

these bills seek to alleviate age discrimination in employment is an extremely serious concern for many people in our country today.

An undisputed fact of American life is that it is a work-oriented society. Status, economic security, and psychological well-being are all associated with work.

Yet outdated ideas concerning the inability of older workers to perform a full day's work limit opportunities for a large and growing proportion of our society.

At a conference held in Iowa in 1961 on counseling the older disabled worker, Dr. Woodrow W. Morris, director of the Institute of Gerontology and of the College of Medicine of the University of Iowa, delivered a paper on the meaning of work to the older person, in which he pointed out:

* * * a job or work constitutes further data by which one identifies a man. Once the name of any person is elicited, the next obvious question is: "What does he do?" It puts the individual into a certain category and furnishes a frame of reference for further contacts with him. When forced to be unemployed an individual feels debased, degraded, worthless, and without an identity.

Congress recognized the importance of employment for older people when it included among the 10 objectives of the Older Americans Act the "opportunity for employment without discriminatory personnel practices because of age."

The bills now being considered by this committee will do much to meet this objective more fully.

The legislation can contribute to a more favorable climate in which older workers can maintain and have opportunities for employment—in which ability and experience and not chronological age itself are the major qualifications for a job.

From the other side of the picture, the skills and abilities of these able older workers must not be ignored while so much still needs to be done throughout the country. Many older workers can, if given the opportunity, contribute valuable resources to meet the needs of their communities.

There have been several efforts undertaken in recent years to face up to the problem of age discrimination in employment by the Department of Labor, other public and private employment programs, and agencies working in the field of aging to help various employers understand the employment needs and potentials of the older worker.

But arbitrary age discrimination practices continue to be a significant barrier to older people who seek employment. The most recent documentation of the extent of age discrimination in employment was the report submitted by the Secretary of Labor, Willard Wirtz, to the Congress in 1965.

At that time, the Secretary said:

The possibility of new non-statutory means of dealing with such arbitrary discrimination has been explored. That area is barren. The elimination of arbitrary age limits in employment will proceed more rapidly if the Federal Government declares, clearly and unequivocally, and implements so far as is practicable, a national policy with respect to hiring on the basis of ability rather than age.

Today with nearly two of every five persons in the labor force age 45 and over, a clear statement of public policy is of critical importance.

Although unemployment among older workers is below the national average of all workers, every recent study on unemployment has docu-