

Poverty Grips 5 Million Senior Citizens

By Jack Anderson

In a society enamored with youth, an estimated five million senior citizens have been overtaken in their old age by poverty.

Most of them collect pitiful pensions, which have dwindled in purchasing power as the cost of living has soared out of sight. For many, the economic crunch has become truly a life-or-death matter.

Their pathetic stories are told in letters that have been made available to us from the private files of the National Council of Senior Citizens.

"These people that keep bragging about how much they are giving the senior citizen should have to live on it themselves," wrote a man from Gouverneur, N.Y. "It has been eight months since I have had a piece of meat."

He is lucky. Some live on rolls, coffee and dog food. Food fit for a dog at least provides protein at low cost. Some old folks have turned in desperation into common thieves, rifling meat counters and grocery shelves. But most are too proud for such degradation and suffer with quiet dignity.

A staff memo, prepared for the Senate Special Committee on Aging, notes grimly: "All age groups have felt the impact of spiraling inflation in one form or another. But older Americans have probably been victimized to a much greater extent than any other segment in our society. . . ."

"Rising food costs have been especially oppressive for the elderly because about 27 per cent of their budgets is spent on food, in contrast to 16 per cent for the total population. The net impact is that this upward spiral can have the effect of obliterating the 20 per cent Social Security increase."

For those on fixed incomes, the situation is so desperate that Chairman Frank Church (D-Idaho) will try to move up the effective date of a forthcoming 5.9 per cent Social Security increase for senior citizens from July to January.

The unpublished memo stresses the importance of Social Security to the elderly. "For most older Americans," states the memo, "Social Security represents their economic main stay. It constitutes almost the entire source of support for almost one out of every seven

aged couples and two out of every seven elderly single individuals.

"For millions of older Americans, however, Social Security benefits still fall below the government's own poverty benchmark."

Nevertheless, the Nixon administration not only is fighting against more Social Security increases but has also recommended higher Medicare payments. This proposal would cost the aged and disabled \$1 billion more for Medicare next year.

Some of the aging and ailing can't even get Medicare. One woman from Linden, N.J., wrote of her plight: "I receive Social Security which is very small, \$132.50, that just about keeps me alive. I have a cataract and a heart condition and on that amount I can't afford a doctor. I have no hospital insurance. I can't get Medicare until I'm 65. I'm 64 now. I may not see 65."

Meanwhile, members of Congress are drifting back into Washington, suntanned and rested, after their summer vacation. Shortly, they will decide what to do about the senior citizens who can't afford edible

food or medical care, let alone a month in the sun.

David's Deal—It helps to be the son-in-law of President Nixon. The President's friend, Bebe Rebozo, provides David and Julie Eisenhower with a fashionable suburban Washington home for a modest rental fee. Now David has been accepted at Washington's prestigious George Washington law school under curious circumstances.

The school had 6,000 applicants for 400 openings. Yet David won entrance even though he applied three months late. Young Eisenhower didn't even take his entrance exam until this summer. Yet he was jumped ahead of most others and placed in this fall's freshman class.

David told us he had to meet high standards to be admitted, although he wouldn't reveal what his test scores were. He acknowledged, however, that "a friend of the family" helped him in his efforts. An associate dean at the school told us that the Eisenhower case was certainly unusual but did not constitute a special privilege in his opinion.

©1973, by United Feature Syndicate