

Secretary Califano Lauds NIH; Cites Dr. Fredrickson as 'Best'

During a brief visit on Feb. 3, HEW Secretary Joseph A. Califano, Jr., spoke to a packed audience of NIH employees in the CC Masur Auditorium.

A partial text of his remarks follows:

. . . I recognize how important the work is that you've been doing at NIH for many years and I hope will continue to do. I recognize NIH as one of the greatest national treasures this country has; indeed it's one of the great treasures of the world. I will do what I can to help provide an environment in which you can pursue your work.

The work you do is of critical importance to our society. You seek cures for some of the most intractable diseases of mankind. You seek to discover preventive measures which can reduce not only misery but the expense of disease and illness. You provide the leadership this country needs.

You're looked to for that leadership in terms of grants and contracts and direction for much of our Nation's research in these areas.

I believe that the research you do here, and that basic research generally in health, is critical for our society and needs additional support and resources, and I'll do my best to try and get them for you.

Your skills are as scientists; your minds are brilliant in those areas; you have some of the finest people in the world here. My skills are as a lawyer. So if you give me the facts, I'll try to make the case for you in Congress and OMB.

I am happy to announce that we have completed our search for a Director of NIH. We have looked—as I have for every position it has been my responsibility to fill or to recommend to the President that he fill—have looked only for the best—only for excellence. . . .

The President is announcing this morning and I am announcing to you that we found that person, and we found him right here at NIH, in Dr. Frederickson.

You know him better than I; he has spent most of his professional life here. I know him not only from the several meetings I've had with him but also from calling scores of scientists around this country to find the best man for this job, and I'm delighted that he is willing to stay on.

I also hope that you understand the meaning, in the larger sense, of

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SECRETARY CALIFANO LAUDS NIH

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retaining Dr. Fredrickson and looking only for excellence.

Health care and biomedical research and the work you do here, as the work done everywhere else, will be subjected to a new level of scrutiny in the world in which we live and the Nation in which we live.

There will be pressures to find solutions faster, to make medical care less expensive, to make it more available, to conquer disease after disease, a what-disease-did-you-conquer-yesterday? attitude.

There Is No Insulation From Pressures

Those pressures exist. They're in the world in which you live and the world in which I live. There's no insulation from those pressures.

But as far as politics is concerned, it's out of NIH. If I have the power to do anything, as I told Dr. Fredrickson this morning, I will do my best to insulate these Institutes and this great institution from partisan politics.

The only thing and the central thing that I ask in response is that you provide us with excellence—excellent appointments to advisory committees, excellent Directors and staffs, and excellent work. . . .

I know that with Dr. Fredrickson staying on the elements of sound basic research that are critical will be followed here: that there will be a wise choice of problems targeted for research; that there will be a stable component of research initiated by investigators themselves; that there will be room here—the doors will always be open for new investigators with new ideas; and that you'll retain and enhance the capacity to attract intellectual leaders of graduating classes year after year. . . .

Explains Depoliticization

You should know that depoliticizing NIH does not mean certain things. It does not mean that scientists can be removed from human concerns. It does not mean that you will not be subjected to some of the immediate pressures that surround the entire health community.

It does not mean that you can avoid the incredibly difficult ethical questions that attend so much research as science moves to newer and newer frontiers and learns more and more about the secrets of life and our universe.

It does not mean that you are free from the pressure and encouragement that I would impose throughout this Department to deal with the problems of minorities—black, Chicano, Indian, other minorities, women, and the disadvantaged—and to provide them an equal chance with everyone else.

NIH Must Use Training Leverage

It is imperative—and I'm learning this first-hand as I seek people for the top hundred or so policy-making jobs in HEW—it is imperative that places like NIH use the leadership that they so richly have—and use the leverage that they have in the private sector with the universities who are training people—to enlarge that pool of blacks and women and Chicanos and minorities—and of handicapped people—that are available for the top jobs in this country.

You begin to move into those jobs—in your specialties—in the great research universities of this country.

I want to do nothing to inhibit the excellence of those research universities, but I will not stand for what I consider to be a myth that excellence is inconsistent with opening those universities and their postgraduate schools to the blacks and women and other minorities of this country that for so long have had so much difficulty getting in those doors.

I say in a nonpolitical way that we've lost 8 years on this problem. I'm not naive enough to think that we can make up those years in 4, but we're going to try to make up for some of them.

There's no way to do it unless it is done at the top. The very gem—the cream of our research effort in the biomedical field for the world, probably—is right here on this campus and on your other campuses—at the Research Triangle and elsewhere. If it doesn't come from here, it's not going to happen.

Open Doors To Minorities, Handicapped

It's too easy for the great universities of this country to say, "Well, sure, we'd love to have a professor or researcher or an investigator in that area who's a woman or who's black, but there just aren't any." If that's true—and I doubt it—to the extent there aren't enough, it's because those same universities haven't opened those doors wide enough.

If you open the doors, they'll open the doors. And when you tell them how important you think that is, they'll recognize how important it is. If you can do it here, it can be done anywhere in the world, because you're the best—this is the best place of its kind in the world.

I believe that, President Carter believes that, and you've got to provide leadership in that difficult area.