

ADDRESS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

BY

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THE VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

BEFORE NATIONAL LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE ON

MENTAL HEALTH LEGISLATION

MAYFLOWER HOTEL, GRAND BALLROOM

WASHINGTON, D. C.

MARCH 19, 1965 -- 2:30 P. M.

It is a privilege to meet with you and to help
sum up "where we go from here" in the battle against
mental illness.

17 months ago, in this same city, I had the
honor of addressing many members of this audience
at a Convention of the National Association for Mental
Health.

That day I spoke of a deep, underlying danger
to America -- fanatic extremism. I cautioned against
the "far-out" Right -- against "wild men of reaction"
who, like the fanatic Leftists of the 1930's, had "gone
off the handle."

↳ I mentioned an even vaster danger -- on the world scene --
the possibility that the head of a Nuclear-Missile Power
might make an irrational decision which could lead to
international disaster.

↳ This is what I said on the danger of irrationality
on the night of November 21, 1963:

“We live in a world in which the penalty for
rash judgment is monstrously out of propor-
tion, in which the misjudgment or miscalcu-
lation of a powerful leader can bring down
civilization in death and destruction or --

and then, I stated --

“where the act of an emotionally unstable
person or irresponsible citizen can strike
down a great leader.”

“The next day, in Dallas, from the window of the
Texas School Book Depository, an emotionally unstable person --
who, in his youth, had needed, but had not received -- psychia-
tric help -- aimed a carbine. The shots he fired struck from
our midst -- a young father, a President, a statesman, a
magnificent human being.

L All humanity shuddered in horror at this tragedy.

I ask this Conference: "Has America fully learned
the lessons of that tragedy?"

L The answer is, I believe: "No, not entirely."

The nation has not yet fully learned that, in every
community, comprehensive programs are necessary in order
to cope with the problem of sick minds. Most of those ill minds
will never inflict any harm. But the mentally sick -- the victims
of a wide variety of disorders -- will suffer, as will their loved
ones. And all of society will continue to be the loser.

L To help meet this problem, your Conference has for 2
days studied this problem -- the most widespread, most complex,
most misunderstood health problem in the Nation. You have
developed an action program, a battle plan to help win the war
against this enemy of mental illness.

and - You know that, crucial to victory in this war -- is an

Amendment President Johnson has proposed to Public Law 88-164.

That law -- the Community Mental Health Center Act of 1963 -- is a living memorial to President John F. Kennedy. This law he fought for so well cannot realize its fullest promise without the Bill proposed by President Johnson. This bill will, as our

Chief Executive stated in his Message of January 7, 1965:

"pay the initial costs of personnel to man community mental health centers which offer comprehensive services."

∟ This Amendment -- for Staffing Funds -- had,
as we recall, been amputated before the 1963 law was enacted.

∟ The time has come to graft the amendment back on,
This can be done -- if you give it your strong support at
the grassroots of America.

∟ If the Staffing Amendment is enacted, then, by 1970--
the Nation will get the benefit of 500 to 700 well-staffed
Community Health Centers. These Centers will -- unlike
the traditional State or County Institution -- offer not merely
one service -- in-patient care, but a complete range of
services, tailored to every type, to every degree, to
every stage -- of emotional and mental illness.

For the first time, most of the mentally ill will be treated promptly -- as individuals -- in places where they have the best chance to recover -- in their own environment and their own community -- instead of being treated too late (if at all) and in remote isolation.

For the first time, America's poor, including its culturally deprived (who are more vulnerable to emotional illness than more advantaged groups) will have access -- locally -- to first rate professional services.

The great need for well-staffed Centers will, I am sure, meet a favorable response from the Legislative Branch.

L The 89th Congress is truly a Peoples' Congress -- a humane, enlightened Congress. This Congress will add to the outstanding record of the predecessor 88th Congress.

L This Amendment for funds to staff Centers is one more building block in what I should like to call -- a total structure of 20th Century action for Mental Health.

L One "wing" of that structure is the expanded National Institute for Mental Health. N. I. M. H. is, as you know, the world's foremost stimulus of psychiatric and related progress. Year after year, the Congress of the United States -- in authorization and appropriation -- has increased NIMH's capacity to perform its vital job. Dr. Robert Felix, NIMH's past Director and Dr. ^{Yollis} Stanley Yollis, present Director, have been worthy "Masons" ^{builders} of this wing.

In the Congress, two great leaders have been particularly responsible for NIMH's progress -- my distinguished colleague, Senator Lister Hill, and an outstanding Congressman ~~who takes~~ who takes rightful pride in having been an actual bricklayer, John Fogarty.

Elsewhere, in the National structure of mental health are the "wings," made possible by advanced thinkers and doers of the American Psychiatric Association and of related professional organizations -- in the healing arts.

Still another "wing" comprise dynamic citizen action -- the National Association for Mental Health and related grass-roots groups -- represented by so many leaders in this audience.

You are not alone. The greatness of America, as Alexis de Tocqueville wrote a century ago, is its volunteer spirit.

You, today, are the elite force of a professional and citizen army. You are -- (to borrow a title which was misappropriated by America's foes) -- a "Peoples' Liberation Army." Your goal is to help liberate human beings from the terrible bondage of mental affliction -- the awful suffering of depression and other disturbances.

You seek to break the shackles which have chained men, women and children -- figuratively (and on occasion, literally) -- in state and county asylums -- which have sometimes been little more than "human warehouses."

L The movement for Community Mental Health Centers is far from a cure-all for mental disease -- but it is a great advance.

L It is part of a mighty reform wave in psychiatry. Behind this wave is a tide of public sentiment, demanding an end to ignorance and indifference, to superstition and sneers. Propelling this wave has been science's own achievements, such as the spectacular breakthroughs made possible by psychiatric drugs.

L Within one decade, the so-called "impossible" has come to pass. Doubters even in professional ranks -- pessimists on what could be accomplished, fatalists have been proven wrong about what science -- and, yes, human devotion -- could achieve.

L The walls of Snake Pits have come tumbling down. "Untreatable" residents of institutions have been treated. "Incurables" have been cured. "Unreleasables" have been released. Many have had to be re-admitted. But what a joy to countless

as deceptive myths.

There are more myths about madness in this nation than even about -- say, the institution of marriage (which some people seem to equate.)

Illusions or delusions about derangement -- cannot be ignored. We can replace them with truth. We can erase this cruel stigma which has blighted the lives of so many former patients.

This Nation can do much more -- it should do much more -- across-the-board for the mentally ill, and I might add, for another vast, ill-tended group -- the mentally retarded.

Timing is crucial. We should counter-attack -- now -- against mental disease before it attacks our fellow citizens. Often, we can prevent it before it occurs, instead of sitting back and waiting to treat it -- after the fact. We can help well citizens (and this includes just about all of us) in those times of crisis which tend to occur in almost every man or woman's life.

We can reduce the shocking national toll of 20,000 suicides a year.

We can lower the incidence of mental illness in childhood. If we don't, the number of disturbed youngsters, aged 10 to 14, in mental institutions will increase 100% by 1970, as compared with 1965. This is despite the fact that the overall youth population will increase by only 20%.

↳ We can mobilize inter-disciplinary forces --
psychiatrists, neuro-physiologists, sociologists, anthro-
pologists, bio-chemists, mathematicians, engineers and
others -- to build weapon-systems against mental disease,
the same way we have -- long since -- built space, nuclear
and missile systems.

↳ We can modernize and link information storage and
retrieval, as through the National Clearinghouse on Mental
Health Information, in the same way we streamlined data
systems for the Polaris submarine, the Titan Missile or
Project Gemini.

↳ All along the line, we can strengthen public institutions --
~~which see but so often fail to help victims of emotional illness --~~
welfare departments, counselling agencies, correctional
institutions, probation agencies and others.

↳ Their clients are people in need -- men, women and

children who may be confused, crushed, and yes, criminal.

↳ The task before us is to salvage, reclaim, uplift

lives -- instead of providing mere palliatives.

↳ We must prove that we are "our brother's keeper."

↳ We, the people can do something -- can do more --

do better -- for the mentally ill. ↳ We can do so in countless

private organizations of this Nation, in our fraternal group,

our trade union, business, Chamber of Commerce, Church

group or farm group.

h Finally, we can recognize the deeper -- even more alarming
-- implications of a certain mental condition which contributed to
the terrible tragedy which took place in Dallas a year and a half ago.

L I refer to the condition of blind hatred against fellow citizens,

L Most often, this condition is not serious enough to warrant
hospitalization. Usually, hatred poisons -- but does not unbalance
-- the mind.

L But even in its less extreme forms, hatred is a menace to
American society.

L In its most widespread form today, hatred is directed against
leaders of the Negro people -- whether those leaders happen to be
white or Negro.

L Such hatred has already taken a terrible toll.

A question today before this nation is: "How much larger a toll
will we allow hatred to exact?"

Poison of Prejudice

↳ How many more mobs will we allow fanatics to incite?

How many more beatings, burnings, and bombings will good citizens tolerate at the hands of a tiny, vicious minority?

↳ This question cannot be answered alone by the forces
of law and order.

↳ This question must be answered by the conscience of every community, by the overwhelming numbers of decent citizens who bear no ill will against their neighbors.

↳ The question must be answered in every city, every state and every region. As President Johnson reminded us, Monday night, this is a problem facing all America.

↳ The challenge faces every law-abiding citizen who has been content to be silent while those who hated -- spoke. It confronts every citizen who has remained passive, while those who hated -- acted.

Leadership of men of good will is necessary -- by men
of good will. *Evil triumphs - When Goodmen fail to Act.*

You of this audience are ideally qualified to lead -- to
make your own community an example of excellence in human
relations.

Your proper concern is more than with the problem of
mental disease -- as serious as that is; your larger concern
is for the human condition, the situation of the Family of Man.

You of this audience are leaders for sanity and for reason.

The cause of human dignity is your cause, and it is mine.

Let us each do our part.

Let us each be worthy of the religion we profess, the
science we esteem and the Nation we love.

TRANSCRIPT 1965

3/19 National Leadership Conference
on Mental Health Legislation

Thank you very much my dear friend Geri Joseph. Isn't it wonderful to have your own special introducer on occasions such as this? Someone whose affection and friendship exceeds ~~the~~ ^{their} prudent judgment and objectivity. I am simply delighted. I want to agree with every word that you've said Geri (laughter). She is a very dear and close friend of Mrs. Humphrey's, and I know that she tells Muriel all these things all the time because Muriel's treating me better all the time. And you're improving the condition of mental health in our family (laughter) in reference to the so-called "head of the family" which is a myth, needs to be exploded.

I have many opportunities now as before, even more now, to be with groups of national significance, groups that are doing great things. And it's very difficult to know which invitations to accept and which ones not to. There are meeting in this city today large audiences of two or three thousand people. But I felt that your audience and your meeting was one of equality and of the importance that I should like to know and to meet. And that's why I'm here. Because of what you do and what you represent.

Because of what I know is your dedication and your commitment to the well-being of human kind. Of course it helps to have Geri on the program and as one of your leaders, and it helps to have other friends that I see in this audience, and I responded to their warm invitation.

I'm here today to help you sum up where do we go from here in this battle against mental illness. Seventeen months ago in this same city, in a different hotel and in a different meeting, I had the honor of addressing many members of this audience at a convention of the National Association for Mental Health. In fact, I was speaking of that particular address to a reporter, I should say to a writer just the other day: the gentlemen who is doing a study in depth of those tragic and sorrowful days in late November 1963.

The day that I spoke to the meeting of the National Association for Mental Health, I spoke of a deep underlying danger to America and I called it "fanatic extremism" and I cautioned against certain groups. I cautioned against the far-out right against the wild men of reaction who like the fanatical leftists of the 1930's had literally gone off the handle, and we've seen plenty of it in the 30's, in the 40's, the 50's and even into these 60's.

I mentioned, then, an even vaster danger as I saw it on the world scene: the possibility of the everpresent threat of nuclear proliferation of the head of a nuclear missile power who might make an irrational decision which ~~w~~ could lead us to international disaster. Because remember that every decision is made by a human mind. And you cannot always be positively sure of the health of that mind. This is what I said on the danger of irrationality on the night of November 21, 1963, and I quote from that address:

"We live in a world in which the penalty for rash judgment is monstrously out of proportion, in which the misjudgment or miscalculation of a powerful world leader can bring down civilization in death and destruction, or" and then I stated these words:

"where the act of an emotionally unstable person or irresponsible citizen can strike down a great leader."

I had no ~~prophetic~~ prophetic vision. I'm not a prophet, nor do I indulge in prophesy. But the next day in Dallas from the window of a Texas school book depository, an emotionally unstable person who in his youth had needed but had not received psychiatric help aimed a deadly weapon. The shots he fired struck from our midst

a blessed and dear man, a young father, a magnificent human being, a statesman, and our President. What price we paid for instability and mental illness.

All humanity shuddered in horror at this tragedy, and I ask this conference a little over a year later, Has America fully learned the lessons of that tragedy. The answer I believe is, No, not entirely. Because some of the same violent passions sweep this country, forms of hatred and bitterness and prejudice still poison our thinking and our reaction, so possibly we have much yet to learn. I think so.

The nation has not yet fully learned that in every community comprehensive programs are necessary in order to cope with the problems of sick minds. And most of those ill minds, of course, will never, thank goodness, inflact any harm.

But the mentally sick, the victims of a wide variety of disorders, they will suffer, as will their loved ones. And society will continue to be the loser.

The greatachievement of the last generation is that we have taken this problem of mental illness and mental retardation out of the shadows. We taken it out from the dark tunnels of indifference, of lack of concern and we put it out in the sunlight for human observation, and we trust for human evaluation and improvement.

Now, to help meet this problem of mental illness, your conference has for two days been studying this most widespread, this most complex, and misunderstood health problem in the nation.

You have developed an action program -- a battle plan so to speak to help win the war against this enemy of mental illness. And again, this is one of those wars you can't lose; you're bound to win something.

And you know that crucial to victory in this war is an amendment, a piece of legislation that is pending right now before the Congress in the very city where you meet. It's an amendment to Public Law 88-164, the Community Mental Health Center Act of 1963.

Now that Community Mental Health Center Act which I addressed myself to a little over a year ago, an Act I had something to do in the passing, is a living memorial to the late President John F. Kennedy. This law he fought for, cannot realize its fullest promise without the amendments that are presently before the Congress, sent there by President Johnson.

This bill, these amendments, as our chief executive stated in his message of January 7, 1965

and it was one of the first bills he sent to Congress --
"will pay the initial cost of personnel to man community
mental health centers which offer comprehensive services."

~~THEX~~ This amendment for the staffing fund, for
administrative purposes, had as you recall been literally
amputated from the Act of 1963. The time has come to
grasp back on to that Act



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