

An Appeal to the Doctors

By SEN. HUBERT H. HUMPHREY

From an address delivered to the Legislative Conference in Minneapolis February 18, 1950.

OUR STAFF is studying all the voluntary health plans in the Nation. We want to find out if they should play a role in a national health program; and if so, what kind of plans and to what extent. We want the answers to this and a host of other problems in order that we may draft a bill which means as much to you as to the people who seek your services. We've had the advice and assistance of farm organizations, of cooperatives, of labor groups, of social workers, statisticians, and public health people. They have consulted with us and we know they will again.

But from the organizations of professional people who have so much at stake in this legislation we have received nothing constructive at all—nothing but opposition.

I learned that early in 1946 Senator Murray had written the AMA—had asked its representatives to come to Washington, to go over his bill, and to point out anything in it that could possibly do damage to you, either professionally, politically, or economically. He had not asked support—only for constructive criticism.

I cannot tell you how shocked I was to learn that your officers did not even have the courtesy to reply.

They waited until the election of 1946 and decided that the medical-care problems of the American people had disappeared and that even courtesy was no longer necessary.

I want to tell you that the time for that sort of blindness is past. The American people need and want, and are going to have, a national health program. If when that program goes into effect there is anything in it which hurts you in any way, it will be because of criminal negligence on the part of your organizations. It will not be the fault of the American people or of the men who draft the law. We do not believe we can have a sound health program unless it is as sound for you as it is for us.

The American people want a plan that will enable them to purchase health care on a decent, self-respecting, pay-as-you-go basis. They want a plan that will enable them to use your services when and as needed—at your discretion. They want to pay in proportion to their incomes and they want the Government to add enough so that you get paid well and with plenty of incentive. They're thinking of you as well as of themselves because they and we, your representatives in Congress, know that we want the best medical care possible and that we can get it only from people who are free and happy in their professions.

Without your help we have tried painstakingly to protect your interests in drafting the administration's bill. We've not only guaranteed the patient complete freedom to choose or change his doctor but we've guaranteed you complete freedom too. It's spelled out in the bill. You are free to enter the plan or not, or to enter it on a part-time basis if you so choose. If you do enter you are free to accept or reject patients just as now. In each community doctors can decide for themselves on what basis they would like to be paid. You can engage in group or solo practice as you will. You are represented on all local plans and at the state and national level by men of your own choosing. And the bill guarantees that professional matters shall be decided upon only by professional men.

Without your assistance we have tried to give you every just and equitable assurance. But we should have your help. I don't mean the sponsors of S. 1679 alone and I don't mean help in passing a bill. I do mean that since one of the bills before us or a variation of one is going to pass, your officers owe an obligation to you and to the Nation to see to it that should a bill pass even over their objections, it protects your interests as well as is humanly possible.

I am asking you—pleading with

you—to recognize your obligations to the future of your profession and of the Nation of which you are citizens. As individuals I know you do, but when your organizations speak for you, they do not. And they are your organizations.

The American people have granted you your license to practice.

The American people have said that no one shall compete with you.

The American people have invested \$40,000 of their money for every one of you doctors in order that you might have hospitals in which to work without cost to you.

The American people have invested thousands more in the professional training each of you receive.

Having done these things and more, the American people with all their respect for you as men and women of science and as friends, are not going to permit your organizations to tell them that they have nothing to say about the manner in which they shall pay your bills.

That's why I am asking that before it's too late you stop listening to those venal men who make their fortunes by urging you to fight every proposal and charging you for the privilege of carrying on the fight. Forget the scare words like "socialism" and "welfare state." Use the same scientific approach to economic and political problems as you would in investigating a purportedly new remedy for disease.

This government which the firm of Whitaker & Baxter and the AMA want you always to fight—which they want

you to fear—is your government. It belongs to and is run by you and your neighbors.

It's the government of the United States of America and of its people. That's the government the Journal of the AMA is talking about when it says the government wants to regiment you, to destroy your livelihood, to ruin your profession.

That sort of talk is nonsense and right now for you it's dangerous nonsense.

Those of us who serve your government in the Congress are not ogres. We're elected by you and your neighbors. We want to work for and with you—not against you. And in the field of health this is particularly true. The people tell us what their needs are—we should have your help in getting it for them.

Read the health bills in the Congress. Don't let anyone tell you glibly what they would mean or do to you. Read them. Put your finger on any line or lines you think bad or harmful. Call them to our attention. Either we can explain why they are there and how they are good, rather than bad, or we'll change them. No one of the sponsors of the national health insurance bill thinks he has a perfect bill. Not a single Senator sponsoring any of the other bills thinks his is perfect—I know I can speak for them.

We do think that American medical care is among the best in the world. But we know that too many Americans can't afford it under our present system of payment. We want to change not the practice of medicine, but only

PENDING LEGISLATION

HEALTH SERVICES TO SCHOOL CHILDREN. S. 1411. Opposed by AMA. To date not acted on by the House.

PUBLIC HEALTH UNITS. S. 522. Opposed by AMA. To date not acted on by the House.

NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION. Passed by both houses.

EXTENSION OF HOSPITAL CONSTRUCTION ACT. Passed by both houses.

AID TO MEDICAL EDUCATION. S. 1453. House Finance committee turned down House counterpart of S. 1453, H. R. 5940. Biemiller introduced a similar bill, H. R. 8886. Not acted on yet. Opposed by AMA.

MEDICAL RESEARCH. House Appropriations committee has approved a bill providing funds for research.

the way in which we pay for it. The people of this country are demanding a change and, with or without your help, we're going to give it to them. Without your help we won't do as well and you may inadvertently and unnecessarily suffer. With your help we should have no

problem reaching a solution satisfactory to all.

For myself, for the Congress, and for the people of your country, I ask that help. I can pledge you our good faith—completely. Will you extend to us a little?

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