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ADDRESS BY ATTORNEY GENERAL ROBERT F. KENNEDY
BEFORE THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR HEALTH,
PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND RECREATION, TAFT AUDITORIUM,
CINCINNATI, OHIO, APRIL 6, 1962.

Last December, in New York, the President remarked that politics is, indeed, an astonishing profession. It enabled an obscure lieutenant to become Commander in Chief in 15 years, and it enabled an obscure Harvard end to become that night an honorary member of the Football Hall of Fame.

I was happy to accept your invitation to speak here. I was encouraged to do so by Bud Wilkinson, Special Consultant to the President on Youth Fitness. Bud, as you know, also is football coach at Oklahoma, and after last season he pointed out forcefully another astonishing aspect of politics.

"We won half our games," he said, "and it was a poor season. You won about half the votes, and look where you are. And you have four years to get ready for the next game."

Even so, I believe it only fair to say we both play a pretty tough schedule. And certainly, I want to add here that this Administration is proud of the progress that has been made through the cooperative efforts of your profession and the President's Council on Youth Fitness, which Bud Wilkinson heads. But, I must say frankly, much more progress can be made and must be made in the next 12 months.

I address you tonight as a layman, but I am vitally interested in

the contributions of your profession to the physical and mental well-being of our countrymen.

Yours is a vast organization, with divergent points of view. It includes health educators, recreation specialists and physical educators. You are represented by men and women; by coaches and classroom teachers. Your areas of interest range from high jumping to hygiene, from obesity to obstacle courses, from dental health to driver training, from folk dancing to first aid.

It is virtually inconceivable, then, that you would be totally free of differences of opinion. The very nature of your organization makes it difficult for you to isolate a single objective as being the most important for all your members. Yet that is what you must do -- not necessarily for your own good or for the good of your profession, but for the good of your country.

That objective must be, first and foremost for all of you, the proper level of physical fitness for all our boys and girls and all our young men and young women.

The nation is looking to you for leadership in solving our youth physical fitness problems. You have a great responsibility. What is done in this nation to improve the physical fitness of our youth must be done primarily by you. You will not be alone, but you must provide the leadership in our schools and our communities, no matter what the sacrifice. Your intrinsic reward may not be great. But you will have the great satisfaction of knowing you placed your country ahead of yourself and your organization. And a strong, secure nation will recognize your efforts.

I am fully aware of your problems. I know that for years you have fought for sufficient time, facilities and administrative support for your programs. I know that fight continues; that the situation is not ideal in every school and community.

That we have a youth physical fitness problem in this country, is no more an indictment of your profession than is an indictment of all of us as citizens and parents. The indictment is of our way of life. Too many of us have failed to recognize what is happening to the vigor of our country. Too many, even though aware of what is happening, have failed to do anything about it.

I am reminded of Bill Bingham's observation of a Saturday afternoon at Harvard's Memorial Stadium -- "twenty-two boys on the field badly in need of rest -- and 40,000 people in the stands badly in need of exercise."

Your task will not be easy, but without any question your profession has an unmatched opportunity and a great challenge. Never before, even in time of war, have Americans been so eager to support programs for the physical development of our youth. The nation is ready to follow your leadership, but that leadership must be clear, forceful and -- above all -- unified.

To put the problem simply, we have to get our youth into a reasonable state of physical fitness. Anything less will not satisfy the demands of this day and age.

To do this, we must put first things first. There has been a great deal of talk about physical fitness. The problem is clear. We know what has to be done and the President's Council on Youth Fitness has outlined

a simple program that will get the job done.

I think we can talk all we want about theories and benefits of various types of programs but if our young men and young women are not physically fit, all the theories and ideas won't add up to much. Bud Wilkinson can have the most deceptive plays ever devised and he can have the best strategy, but if his young men aren't physically fit to play 60 minutes of tough football, they won't win.

I think that's the situation among many of our youths today. They may be called upon to play 60 minutes but they aren't in shape to do so.

In my judgment, what is needed most are programs the public will understand, accept and -- even more important -- will insist on for their schools and communities. The need is for programs designed not necessarily to meet every specification of your personal philosophies or those of your particular segment of this profession. The situation demands programs to meet the needs of our boys and girls -- the needs of our country.

I am convinced every program must include a simple physical achievement test to identify the physically-underdeveloped students. This group represents our greatest need.

I realize that most of us, no matter what our special field may be, like to work with talented people. But your profession is one which must give highest priority to those who need you most -- the physically underdeveloped. I believe every program must include the identification of these students, and compulsory basic developmental activity that will enable them to reach a satisfactory level of physical fitness. Only then will they be able to reap the benefits of physical education.

As you know, such an identification test was developed for the President's Council on Youth Fitness by many of the leading members of your profession. Particularly significant is the fact it was designed to identify the lower 25 percent, physically, of our youth. The shocking fact was, however, that in pilot programs involving one-quarter of a million students, the test identified the lower 46.9 percent. The situation was almost twice as bad as these leading educators believed it to be.

In carrying out your mission as educators, you never can assume that physical fitness will just happen. It must be made to happen -- through daily vigorous activity, every day for every boy and girl. That, I believe, should be your primary mission. It is the unique contribution your profession can make, and it is one of the most valuable that education can offer to our youth.

This is the basic program recommended by the Council on Youth Fitness and supported by 19 educational and medical organizations. There is no instance where schools have reduced their physical fitness programs to the levels suggested, by the Council and these fine organizations. We do know that many schools have started programs where none existed as a result of the Council's recommendations. Other schools have been given impetus and encouragement to improve existing programs. But the sad fact is that too many schools still don't have even minimum physical fitness programs.

I am aware of the great contributions each of you can make in your specialized field. I am not overlooking the necessity for total fitness, proper education in health practices, nutrition and safety, or the lasting value of recreational interests and skills. These are as important as intellectual growth.

But physical fitness must be emphasized as the foundation fitness if this nation is to face the future with strength and confidence.

Our youth must be taught sportsmanship and fair play in dealing with each other. But in the battle of ideologies they must realize they cannot finish second and survive. They must have the strength and courage to face up to that fact and act accordingly.

I urge you to quit arguing the validity of statistics that indicate our physical weakness. I believe we should accept them at least as a challenge, and resolve to meet it.

I am appalled, as I am sure you are, when I read reports to the Council on Youth Fitness that almost half the youngsters in pilot programs failed simple physical achievement tests Or that not a single student in one North Dakota school reached satisfactory levels in your own comprehensive test Or that only 7.2 percent of the 6,500 students at Muskogee, Oklahoma reached those levels Or that in January of 1962, 45.2 percent of the young men called for induction into the Armed Forces were rejected.

In meeting this challenge we should first check our own health and fitness. A person who does not look healthy and fit is not in the best position to sell fitness to a community, a school or to a single student. Example is a great teacher, and is of particular importance in your profession.

Your task is to change the physical habits of the nation, and it will not be done swiftly or easily. No matter how dedicated you are -- no matter how hard you work or how much support you receive -- ideal programs will not spring up overnight.

You must face each situation as it exists, and do what you can with what is available. And what you can do is a job that is vital to our very survival. In a very real sense, our future depends on you.

In schools which have no program for the physical development of our youth, you can do more than anybody else to get one started. It probably will have to be a minimum program of a few minutes a day of basic activity, but it will be a start, from which a quality program can be built.

In schools which have inadequate programs of not enough time, or not enough vigorous activity, you can do more than anybody else to strengthen them. In schools with excellent programs, you can do more than anybody else to keep them.

In overcoming the problems and difficulties you will face, and in gaining the support you will need, you will have the continued cooperation and backing of this Administration.

The President's Council on Youth Fitness will continue to recommend its fitness program to all schools. We know it is a sound approach because it was prepared by sound, professional people, many of whom are in this audience.

The Council soon will offer similar recommendations in health, teaching and physical education, and in school-community recreation, developed in the same way. These, and the national public service advertising campaigns urging support of your programs will be of great aid to you.

The President is very interested in what you do. He is very concerned. In his message to you tonight, he expressed his appreciation to your profession for the work it has done. Speaking in behalf of the Council on

Youth Fitness, of which I am a member, I add my appreciation, but I join with the President in urging you to greatly strengthen your efforts in the future.

More is at stake than muscles for our children. In my judgment physical fitness is basic to all forms of excellence, and to a strong, confident nation.

That is why your work is so important to the future of our country. History knows no inevitability, except as men surrender to their own fears of the future. And a free nation, united behind strong leadership, has no fear. It faces the unknown with anticipation and with faith. And our history testifies to this faith.

We were born in revolution and nurtured by struggle. We are a tough, viable, industrious people who built a great nation in an uncharted wilderness and preserved individual liberty while achieving the greatest prosperity the world has ever seen. We do not look for a battle or search for a fight, but we are prepared to meet our responsibilities.

So, we cannot afford to be second in anything -- certainly not in the matter of physical fitness; and certainly we cannot afford the luxury of arguing the validity of tests or the merits of programs.

Rather, while there is still time, we must hit hard at the problem with a practical and unified program that will assure adequate physical development for all our youth -- a program that, in the defense of our freedoms, will enable them to pass any test, any time, any place in the world.

I am confident that from your example and dedicated action will come the leadership the nation expects of your profession.