
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”
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and the New Deal**

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1939 January ?

**Proposed Message to Congress re
a National Health Program**

1-23-39



Jan 23

PROPOSED MESSAGE

u
a National Health Program

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In my annual message to the Congress I referred to problems of health security. I take occasion now to bring this subject specifically to your attention in transmitting the report and recommendations on national health prepared by the Interdepartmental Committee to Coordinate Health and Welfare Activities.

The health of the people is a public concern; ill health is a major cause of suffering, economic loss, and dependency; good health is essential to the security and progress of the Nation.

Health needs were studied by the Committee on Economic Security which I appointed in 1934 and certain basic steps were taken by the Congress in the Social Security Act. It was recognized at that time that a comprehensive health program was required as an essential link in our national defenses against individual and social insecurity. Further study, however, seemed necessary at that time to determine ways and means of providing this protection most effectively.

In August 1935, ~~just~~ after the passage of the Social Security Act, I appointed the Interdepartmental Committee to Coordinate Health and Welfare Activities. Early in 1938, this committee forwarded to me reports prepared by their technical experts. They had reviewed unmet health needs, pointing to the desirability of a national health program, and they submitted the outlines of such a program. These reports were impressive. I therefore suggested that a conference be held to bring the findings before representatives of the general public and of the medical, public health, and allied professions.

More than 200 men and women, representing many walks of life and many parts of our country, came together in Washington last July

to consider the technical committee's findings and recommendations and to offer further proposals. There was agreement on two basic points: The existence of serious unmet needs for medical service; and our failure to make full application of the growing powers of medical science to prevent or control disease and disability.

I have been concerned by the evidence of inequalities that exist among the States as to personnel and facilities for health services. ~~There are equally serious inequalities in personnel and~~ ~~and~~ resources, medical facilities and services in different sections and among different economic groups. These inequalities create handicaps for the parts of our country and the groups of our people which most sorely need the benefits of modern medical science.

The objective of a national health program is to make available in all parts of our country and for all groups of our people the scientific knowledge and skill at our command to prevent and care for sickness and disability; to safeguard mothers, infants and children; and to offset through social insurance the loss of earnings among workers who are temporarily or permanently disabled.

The committee does not propose a great expansion of Federal health services. It recommends that plans be worked out and administered by States and localities with the assistance of Federal grants-in-aid. ~~The aim is a flexible program, to assure that none of our family of States is barred from an equal opportunity to share in the strength and progress of the Nation.~~ The committee points out that while the eventual costs of the proposed program would be considerable, they represent a sound investment which can be expected to wipe out, in the long run, certain costs now borne in the form of relief, ~~and they~~

~~would represent, to a very large extent, merely a more effective and hence a more economical and humane use of money we are now spending for sickness from our private purses and from public funds.~~

We have reason to derive great satisfaction from the increase in the average length of life in our country and from the improvement in the average levels of health and well-being. Yet these improvements in the averages are cold comfort to the millions of our people whose security in health and survival is still as limited as was that of the Nation as a whole fifty years ago.

The average level of health or the average cost of sickness has little meaning for those who now must meet personal catastrophes. To know that a stream is four feet deep on the average is of little help to those who drown in the places where it is ten feet deep. The recommendations of the committee offer a program to bridge that stream by reducing the risks of needless suffering and death, and of costs and dependency, that now overwhelm millions of individual families and sap the resources of the Nation.

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I commend the report of the Interdepartmental Committee ~~and~~
~~its recommendations~~ for careful study by the Congress, ~~and for such~~
~~action as may seem advisable, in this line.~~ The essence of the
program recommended by the Committee is Federal-State cooperation.
Federal legislation necessarily precedes, ^{for it indicates} ~~to indicate~~ the ~~assistance~~
assistance which may be made available to the States in a cooperative
program for the Nation's health.

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