

NAEH – New Partnerships Conference

Washington, DC

Remarks by Philip Mangano

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Thank you Nan for that kind introduction. And thanks to Carla and Betsy and to each of the sponsoring organizations of this conference.

It's great that you're all here in Washington. This is the first time this conference has had to be held in two different zip codes.

It's like an old-fashioned summer family reunion. And how the family' has grown. And how the roots have broadened, and what good roots. Rooted in this nation's great social movements – abolitionism, suffrage, civil rights – movements that have made our country a better place.

And what great heads of household this family has. Nan Roman, Carla Javits, Betsy Lieberman – all committed to that rich heritage of ending social wrong.

I thank them for their collaborative spirit. And for their willingness to have me update you briefly on the work of the Council and the honor of introducing you this morning to our keynote speaker, Secretary Anthony Principi.

I see some of my Massachusetts friends here. I hope you've hatched the kidnap plan to get me back.

I like the title of your conference, New Partnerships for Ending Homelessness. I was at a conference recently and the title had a different verb – Resources for addressing homelessness. Addressing, now that's a hard thing to do, as we all know. Homelessness has no address.

This week's New York Times Article certainly made that point. 5,000 people living in Skid Row in Los Angeles under plastic coverings, in tents and sleeping bags. And across our country the growing number of people on the streets and in encampments.

No geography is untouched and no jurisdiction – whether urban, suburban, or rural – an exception.

No population is immune – newborns, children, teens, young adults, adult and elderly. Whether unaccompanied or in families.

Frankly aren't we all tired of addressing homelessness? And homeless people are sick and tired of experiencing it. We want homeless people to have an address. A home. A place to be.

And that's what we're trying to do in Washington right now. Change that verb of homelessness from addressing, managing, maintainancing, and accommodating. Those just aren't acceptable any longer. That new verb is – ending. Ensuring that there is a home for every American.

So I like the title of this conference because it's pointed in the right direction with intentionality – ending homelessness.

And I like that title because it speaks of New Partnerships. That's exactly what we've been doing at the Interagency Council – developing the new partnership to end homelessness.

Some of those partnerships are inside the federal government. There are now 20 federal agencies at the table working together to make their resources more available and accessible to homeless people.

Someone introduced me recently by saying that my job was not only herding cats, but herding schizophrenic cats. Some days it feels like that. But most days it's the opposite. Agencies are working harder than ever to collaborate and it's working. Secretary Principi will mention a few of those initiatives.

Partnership inside the federal government. And the Council's been working on extending that strategy outside of Washington.

We've asked every Governor in the country, brand new (there are 24 of them) and long serving to create a state interagency council on homelessness to mirror what we're doing in Washington. To bring to the table all of the resources that could bear on homelessness and make them more available and accessible. Nearly 30 Governors have made the commitment. If your state doesn't have one, it should. We want to partner with all states. [place holder – Secretary Thompson]

We've also gone to cities. Last month at the annual meeting of the US Conference of Mayors, we partnered with the Mayors in two resolutions – one supporting the ending of chronic homelessness in the next ten years. The other a commitment for Mayors to create ten year plans to end homelessness. Both passed unanimously.

Three Republicans and three Democrats supported each resolution. [place holder – Secretary Martinez]

Partnership.

In fact, yesterday I met with the point person on homelessness from 37 major US cities including eight of the ten largest. We talked about innovative solutions and ten-year plans for those cities.

This past weekend I was in Milwaukee speaking to the annual conference of the National Association of Counties. We offered similar resolutions. And as some of you may know there are 3100 counties in our country. 2500 have populations of fewer than 50,000 people. They are in large part rural. We wanted them to be part of the partnership to end homelessness.

On Tuesday they adopted unanimously the resolution calling for counties to develop ten year plans to end homelessness. New partnerships.

Most heartening for all of us committed to creating the political will to end homelessness – and isn't that we've always longed for – the Governors, and Mayors, and County Executives are moving forward, committing themselves to plans to end homelessness.

When we were in Denver for the US Conference of Mayors we made an agreement that symbolizes our efforts. With Mayors Menino and Daley who have big D's after their names, and this Administration that has a significant R after its name – we agreed that on this issue of homelessness, that partnership trumps partisanship. That on this issue, there is no D or R or I or G. We're all just Americans trying to end a national disgrace.

Now some will resort to partisan rhetoric that is toe tapping and hand clapping.

Rhetoric that's partisan and ideological. But that tact only produces polarization and paralysis. And neither of those gets the job done.

And that job is ending homelessness, not beginning gridlock. Whether we're providers, advocates, homeless people, Mayors, Governors or the President. Our job isn't creating stalemate. No, it's to create houses. Homes for our neighbors.

And there are some new resources out there to help you get the job done. Secretary Principi will mention some of them later.

But right here in this room 8 new resources are present. They are 8 of the 10 Regional Coordinators the Council now has stationed across the country to help states develop interagency councils, cities and counties develop 10 year plans, and regional federal offices to work more closely with you. Would you stand up and be counted.

Thank you.

And another resource in our effort to end chronic homelessness is the Policy Academies. This year we are offering participation in a Policy Academy to every state. If your state hasn't said yes, it should. Go knock on those doors.

We sponsor the Policy Academies to work with state officials and resources to make them more available and accessible to homeless people.

I'd like to challenge the Alliance and the Corporation and AIDS Housing and the National Coalition to match the Policy Academies sponsored by HUD, HHS, VA and now Labor. I'd like to see your organizations sponsor a series of Advocacy Academies to teach state and local homeless groups how to access mainstream resources for homeless people to end their homelessness. An Advocacy Academy for every state. Why not?

And yet another proposed resource is the \$70 million Samaritan Initiative in the President's FY '04 budget. It's an interagency collaboration targeted to chronic homelessness. It's new funding. Now it needs to make it through Congress. Please help us to make it happen.

In all those initiatives and resources the work of the Council is to make your work in the field more effective and results oriented – through new partnerships.

And your keynote speaker this morning gets just that: He's the new Vice Chair of the Interagency Council.

When I first came to Washington I went to his office to meet him. I knew he was a combat-decorated Vietnam War veteran and that he had formerly been Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs and the staff director of the Senate Committee on Armed Services.

That he had graduated from the Naval Academy and been a partner in a San Diego law firm.

The credentials were impressive. But as the newly appointed executive director of the Interagency Council, I was interested in his homelessness IQ – his interest quotient.

I wasn't disappointed.

After pleasantries, the conversation turned to homelessness in general and homeless vets specifically. The Secretary's countenance changed and he leaned back in his chair.

He did so, I learned, because he felt we weren't doing enough and he had some frustration. The same frustration we share. We roll up our sleeves, work hard, sacrifice, but don't see the change we're hoping for.

He wanted to know how we could invest more wisely. How we could work together more closely. How we could see more visible outcomes and results from our efforts. How we could move forward on the President's marker to end homelessness for the most vulnerable.

And in that conversation and in other conversations and in his deep commitment to the work of the Council, the Secretary's, dare I say it, passion for this issue has been most visible and evident. He's Italian. What did you expect?

A passion that's in his marrow, in his soul. A thoughtful, reflective passion that expresses itself in action and resources. Witness the increases for homeless veterans in the VA budget. The VA's active participation in the Council. Their participation in interagency initiatives. All borne from his inner quest to make a difference.

And he's surrounded himself, as any good field commander would, with trusted and experienced comrades. On homeless issues his right hand person is the knowledgeable and savvy Pete Dougherty. Supporting him Gay Kerber and Al Taylor. Professionals who care. And his advisory group led by the no-nonsense Robert Van Keuren includes my old friend from Boston, Ralph Cooper.

We are fortunate to have such an ally exerting that political will in directing the nation's second largest department. VA's resources targeted to homeless people are not exceeded by any federal agency.

As Vice Chair of the Council, Secretary Principi has been thoughtful, challenging and deeply committed to ending homelessness. He has put his resources where his rhetoric is. His resolve where his responsibility lies. He's on the front lines again. This time with us, battling homelessness.

Please welcome a friend to homeless people, Secretary Anthony Principi.