

Carter, Pepper Struck a Blow Against Age Discrimination

By Robert Weiner

President Carter teamed up with septuagenarian U.S. Rep. Claude Pepper to address age discrimination in America.

Pepper (D-Florida) was chairman of the House Select Committee on Aging and national co-chair of Senior Citizens for Carter. Together, they proposed legislation that would end the mandatory retirement age in government service and raise the mandatory retirement age from 65 to 70 in the private sector. They later pushed a second bill banning all age-based forced retirement in private and public except in certain high-risk jobs.

With assistance by Rosalynn Carter in setting it up, President Carter met with the 30 members of the House Select Committee on Aging on July 15, 1977, at the White House.

The president expressed support for the Anti-Mandatory Retirement Bill, which he ultimately signed into law on April 6, 1978. President Carter said that his mother, Miss Lillian, demonstrated “every day that those who are past the age of 65 or even more can live a healthy, productive, and very inspiring life.”

Pepper, who was 77 at the time President Carter signed the bill, said that had he been forced to retire at 65, “I don’t know if I’d be alive today.” He called the White House meeting historic, “giving impetus to help millions of elderly.”

About the Author: Robert Weiner was chief of staff for Rep. Claude Pepper. Weiner was a 1976 Carter/Mondale campaign aide in the Atlanta national headquarters, member of the Clinton and Bush White House staff, and is currently head of an op-ed writing group recruiting young journalists; it won the National Press Club President’s Award. National Press Club member Ben Lasky contributed to this story.



President Carter meets at the White House with members of the House Select Committee on Aging, July 15, 1977. From left, Rep. Fred Rooney, Mildred Pepper, Committee Chairman Claude Pepper, President Carter, committee Chief of Staff Robert Weiner, White House Counselor on Aging Nelson Cruikshank, and Rep. Ed Roybal.