

## Remarks on Accepting the 2005 Terrance Keenan Leadership Award in Health Philanthropy

Frank Karel, Trellis Fund and, formerly, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation,  
Rockefeller Foundation, and Commonwealth Fund

Thank you, Karen, for that generous introduction. And to all of you for this wonderful award, which is very special because it comes from you, my colleagues. In return, I have a story for you -- an “in the beginning” kind of story.

My first contact with the foundations world occurred in Baltimore one morning in 1965. As director of public relations for the Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions, I was doing a favor for Tommy Turner, dean of the medical faculty. He was being visited by an old friend, a foundation president with a long history of support for Hopkins. At the last minute, however, Dr. Turner had learned his friend was bringing along a new program officer.

My job, in Dr. Turner’s words, was to – quote -- “get this new guy out of my hair. Take him on a tour of the place and get lost while I persuade his boss to underwrite a new ventures fund for the school.”

So I walked my guest on what may have been most extensive tour ever conducted of the vast Hopkins complex. After six hours, my tongue was hanging out, but my guest was still going strong. He couldn’t have been more attentive – gentle in manner and soft of voice, but non-stop with questions, relentlessly probing. He all but filled his spiral-bound notebook with everything I knew about the place. In turn, he, with head characteristically tilted to one side and speaking in long, perfectly formed paragraphs, answered my questions about his foundation and what a program officer does.

That was how Terry Keenan and I began a 40-year friendship. The Dean got his grant and I got a job offer. Terry called a several months later asking if I would be interested in joining him at the Commonwealth Fund. I was and did, and Terry became my philanthropy mentor as well as friend.

I share this story because I want you to understand that by adding my name to the roster of Terrance Keenan Award recipients, you have touched my heart in the most profound way within your power.

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I was so fortunate to have learned the craft of grantmaking from Terry. He *is* the master. Indeed, I have been blessed by so many colleagues like Terry, whose encouragement, support and collaboration have enriched my journey from East Baltimore to now, from one great adventure to another.

A goodly number of these colleagues are in this room.

? Maggie Mahoney, who was at Carnegie when Terry and I were at Commonwealth ... was instrumental in my going to Johnson and, later, leaving Terry and me at Johnson, became president of Commonwealth and made communications an integral part of that foundation's grantmaking.

? Steve Schroeder, the Johnson Foundation president who brought me back for another bite of the apple, giving me the encouragement and resources to take foundation communications to a level that I could never have imagined... On top of which, he's the best boss I ever had and one of the nicest guys I could ever hope to work for.

? There's also a hugely talented contingent of former colleagues from Johnson, including Joe Marx, whose communications skills helped Steve push for a smoke-free America, and found time to create the field of sports philanthropy as well ... Stuart Schear, whose creativity and drive gave new life to the Foundation's access-to-care efforts ... and Jane Isaacs Lowe, the senior program officer on the Local Initiatives Funding Partners Program.

? Then there's Drew Altman, president of Kaiser, who really understands the power of communications, and who brought one of the best communications thinkers and doers into our sector -- my good friend, and until recently your vice chair, Matt James.

? Finally, Andy Burness, colleague and collaborator, wise counsel, my best friend and, most important of all, my *yenta*.

I could go on and on, naming half the people in this room, but we don't have that kind of time. Suffice it to say no one has ever stood alone where I stand today. No recipient of this award could have come within a country mile of this honor without the help and work of others. For me, the sheer number of people to whom I am beholden is daunting as well as personally humbling. Please give me pass simply to express my deep appreciation to four decades of colleagues who, in spirit, stand here with me today.

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Between 1974 and 2002 – from the time I was invited to establish a communications office at The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, did the same 13 years later at the Rockefeller Foundation, and then six years later returned to Johnson for a final eight years until retirement – the use of communications techniques to advance the objectives of grantmakers and grantees alike gained strong traction in the foundation world. I only skimmed the surface in my acknowledgements -- most of the leaders in this effort are sitting in this room, for health grantmakers and their grantees have been and still are at the forefront of this work.

But for me that was then, and this is now. I wouldn't have believed it, but retirement is even better, and every bit as professionally rewarding as my years of gainful employment. One of my new activities is especially germane to this conference's theme, "Agents of Change."

As a trustee of Trellis Fund, my wife's small, family foundation in Washington, DC, I now know communications can be a powerful force for all the foundations that lie beyond the "usual suspects" – the 100 largest.

Trellis, well before my arrival three years ago, had a number of interesting successes with relatively small grants to communications-savvy organizations seeking to make government and non-profits more responsive to the needs of DC's most vulnerable residents.

After the 9/11 attacks, for example, National Airport was shut down for almost two months. Tourism plunged. People in the hospitality and tourism industries, particularly low-wage workers, lost their jobs in staggering numbers. The unemployment compensation system was in a tangle, and not adequate to the challenge.

A \$60,000 Trellis grant to the fledgling Employment Justice Center lifted the burden of fund raising just enough for its amazing co-directors to mobilize a powerful coalition of labor and other organizations. Together, they successfully advocated for more benefits and better rules for these laid-off workers. As a direct result, more than \$200-million in additional unemployment compensation went to DC workers who lost jobs in the wake of 9/11. This enabled thousands of families to stay afloat through this difficult time.

More recently, we are exploring how Trellis might help create a research base linked with effective advocacy for changes giving DC's 400,000+ residents what every other American and their communities have:

- ? full voting representation in Congress;
- ? autonomous local government whose every act is not subject to scrutiny and capricious and even mean-spirited revocation by Congress, where we have no voting representation; and
- ? a local government revenue stream sufficient to the District's needs, eliminating a persistent structural deficit approaching \$800-million a year -- because Congress won't permit DC to tax income earned in the District by suburban commuters and other non-residents.

Achieving these three objectives is a Herculean challenge whose horizon may be decades away, but they're almost 200 years overdue. And I'm one of a growing number of residents just plain fed up -- mad as hell and determined to start making it happen. When DC has more young soldiers than many states laying their lives on the line to bring democracy to Iraq and Afghanistan, it's damn well time to start the push for some democracy back home.

Consider the public health implications, alone, of Congress' continuing denial of DC residents' most fundamental rights.

? Do you know one of the final acts of the House of Representatives before adjourning for last November's election was to pass a bill that would wipe out all of DC's local gun control laws? This targeted those of us living in the "civilian" areas of the District. Congress and other feds would continue to be protected by their own maximum security

measures on Capitol Hill and other government properties. Only the Senate's failure to act in its rush to adjourn spared us...this time.

? Do you know Congress did void Medicaid coverage unanimously passed by the DC Council for women's birth control services? Coverage for Viagra, of course, was left untouched.

? Do you know Congress killed DC's plans to use local revenues to create a needle exchange program? This at a time when the District's rate of HIV infection is the highest in the country, more than ten times the national average.

Trellis shares office space with the Consumer Health Foundation, and I am so pleased that Margaret O'Bryon and her staff are funding a much more detailed assessment of the health consequences of the District's rule by a Congress in which we have no voting representation. This is precisely the kind of information needed to fuel advocacy for change.

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Far and away, my fondest hope today is that the trustees and staff of every other local foundation in this room will take long, serious look into how your foundations might better use communications to advance their own objectives. It's all about becoming more effective.

Using communications strategically isn't rocket science. And it can be affordable. Basically, it's a process guided by pursuit of answers, and the application of those answers, to three deceptively simple questions:

? what do you want to accomplish?

? who has to think and act differently for that to happen? and

? what information, communicated how, might prompt them to change their ways?

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In closing, I want to thank my wife Betsy and my daughters Elizabeth Reynolds and Barbara Kendrick for being here for this occasion. More than anything else, I am here because my family has always been there for me. For them to have shared this capstone of my career is something I will treasure for – I hope – a long, long time. And to you, my fellow grantmakers and colleagues -- again – I thank you for this moment.

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