

TEXT of TALK By REP. JOHN FOGARTY, (D.,R.I.)
At Eighth Annual Presentation of Albert
Lasker Medical Journalism Awards,
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"HOPE FOR THE FUTURE IN MEDICAL RESEARCH"

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am glad to be here to-day to take part in the presentation of the Albert Lasker awards to the men who have done so much in newspaper, magazines and the radio and television world for medical research and public health.

I am glad because I would like to offer my congratulations to the winners of these awards for their achievements in 1956 but, also, because it gives me the opportunity to speak to the medical press as a whole and to underline to them -- from the point of view of a working Congressman -- how much yet remains to be done if we are to win the fight against cancer and heart disease and the other ravaging diseases of mankind -- in a reasonable length of time.

To be sure, we have made a good deal of progress in the past ten years. I am especially familiar with the details of that period of time because I have been closely associated with medical research in Congress as a member of the appropriations subcommittee on Health, Education and Welfare. This is my eleventh year as a member of the subcommittee and the seventh year of those eleven that I have had the honor of serving as its chairman and of bringing to the floor of the House of Representatives the appropriations bill for research and training in the field of public health.

During those years I have witnessed many medical triumphs. I have seen the signal effect of streptomycin on tuberculosis and then the dramatic drop in the death rate from that disease with the discovery of the isoniazide drugs.

I have seen the discovery of the cause of blindness in prematurely born babies -- retrolental fibroplasia, the medical men call it -- and the virtual elimination of that form of infant blindness.

I have seen the sulfa drugs arrive. I have seen the polio vaccine, the antibiotics, the tranquillizing drugs in heart disease and mental illness and the electron-microscope in its application to bacteria and virus, and I am greatly encouraged by these milestones in medical progress.

But the most impressive, and to me, the most important accomplishment of the past ten years is that during that period, as a result of all these medical discoveries, five years of life have been added to the span of every man, woman and child in America!

That, to me, is the most vivid and most graphic way we can sum up the progress we have made in a decade. A child born to-day can expect to live five years longer than a child born ten years ago!

This medical miracle has more meaning to me than the invention of the telephone or the radio or the automobile or the airplane. For while each of those inventions was historic and had far reaching effects on our way of living, they touched only the periphery of our lives while here is something that affects directly and clearly the most fundamental and precious possession we have, -- life itself.

As we look back over that decade we can see that the benefits that flowed to us came about by the combined efforts of a great many people and a great many forces.

There were the doctors themselves of course, who worked with unremitting toil under great handicaps. There were the voluntary agencies which rasied the funds to underwrite some of the work, and there was the federal government which acknowledged its responsibility and appropriated funds to support these efforts. There were dedicated leaders like the late Albert Lasker, in whose name these awards are being made to-day, who stimulated both private and public sources to strive for new and higher goals, and his wife, Mrs. Mary Lasker who is carrying on the same work to-day and who is the most eminent non-medical worker for public health in the nation.

And finally there are you gentlemen who are to receive these awards, and your colleagues, who every day in the year write stories and offer presentations that bring home to the American people what has been done in medicine and what remains to be done if we are to alleviate human suffering and forestall early death.

It is in your hands, I believe, that a great deal of our hope for the future must rest. For now, more than ever, with a sound medical program off the ground we must get a message across to the people so that they will support the program more fully and give it the chance it needs for its ultimate and speedy success.

I said a few minutes ago that I would like to talk to you as a working Congressman. I meant as a congressman who works in the same general field in the framework of the legislature as you do in journalism, the field of medical research and all its collateral aspects.

When I began my assignment with the committee of which I am chairman, I was somewhat shocked to find how little interest there was in the appropriation for public health and even more surprised to find how little knowledge there was. A handful of congressmen, however, had a deep and sincere conviction that a substantial effort by the federal government was necessary in this field, tied in with the parallel work of the voluntary agencies. They worked hard in committee and on the floor of the House and year by year the appropriation was increased -- from 8 million dollars in (FY) 1947 to 183 million dollars in (FY) 1957.

Each year it seemed to me, there would be more acceptance of the soundness of a liberal approach to the problem and indeed, each year the medical representatives of the voluntary agencies came to Washington to testify for funds, they found it hard to believe that there would be opposition to such a demonstrably worth-while program. Yet opposition there was -- articulate and persistent, and each year a new battle had to be fought, in committee and on the floor, to make any forward movement at all.

The medical men seemed to feel that time would take care of it. It was their view that as the members of Congress came to appreciate the merits of the program it would soon become a problem only of spelling out the amount that was necessary to be appropriated each year and the result would be automatic, -- the funds would be voted. Being a little closer to the parliamentary picture I couldn't share their optimism nor could I share their faith in some of my conservative colleagues. I told them it was my own conviction that many of the members of Congress would not respond favorably to this kind of appropriation unless there was interest expressed at home. And interest at home could not be expected to crystallize until the people themselves knew the programs better, the accomplishments to date, and the blueprint for the future.

That I am sure is exactly the situation to-day and that is why I say to you men of the press and radio and television that to a greater extent than you suspect, the future of medical research, both public and private, rests in your hands and depends on you and your media for its basic impetus.

A few weeks ago I took the the floor of the House to present the 1958 appropriation bill for health, education and welfare. This is a bill that calls for the appropriation of about 2.8 billion dollars. More than two months of hearings had been held with hundreds of witnesses appearing. All were competent experts and the members of the committee were experienced in the subjects they were dealing with. Each part of the bill was discussed in the subcommittee and the full committee on appropriations, and coming out on the floor it was reasonable to expect, as is usually the case, the bill would be debated and passed in five or six legislative hours as it has in recent years. But last month the bill that was introduced on the 26th of March was not completed and passed until the 4th of April, an elapsed time of ten days or eight legislative days of debate and discussion.

And why did it take six or seven times as long as it usually takes to pass this bill? Because of the concerted, persistent efforts of a large group in Congress to cut the funds in the bill, including general items of health and the items for the National Institutes of Health.

It may be hard for most people to understand, but fourteen amendments were prepared to cut the funds for Cancer, Heart Disease, Mental Illness, Neurology, Arthritis, Infectious Diseases, Dentistry, research construction and other such items. It was only by great effort and good fortune that these cuts were not realized.

On March 29th, with the labor section of the bill disposed of, an amendment to cut funds for library services was introduced and defeated somewhat narrowly. Then an amendment to cut grants to the states for general health was introduced and defeated by not too great a margin. Following that an amendment to cut funds for the contribution of hospitals, (the Hill-Burton program) was introduced and defeated, again by a margin that was not too substantial. In fact the exact vote on this amendment was 106 to 126, so the attempt to cut the hospital construction program was defeated by only twenty votes. Another amendment was then introduced to cut funds for Indian health facilities and this too was beaten.

The next items in the bill were the Institutes of Health, beginning with the Cancer Institute, and it was fully expected that these programs would face the same kind of amendments because an announcement to that effect had been made a few days earlier and the amendments had been prepared for introduction.

But in the light of the defeat of four successive amendments, even though the margins of defeat were not large, the opposition collapsed and the amendments were not presented, so the medical research programs remained intact. But I give you my word, on the strength of my seventeen years in Congress, had those four amendments prevailed -- and they were defeated by slim margins -- the amendments

cutting medical research would have been introduced and they might have carried, too.

That is how close a call we had this year in spite of the fine progress that has been made with the funds expended in previous years.

And so I say to you men of the public media again, you can make a great contribution to the cause of public health by your interpretation and explanation of the considerations. I am sure in my own mind that most people want these programs, but I am afraid they don't understand them fully enough to be militant in their support of them.

As we look toward the future we can see that a great deal remains to be done. We have to admit that we have really taken only the first few faltering steps in medical research when we consider the magnitude of the problem and its complexity.

First, we must expand the program of basic research so that, concurrent with the testing of drugs and improvements in surgical techniques, we can work toward an understanding of the fundamental causes of these diseases.

Second, we must expand the categorical programs individually so that more highly trained men can move at more rapid speed in following promising leads in their respective fields.

Third, we must produce more doctors and train more of these doctors in the categorical fields because we now have a shortage of general practitioners and research specialists as well.

Fourth, we must cooperate with industry in the development of highly complicated and delicate machinery to help the medical research men in their evaluation of scientific phenomena.

Fifth, we must provide the physical plants in which research is to be done and the thirty million dollar a year program we started last year, and have continued this year, is a good start in that direction.

And finally, we must explain the value and the meaning of these programs to the people. We, in Congress, don't know how much it will cost to carry the medical research programs to their conclusion but for myself I can say to you that I will propose whatever sums are necessary. To get the support of most of my colleagues I need your help in your field. If the men who are receiving awards here to-day reflect the attitude of medical journalists in general, then I know we can look to a bright and hopeful future. We can look confidently to the day in the not too distant future when the killing and crippling diseases will be mastered and the American people will have the health and the happiness to which they are entitled.

I thank you.