FLORIDA?**

*By Gema G. Hernández*

While the attention of the public continues to be focused on exploring ways to remove, limit or prevent older drivers from keeping their driver's licenses, three important events are taking place that will impact our abilities to deal with unsafe drivers. These events can be detrimental to our elders and to individuals with disabilities, regardless of age.

These events are not catching the attention of the public but will impact the ability of a community or an individual to age in place, with dignity, security and purpose in a family friendly environment. These events are interconnected and they come at a time when elders and disabled adult are at risk of losing their independence forcing them to live in an institution for the rest of their life unless alternative options are in place.

Two of the events have already happened. The first event took place in Washington. The press conference exposed how states like Florida, are not complying with the Supreme Court ruling of 1999 which mandate that communities be ready to accept back individuals that are now living in Nursing Homes. This is the famous Olmstead decision. Florida attempts to move nursing home residents back to the community ended in 2001 when 45 individuals were successfully transferred back to the community they loved. It was not easy but with the appropriate package of services in place and family support it was done.

Coincidentally the second event marked the end of a very successful program that creates the infrastructure needed for the Olmstead decision to be implemented in your community. The event marked the end of a Best Practice Model Award granted by the Council of Governors in 2001 and affect cities like Ormond Beach, Volusia County and St Augustine. This will happen when Department of Elder Affairs officially closed the infrastructure of the original Community for Life© program and in its place offer some new and untested measuring tool.

Communities for Life©, also known as Communities for a Lifetime©, began in 2000 and was able to capture the attention of 60 cities and counties willing to transform their zoning laws, pedestrian crossings, size and length of their sidewalks, traffic lights and bus stops so individuals with disabilities regardless of age can gain access to groceries, pharmacies and doctors. In its place, a different program will be announced less far-reaching in nature and more dependent on

services and programs than on the ability of individuals regardless of age to move around without assistance. Just when the program was getting national recognition and cities like New Orleans, Lexington, Phoenix, and Albany, were proceeding with what the city of Dunedin had achieved, Florida is going back and breaking what was not broken. This is particularly intriguing at a time when communities are looking for equitable ways to make their streets safer.

What will the 60 cities that have already completed their survey instruments do? Do they need to start all over again? Do they need to present new proclamations and resolutions to the Department? Will the new untested toolkit be as effective as the previous one? Will it capture deliveries of products and home services by doctors and hairdressers or taxis willing to provide discount to individuals that do not longer drive? Will the fairness issue of young and old be addressed in the Caring community?

The third event will take place September 30 when one of the most important pieces of legislation for the older driver and the disabled adult, the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century, is scheduled to expire. Section 5310 of the Transportation Equity Act is of great importance to our communities because it provides fund to enhance alternative transportation and mobility issues. If we are serious about safety and if we want to support intergenerational efforts that provide equitable funding for all age groups this Act is critical.

The more we think of removing impaired drivers off the road the more this country needs to reauthorize the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century so elders and disabled alike who are unable or unwilling to drive are not condemned to a future at home with no independence except the one provided by a government agency.

Consider the following

- 1) To comply with the Supreme Court decision of 1999 Florida would have to move individuals from nursing homes back to the community,
- 2) Communities that were in the process of becoming Elder Ready and Access focus will divert their attention and resources to the different plan, an untested plan which abandon the objective of decreasing the need to drive and in its place focus on programs and services.
- 3) Under the new climate more people will lose their driving privilege due to physical impediments and concerns from the public creating more dependency and isolation among the elders,

- 4) The Transportation Equity Act is about ready to expire and if that happens it will erode the most important financial support for alternative transportation programs in the State.
- 5) If the individuals in need of services are not able to physically access those services and this includes senior centers what good are those services for the majority of elders and individual with disabilities? And
- 6) The Destination Florida program will begin to advertise heavily in the north to bring more elders to Florida and by default bringing more elder drivers to the state with no infrastructure to support them..

If our communities are not structurally ready, our driving and pedestrian laws imperfect, and our funding source for alternative transportation disappearing is this the right time to bring more elder drivers to Florida? Think about it.

## **ASK NOT WHAT ELDERS CAN DO FOR YOUR ECONOMY, BUT WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR ELDERS.**

By Gema G. Hernández

As a person that began the Positive Aging Campaign and as a full time non-paid advocate of elders I believe we do a disservice to the elders of this great nation if we attract them to Florida just because of the income they can bring to State, and then, when they need assistance, we fail to provide them with the services and programs they need to age in place with the dignity, security and purpose they deserve.

The best marketing tool to attract elders to this beautiful state of ours begins not with sexy pictures and a beautiful sunset, but with the announcement that Florida does not have a waiting list for services. At this time, depending upon which information you read, the existing waiting list for community based services ranges from 14,000 to 20,000 plus. With that many people waiting for services and with future budget projections being so grim, it will technically take ten years for the department to provide services to all 20,000 of them.

Of course, 90% of those elders that are waiting for services today will not be there. Unfortunately, they don't have 10 years to spare, specially those 2,500 with frailty levels of 4 or 5. Natural attrition is very high in this group. The assessed priority list is definitely a good idea because you provide services to those who are most frail first, but if the assessed prioritized list is applied as a form of rationing services, then it is not a good idea.

If the idea is to increase the state revenue by bringing more healthy and wealthy retirees to the state we need to at least do something for those retirees we need to make Florida an Elder Ready State©. We need to improve the infrastructure of services and programs, of transportation and zoning laws.

The plan to attract elders to Florida must clearly state that they must come with their caregivers or at the least be willing to move back to their place of origin if their caregivers are not willing or able to relocate to Florida. Thirty Two percent of the frail elders receiving services from elder affairs are able to stay away from the nursing home because they have a caregiver. Without the appropriate community based services and a caregiver once they become frail, these elders have no option but institutional care.

Elders are looking for more than just the weather or the intangible tax situation. They are asking much harder questions. Why would I like to move to Florida if there are 9,000 nursing positions vacant to increase to 34,000 in five years? Why would I like to come to a place where in 37 out of 67 counties there are no Medicare plus Choice health care providers, leaving the elders with no prescription drug coverage and no options?

Why should I want to come to Florida when Assisted Living Facilities and Continuing Retirement Communities are increasing their maintenance fees on an ongoing basis because their liability insurance is skyrocketing? These increases have no end in sight.

Why would I like to move to Florida when the Crime against the elders is increasing and more cases of elder abuse are being reported, from 29,000 in 1998 to 41,000 now?

Why will I want to come to Florida if in the last four years the only program that helps non indigent patients receive assistance in their homes received no budget increases and, after adjusting for inflation, Community Care for the Elderly (CCE) even lost 8% of its value. What makes sense is to invest in community based services and to make sure those options that are offered in places like Oregon, Virginia, North Carolina are also offered here.

Again, instead of luring elders for their money, let's build better communities for all the family Communities for Life© and them just like in the movies if you build Elder Ready Communities: Communities for Life © they will come.

**DONORS BE ALERT:  
WE HAVE REACHED THE END OF INNOCENCE  
AND WE MUST BEGIN THE AGE OF VERIFICATION**

By Gema G. Hernández

The events of September 11 have changed our lives forever. September 11 has opened our eyes and our hearts in more than one way. It has taken away our innocence as a country and as a community. Some of the impact from September 11 will not be seen for years to come as events indirectly linked to that date continue to unfold.

What we have seen now is the generosity and selfishness of the American culture. What we have witnessed is the collective efforts of a variety of individuals coming together as one in their prayers, their donations, their physical effort to help others, and help we had. We have helped the family of the victims, the wives, the children, the husbands, and the grandchildren with our donations and our compassion.

September 11 brought the best this country has to offer, but it also brought to the attention of the public practices that have been going on for years without the public's knowledge. These practices include using donations, fund raising dollars and contributions for purposes other than what the donors intended. It was shocking news to discover that the money we donated to support the victims' families was earmarked for other disasters. In reality those "shocking" decisions are made on a daily basis by presidents and board of directors of a variety of not for profit organizations.

The only difference between this decision and the decision to divert a dollar donated to pay for meals to pay for a party or a lobbyist is the publicity the September 11 donations received. Because it was September 11, Congress, the media and the public at large demanded an explanation of what happened to the \$543 million in donations. The media's attention generated public pressure, forcing the Red Cross to change its decision and agree to honor the donors' wishes and distribute the \$543 million collected for the victim's families to be given to the victim's families as it was always intended.

Unfortunately, this incident of using contributions and donations for a variety of other functions and activities, not necessarily the ones the donor wanted, is common among some agencies in Florida. This is not the first time and it will not

be the last unless we make those agencies part of the government under the Sunshine Law. Some of the innocence we have lost as a community is our trust and belief that the title not for profit organization means an organization that can do no harm. We are just beginning to realize that the label not for profit is only an IRS classification that has nothing to do with how the agency internally uses its donations. An agency's administrative practices can allow for those donations to go for salaries, parties, trips or other purposes.

\* We take for granted that the dollars we give to feed the hungry go toward meals; we trust that the contribution we voluntarily give to an agency to bathe a frail elder or clothe a naked child is used for those purposes. This new awareness of how our donations are used should not stop us from giving because there are plenty of hungry people to feed, plenty of needy children to help. Not every not for profit organization uses the donated dollars in ways not intended by the donor, but we need to verify that our donations go to support services and programs and not for other purposes. For that we need to make sure we donate to the right agency.

One way to make sure our dollars are used properly is to write the purpose of the donation on check or to request a receipt from the agency, which indicates the purpose of the donation. Mark your check or request a receipt that identifies the purpose of the donation. Make sure it says this donation is for meals, for adult day care, for transportation, for clothes, for respite. Never leave the donation to the discretion of the agency, if you do, you may be supporting non-service related activities.

I know of agencies that are using those dollars to buy BMW for the president and CEO or to add those donations to end of the year bonuses for their executives. Bonuses to not for profit CEOs in amounts ranging from \$5,000 to \$20,000 while the home health aides and the case managers get a thank you card for their efforts.

Aggressive accounting should be investigated not only from donations but also from taxpayers' dollars. The same aggressive accounting that lead to Enron and World Com exist in the not for profit area. I tried to stop the practice by investigating the padding that goes on as not for profit community based agencies "create" their unit cost. Unfortunately, those agencies are very well protected by politicians and also by the media that in some cases refuse to conduct in-depth investigations, even after documents have been given to them.

In this season of giving let us give with the same generosity as we gave before September 11, but let us make sure the donations go to the people they were

intended to help. Let us select those agencies whose administrative expenses are fully disclosed to the donor and to the general public. These are agencies with no hidden costs, with lean administrative structures, with pay scales for their executives in line with the government's pay scale, agencies with accountability measurements in place, with no history of financial malfeasance.

It is up to us to make our donations count, and it is up to us to demand that our government do the same with the millions of taxpayers' dollars they give to not for profit organizations. One way of doing that is by requesting that our elected officials apply the Sunshine Law, a full disclosure requirement to all not for profit organizations. This law will restore our confidence in the agencies and will allow us to decide which agency is serving our citizens in the most cost effective and efficient way.

The age of innocence is over, but the age of generosity, support and caring for others has just begun. Let us make sure that our donations reach those we want to help.