

January 31, 1940

[Hospital Construction in Rural Areas]

FDR Speech File

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MESSAGE

FROM

THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

ON  
A PROPOSED PROGRAM OF HOSPITAL CONSTRUCTION  
IN RURAL AND OTHER NEEDY AREAS

To The Congress of the United States:

In my special message to the Congress on January 23, 1939, I expressed my concern over the inequalities that exist among the States as to health services and resources with which to furnish such services. With that message I transmitted the report and recommendations on national health prepared by the Interdepartmental Committee to Coordinate Health and Welfare Activities and recommended it for careful study by the Congress.

Conditions described a year ago are substantially unchanged today. There is still need for the Federal government to participate in strengthening and increasing the health security of the Nation. Therefore, I am glad to know that a committee of the Congress has already begun a careful study of health legislation. It is my hope that such study will be <sup>actively</sup> continued during the present session, looking toward constructive action. <sup>AT THE REQUEST OF</sup> I have asked the Interdepartmental Committee to Coordinate Health and Welfare Activities to continue its study, <sup>and to cooperate in every way</sup> ~~with appropriate committees of Congress.~~

In order that at least a beginning may be made I now propose for the consideration of the Congress a program for the construction of small hospitals in needy areas of the country, especially in rural areas, not now provided with them. Hospitals are essential to physicians in <sup>providing</sup> ~~providing~~

modern medical service to the people. In many areas present hospital facilities are ~~almost nonexistent~~ <sup>almost nonexistent</sup> ~~existing and failing~~ <sup>the most elementary</sup> health needs ~~are not being met~~ <sup>are not being met</sup>

The provision of hospitals in the areas to which I refer will greatly improve existing health services, attract competent doctors and raise the standards of medical care in these communities. The new hospitals should serve the additional purpose of providing laboratory and other diagnostic facilities for the use of local physicians, as well as accommodations for local health departments.

The proposed hospitals should be built only where they are <sup>most</sup> needed; they should not be constructed in communities where ~~adequate~~ public or private institutions are already available to the people in need of service. <sup>if these institutions are not up to the highest standards.</sup> To insure proper location and ~~high~~ <sup>highest</sup> standards of operation, approval of hospital construction projects should be given by the Surgeon General of the Public Health Service, with the advice of an advisory council consisting of outstanding medical and scientific authorities who are expert in matters relating to hospital services. <sup>and other public health</sup>

Projects proposed for consideration should be submitted by responsible public authorities and should include assurance that adequate maintenance will be provided. Approval of projects should be preceded by careful survey of existing local hospital facilities and needs. Standards for organization, staff, and continuing operation should be established by the Surgeon General, with the advice of the advisory council. A competent hospital staff and satisfactory standards of service should be required, including medical, surgical, and maternity service. When <sup>indicated</sup> ~~needed~~, special provisions should be made for the care of the tuberculous. In many areas

of the South, the present acute needs for the care of Negro patients should be met.

I suggest that these hospitals be simple, functional, ~~simple~~ structures, utilizing inexpensive ~~but thoroughly tested~~ materials and construction methods. The facilities of the Federal Works Agency should be utilized in the planning and execution of the hospital projects. Title to these institutions should be held by the Federal Government, but operation should be a local <sup>financial</sup> responsibility.

I recommend to the Congress that enabling legislation for this program be enacted and that <sup>the</sup> sum of <sup>estimated 7,500,000 and</sup> \$10,000,000 be appropriated to the Public Health Service to inaugurate the program during the next fiscal year.

~~I am proposing at this time a relatively small expenditure toward meeting our large health needs. Yes, I am confident that even this limited~~ undertaking will bring substantial returns in the saving of lives, rehabilitation of workers, and increased health and vigor of the people.

MESSAGE

ON

A PROPOSED PROGRAM OF HOSPITAL CONSTRUCTION  
IN RURAL AND OTHER NEEDY AREAS (continued)

This suggestion is not a renewal of a Public Works program through the method of grants in aid. The areas which I have in mind are areas so ~~terribly~~ poor that they cannot raise their share of the cost of building and equipping a hospital. Yet I believe that many of such communities have enough public-spirited citizens with means, and enough citizens able to pay something for hospital treatment, to care for operating costs of a hospital, provided they ~~are able~~ not have to pay for its original construction and equipment, or to pay annual interest and amortization on borrowed money. Treatment in such a hospital would, of course, be available to men, women and children who literally ~~cannot~~ <sup>do not</sup> afford to contribute little or nothing toward their treatment.

One of the important difficulties in such areas at the present time is that young Doctors hesitate to practise general medicine or surgery because of the utter lack of hospital or laboratory facilities. One cannot blame them.

In such areas also costs of construction are generally low and many local materials can be used. It is my belief that with the assistance of the Works <sup>Projects</sup> ~~Program~~ Administration the cost of building and equipping a hundred

bed hospital can be kept down to between \$150,000 and \$200,000. This means that we could build fifty such hospitals for between \$7,500,000 and \$10,000,000.

This is not an ambitious project. This principle should not be extended to government gifts to communities which are financially able to build their own hospitals. It is an experiment in the sense that the Nation will gain much experience by undertaking such a project.

At the very least it will save lives and improve health in those parts of the Nation which need this most and can ~~not~~ afford it *first*

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January 30, 1940

CONFIDENTIAL: To be held in STRICT CONFIDENCE and no portion, synopsis or intimation to be published or given out until the READING of the President's Message has begun in the Senate or the House of Representatives. Extreme care must therefore be exercised to avoid premature publication.

STEPHEN EARLY  
Secretary to the President

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In order that at least a beginning may be made I now propose for the consideration of the Congress a program for the construction of small hospitals in needy areas of the country, especially in rural areas, not now provided with them. Hospitals are essential to physicians in giving modern medical service to the people. In many areas present hospital facilities are almost non-existent. The most elementary health needs are not being met.

The provision of hospitals in the areas to which I refer will greatly improve existing health services, attract competent doctors and raise the standards of medical care in these communities. The new hospitals should serve the additional purpose of providing laboratory and other diagnostic facilities for the use of local physicians, as well as accommodations for local health departments.

The proposed hospitals should be built only where they are most needed; they should not be constructed in communities where public or private institutions are already available to the people in need of service even if these institutions are not up to the highest standards. To insure proper location and good standards of operation, approval of hospital construction projects should be given by the Surgeon General of the Public Health Service, with the advice of an advisory council consisting of outstanding medical and scientific authorities who are expert in matters relating to hospital and other public health services.

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FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

THE WHITE HOUSE,

January 30, 1940.