

Select Speaker Remarks

Briefing on the Introduction of H.R. 5447

The Dorothy I. Height and Whitney M. Young Social Work Reinvestment Act

Cannon House Office Building

February 27, 2008

Congressman Edolphus “Ed” Towns (D-NY)

- Of course, Dr. Height needs no introduction. If you don't know her, where have you been? You need to get out from under that rock!
- This is a great day—Dr. Height and Whitney Young are two of my personal heroes. Both had a lot to do with me going into the field of social work at all.
- Millions of Americans are served by social workers. The contributions of social workers to addressing many of our country's socioeconomic challenges are significant. Therefore, this is a very important piece of legislation.
- I invite my colleagues in the House and Senate to consider the far reaching effects of our current conflict in Iraq, just like in Southeast Asia many years ago. More than any other profession, social workers provide members of the armed services essential help.
- Social workers are always there. They are highly skilled and trained, but we're not doing what's required to ensure their ability to help and support us as society's needs grow.
- Our country demands these services of itself and the Social Work Reinvestment Act is an important solution to the problem.

Dr. Dorothy I. Height, President Emerita, National Council of Negro Women

- First of all, I want to say 'thank you' to Rep. Towns and Rep. Shays. You are really taking into account 600,000 social workers in this country.
- It's less known that civil rights leaders first came together around social work issues. Whitney was convinced that we knew more about what needed to be done than the funds to do it with.

- In 1962, several of us—including Roy Wilkins, James Forman, and James Corbin—convened. Our assignment was to see what we could do about numerous social welfare challenges. We each chose an area of focus. Whitney chose housing. I chose boards because at that time many boards had no representation from the community.
- We had to agree never to send a substitute to the meetings. The only substitution was Martin Luther King when he was being held in the Birmingham jail. We all began working on issues related to social work and social welfare.
- On June 12, 1963, Medgar Evers was assassinated and on the day of his burial Steven Currier brought our group together again. He said “We have to do more.” He had invited 90 people to the Carlyle Hotel in New York—and asked them to give more support to the movement. It was the first \$900,000 raised for the civil rights movement and it created the United Civil Rights Leadership. After that, we began to work.
- I know Whitney, before his untimely death, could have told you more. It was important to show the relationship between social work, civil rights and the major issues of the day. Part of the message that Whitney repeated was that “Social work is not about fixing today’s problems. It helps prepare people to advocate—and searches to find underlying causes of major social problems so we don’t repeat the same mistakes.
- We’ve come this far. We’re not just working on the issues. I think this bill can take us forward to another level. The bill recognizes the relationship between social work and social action. Most of us who call ourselves leaders of civil rights organizations, started as social workers. Because of this, I am very honored to be a part of this event today.
- I have worked on five continents. And I have learned a great deal. I have met and known many people in my life. I have met many people in high positions and leaders all over the world. But I have also learned from the poor and I think that social work represents those who know that if we really want to—we can eliminate poverty and suffering.
- Social workers know first hand what the issues are. We are prepared, but we also need support to keep contributing. As A. Phillip Randolph used to say, “What the Negro needs is not more work, but more pay for the work he does.” I believe this is equally true for social workers.
- As one who has been a social worker my whole life, I know what I would have been earning if I had been in another place. But I also know that there have to be more trained professionals to help in times like this. If you read the paper every day, you are amazed at the level of suffering and abuse. You read about what’s happening to children, the elderly, and to those in the military.

- What we need are people with skill and commitment to help us deal with these and so many problems, and to help us move forward. The beautiful thing about the Social Work Commission as outlined in the legislation is that it provides a way for us to do just that—move forward.
- We take social work and social workers for granted. Through this legislation, we can awaken the country to the role of the social worker and to the profession's many contributions. We are men and women who serve. We do so much in our jobs, but so much more as volunteers.
- Thank you, Rep. Towns and Rep. Shays, for introducing one of the most important pieces of legislation to help American families. Today I am so proud to be a social worker and to be here with you both. Thank you. We need to work wholeheartedly to get this passed. We need to get behind this.

Congressman Christopher Shays (R-CT)

- When Ed and I were taking pictures just now, we were kneeling at the feet of a giant. I feel this is a mini sermon on the mount among true believers. And I'm a believer. I just love Ed and thank you, Dr. Height. We appreciate you for taking time and lending your prestige to this effort.
- This is not the same world 5, 10, 15, 20, or 30 years ago. No job is secure, no matter who you are. We live in a world in which we see incredible competition. But the best and brightest and the poorest of the poor have something in common. We need the help of others. We all need advice. And we all need the professional expertise of social workers.
- Social workers have figured out how to deal with many of the challenges facing our country. But one thing is absolutely certain. We take you for granted. We don't pay social workers anything like what your professional skills and educational background merit, what you're worth and what your skills are worth. As a result, we are seeing an incredible shortage across the country.
- We have to build up the prestige and have the federal government say that this is important to us. Rep. Towns is asking for \$11 million in a \$3 trillion budget. Somehow we can find this money and a way to fund this. We all know the payback will be huge.
- What we need you all here today to do is contact your Members of Congress. Tell our colleagues that this is important to you and important to the country. Tell them that this matters to us and to society. Ask them to please co-sponsor the legislation now. And don't be reluctant to knock on a few Republican doors. They are good people too. Thank you all.

Dr. Elizabeth Clark

Executive Director, National Association of Social Workers

- On Behalf of the National Association of Social Workers and the 600,000 social workers nationwide, we thank all three of you. We also thank Whitney Young's family.
- Most people don't know that Whitney Young was president of the National Association of Social Workers when he died.
- We are society's safety net. We want to be sure that there are social workers out there in the future, and that they are not taken for granted.
- We've already started contacting our members. Hundreds of letters have been sent to your colleagues. Thank you so much.