

president's column

Editor's Note: The following is excerpted from President Larry Gordon's closing remarks before APHA's recent National Public Health Leadership Conference in Washington, DC.

The first American Public Health Association Mid-Year Leadership Conference last year was at least good. This second held at the first of June was at least excellent!

I wish to express appreciation to each of you for your attendance and promotion of APHA policy now and in the future. Special thanks go to our excellent APHA staff for their efforts in planning and coordinating this Conference, and particularly to Katherine McCarter, Conference Coordinator.

During this conference, we have learned that there is not a single crisis involving health policy, but a variety of major issues and crises involving not only scores of individual personal and environmental health programs, but an attempt to destroy the very structure and thrust of the personal and environmental health systems in this nation, with little understanding or care as to the effects of such actions.

We have learned that public health personnel must become more active, assertive, and political in order to serve the health needs of our citizens.

We now know that the battle for enhanced health status and environmental quality will be lost unless our 50,000 national and affiliate members are heard by their Senators and Representatives.

We have been admonished that we must be constantly and increasingly vigilant and active, and we must understand the issues and the alternatives.

We have been assured that we cannot wait for the other person to take action and speak for us. We must act individually and collectively, and NOW!

We now know that we must be pro-active instead of re-active. I hope we have learned that we not only can, but must fight "city hall"...in this instance the Reagan Administration's anti-health and anti-environment measures.

Our speakers have advised us that the Reagan Administration has no health plan, and only a poorly conceived economic plan resulting in a move to radically revise the role of the Federal government and even the Constitution as they pertain to personal and environmental health.

We have noted that the economy has been gaining in strength with a lowered inflation rate without the adoption of the Reagan economic program, and that there are economic alternatives superior to poor nutrition, fouled air, polluted water, and curtailed health services.

We have heard that a balanced budget is no more essential to the Federal government than to a growing private enterprise borrowing to invest in its future

We have discussed public opinion polls indicating that the Reagan Administration received no mandate to destroy our health programs and status, or to reduce environmental protection measures.

Further discussion has made it clear that the block grants are only a first step in the abdication of Federal support for public health, and that block grant proposals would result in a 50 percent decrease in program capability during the first year alone.

We have been reminded that it is a myth that the federal budget is being decreased, considering the massive increases in military expenditures.

We are again informed that energy costs over which we have had little control have been the main cause of inflation, rather than government expenditures being the primary issue.

We have been warned that the Administration will attempt to gut the Clean Air Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act, the Occupational Safety and Health Act, the Hazardous Waste Program, and others if it is successful in destroying key provisions of the Clean Air Act.

We must remember that personal and environmental health measures need grass roots support not only by concerned individuals, but by every APHA affiliate and by coalitions with other groups having a social or environmental conscience.

And finally, the time to act was yesterday, but this week or soon thereafter will do!!