

REMARKS

By

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House of Representatives, U. S. Congress

It is a great honor and privilege to be here with you today to dedicate this new Center for the study of communicable diseases. My congratulations to you, Dr. Burney and to your staff of physicians and scientists. The battles against epidemics that you have fought and won at CDC, the mysteries of the test tube that you have studied and solved - such solid successes, often achieved in makeshift facilities, justified these fine new buildings. I am sure you feel a warm sense of gratification to see your dreams realized and many of us in Congress, who have fought year after year for the building funds you needed, share that feeling.

The great significance of this Center, however, to us and to people everywhere, is that it brings into active operation one of the world's best equipped facilities for the study and control of those diseases that account for two-thirds of all the physical miseries suffered by mankind. We expect great things from the men and women who will labor in these laboratories and, if it is true that "the past is prologue", we shall not be disappointed.

A dedication ceremony in Georgia may seem a strange place for a Congressman from Rhode Island to launch a campaign, but, with your help, that is what I would like to do today. I hope that, as we add this new installation to our research armamentarium, we will begin a campaign for bringing into wider use those rich, life-saving gifts that will come from this Center and that are

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already pouring out of the Nation's research laboratories in ever growing volume.

The need for such a campaign struck me forcibly this summer because, as you know, my own State of Rhode Island has been the scene of the most serious polio epidemic that has occurred this year. Some 70 Rhode Islanders, many of them little children, have already been crippled and the epidemic is still raging. Yet more than five years ago, a 90 percent effective method of preventing polio came from the research laboratory of Dr. Jonas Salk.

When tragedy strikes home, we tend to feel that we have been singled out, that our misfortune is something unusual in an otherwise happy world. But I have learned from my friends in the Public Health Service that the Rhode Island story is but a small chapter in the great tragedy of unused health knowledge which the American people are writing every day.

Here are a few of the facts they have given me:

Two hundred and sixty thousand people die every year from cancer. Some 75,000 of them could survive if present knowledge about cancer were fully applied.

At least half of the crippling from fractures, strokes and arthritis is unnecessary.

For more than 20 years, we have had the technical power to stamp out syphilis, yet 200,000 children and youths under 20 contracted a venereal disease last year and the number is increasing every year.

Strep sore throat ranks second on the list of communicable diseases reported to the Public Health Service - tens of thousands

of cases each year. Yet only a few lucky ones get the prolonged treatment that will protect them from heart disease and every year some 20,000 of the unlucky, untreated ones die of rheumatic fever or rheumatic heart disease.

I could go on with this sorry tale of needless death, crippling and suffering, but what interests us more is how can it be stopped?

Well, I can tell you that it won't be stopped by simply wagging a finger at the public and accusing them of apathy, stupidity or perverseness. I have been dealing with the public for a good many years and I haven't found them apathetic about health. If there are people so dumb or so cussed that they want to be crippled or killed, I've never met them and I've met a lot of people. Whenever the budget for health research comes up, and whenever it looks like it might be trimmed - as it always does these days - my mail is flooded. And those letters don't come from a bunch of scientists who want to ride a gravy train. They come from parents who have lost a child from an incurable disease. They come from friends, neighbors, relatives of those who are suffering from a disease the scientists do not yet understand. The American people want life-saving answers, no matter what it costs to get them, and if they want the answers that bad, it stands to reason they want those answers used once they are found.

So let's get over this phony excuse of public apathy and look at a few hard facts, the chief one being that 19th century health machinery doesn't fit a 20th century society.

A lot of people still seem to think that if they have a good doctor, they can relax and rely entirely on him to look after their health. Maybe some of their doctors believe it too. But I say that's a 19th century idea. I'm a labor man and this attitude reminds me of the line management used to peddle back in those days - leave everything to the wisdom of the managers and they'll see that labor and the public are looked after. "Industrial problems are much too complicated for mere citizens and workers to understand". Well, it's been a long time since that line had any followers in the ranks of management, labor, or the public. The people, through their government, labor, through its unions, together with management, are all actively involved in the big industrial issues.

Similarly, the big health issues of today are so broad that they cannot possibly be solved by any one group or profession. If the builders of our super-highways and irrigation ditches leave breeding places for mosquitos, you are going to risk outbreaks of encephalitis, a disease that is often fatal, and you cannot expect the medical profession to stop it. If the city planners take no heed of health, allowing our ears to be deafened by jet plane take-offs and our lungs to fill with auto exhaust fumes, can the medical profession alone protect us? And if people begin to die off like flies 20 years from now because man and his industries persist in putting poisons into the air, the food and the water, shall we say that the doctors failed us?

Even in the specific attack against specific diseases, there is good evidence that medical action alone is not sufficient. Can

it be that we are sacrificing lives on the sacred altar of doctor-patient relationship? Is it true that the individual doctor in his office is the only one who can control our health destiny? Or are there better or additional ways to assure universal immunization, to find disease in the symptomless stage when it is still curable, to dry up the reservoir of infectious syphilis that is rotting our youth, to eliminate the disabling side effects of chronic illness?

I note that a technical committee on polio vaccine has advised Surgeon General Burney that mass community programs may be the best and safest way to administer the live polio vaccine when it becomes available next year. But among the groups that have been suggested to help recommend plans for communities to follow, I saw only members of the medical profession. Isn't this the old "management knows best" approach? I can't believe that you have to know what an antibody looks like to be able to judge whether a plan for getting everybody to swallow a candy pill is going to work. I'd like to see the people who are going to get sick as well as the people who will be paid for curing them have a voice in such plans.

I'd also like to see them have a voice - a real voice, not just token representation - on a lot of other health issues: mass screening clinics to find the people who need medical treatment but don't know it; nursing home standards; organized home care programs; environmental health plans, to mention only a few that are usually dealt with along strictly professional lines. I'd

like to see health officers' jobs be just as dependent on the approval of the consumers of health services as they now are on the approval of organized medicine.

In calling for militant citizen action on health issues, I do not underestimate the contribution the medical men, individually and through their professional organizations, have made and will continue to make. The high level of health enjoyed by the American people is powerful testimony to the brilliant and dedicated service we have received from the members of the medical profession.

It is not they who have failed but we who have failed by not recognizing that changes in the makeup of our society and changes in the nature of its health problems call for public as well as professional action on an ever-widening area of health issues.

As we dedicate this great Center for applied research, let us also dedicate ourselves to seeing that the knowledge gained here is indeed applied. Let the ingeniousness of the scientists employed here be matched by our own ingeniousness in adapting old ways, finding new ways, challenging tradition if necessary, to assure that, when knowledge leaves the laboratory, it reaches promptly all the people, rich and poor, young and old, whose health it can protect. To this purpose I, as a Congressman, representing the American people, dedicate CDC.

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