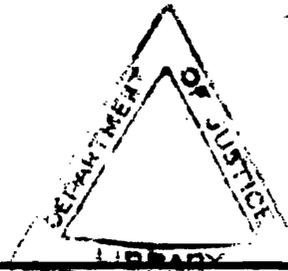




Department of Justice



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STATEMENT

BY

ATTORNEY GENERAL ROBERT F. KENNEDY

BEFORE THE

SPECIAL SUBCOMMITTEE ON LABOR

OF THE

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR

MAY 22, 1963

We are all aware of--and delighted by the success of the Peace Corps. The men and women who have served in it have brought to peoples around the world--in remote mountain villages and in bustling industrial cities--the true picture of the American of the Sixties. It has been their spirit, their idealism, their skill and vitality which has done so much to erase the image of the "Ugly American."

Today, I come before you because we believe the same spirit, idealism, skill and vitality can be extremely helpful and effective in easing the plight of the Poor American and the Sick American. We believe it can be done through prompt enactment of the National Service Corps-- which I urge you to do--and that it will be a major step forward in strengthening the nation and its traditional concern for the worth of one individual.

This bill is a call to service. It is a challenge to people of all ages to follow the example of those in the Peace Corps--to serve their nation by helping other citizens to help themselves.

This bill is a challenge to youth. It is a challenge to millions of older and retired people whose reservoir of skill and experience remains untapped. It is a challenge to all of our people; to do more than merely talk about the ideal of service.

Every sixth citizen in the United States needs our help; there are five of us who should help him.

Six months ago, the President asked me to chair a Cabinet committee to determine whether the principle embodied in the Peace Corps could be applied effectively at home. This study has involved the attention of the Secretaries of Agriculture, Commerce, Labor, Interior and Health,

Education and Welfare, the Administrators of the Housing and Home Finance Agency and Veterans Affairs, and the Chairman of the Civil Service Commission. We also have been assisted by Mr. Shriver, the Director of the Peace Corps, and Mr. Gordon, Director of the Bureau of the Budget.

One aspect of our work has been the study of deprivation.

The facts are discouraging. Millions live with pride but without resources in the mountains and valleys that run from Alabama and Kentucky to West Virginia and Pennsylvania. Millions more live in city slums only blocks away from unprecedented wealth.

We are only beginning to recognize the numbers of the mentally ill and we have barely begun to assist them. As an example, consider the fact that more than five million adults and children in this country are mentally retarded. Only recently have they begun to receive the attention we should give them. Mental retardation is a major national health, social and economic problem. It is ten times more frequent than diabetes, 25 times more common than muscular dystrophy, and 600 times more prevalent than polio.

The problems of migratory workers, who earn perhaps three dollars a day, are well known. There has been much Congressional testimony about their grim lives. The "Grapes of Wrath" grew from their deprivation.

The information booklet which has been submitted by the study group to the members of this subcommittee and the Congress contains many other examples of the high price of poverty -- examples members of the study group saw firsthand only a month ago. .

They visited a state hospital for the mentally retarded on a bright April day when you would have expected all the children to be playing outside. Not one was outside, nor was there a single child in either the well-equipped gymnasium or the classroom, well-stocked with books.

The children were inside, standing in a room which was bare but for a few benches. The floor was covered with urine.

Severely retarded patients were left naked in cubicles--which suggested kennels--made of an elevated mattress enclosed on three sides of high marble slabs and covered on the fourth side by wire mesh so thick you could barely see through it.

Patients were washed by a device resembling a car-wash--a spraying mechanism through which patients could be directed without the need for anyone to touch them.

The only toilets for the approximately 70 patients in a large ward were located in the middle of the room, permitting no privacy.

The hospital's hard-working but inadequate staff could provide at best only custodial care.

There is not even custodial care for great numbers of migratory farm workers--who live in almost unbelievable squalor.

At a Southwestern migratory labor camp one morning last month, a husband, his wife, and their 14 and 15-year old sons had to leave for the fields at 4:30 a.m. in order to reach work in tomato fields 30 miles away. They had to leave their 11-year-old daughter Sarah at home with three younger children because she has a crippled arm and cannot work in the fields.

All day, until the trucks came back from the fields at six in the evening Sarah was responsible for three younger children, one 7, one 4 and a sick baby six months old.

While she was fixing lunch for the children and trying to keep an eye on the baby, four-year-old Pete knocked a pan of boiling water off the oil burner, scalding his right leg and arm. His screams attracted an elderly woman in the next row of shacks. She did the best she could with home

remedies. Nevertheless, within a day or so, infection set in. Finally, Pete was taken to the County Hospital but even after treatment, he was left permanently crippled.

In another camp, cotton picking was over, after a season shortened by the introduction of mechanical cotton pickers. The last work the pickers had found was six weeks before, 300 miles west, and then it was only for a short time.

One family of eleven people had been living in their car for three months. The mother and father slept in the car and two of the children were tucked into the trunk. The nine children ranged in age from three months to 14 years old.

The mother was seriously ill. The children were suffering from malnutrition and were unbelievably dirty because of the lack of sanitary facilities. All had been without food for several days. They had no money and virtually no hope; they did not know where to turn for help. Since they were not residents of the area their appeals were certain to be rejected.

These are not isolated examples.

Migratory Farm Workers

Of some 400,000 domestic migratory workers, 92,000 could find work for less than 25 days in 1960. The remainder, who worked more than 25 days, earned an average of \$1,000 for the year. Those who worked less than 25 days received only \$388.

Because of their constant movement from place to place following a harvest, migratory children fall years behind in education.

Alaskan Needs

In the Wade Hampton District of Alaska, which has a native population of 3,000, the median of school years completed is only 1.6. In Bethel, the 5,000 Alaskans average only a second grade education.

Only 13% of the Alaskan rural natives have structurally sound housing. In Wade Hampton, which has 528 occupied homes, 476 are either deteriorating or dilapidating. None has a flush toilet. Only seven have hot and cold piped water. An average of $4\frac{1}{2}$ persons occupy each room.

Alaskan natives on the average live only 30 years, compared to more than 62 years for the entire U.S. population.

Educational Needs

There are more than 8 million Americans over 25 years of age who are illiterate. In 1960, 8.4% of our population 25 years or over had completed less than five years of school. More than one-fifth of our men fail the selective service pre-induction mental exam.

Mortalities

It is still true that a non-white mother is four times as likely to die in childbirth as a white mother. There were 2.6 deaths per 10,000 live white births. The figure for non-whites is 10.2 deaths.

Indians

The Indian infant death rate is almost twice that of any other race-- 47 per 1,000 live births.

Life expectancy for Indians 42 years, 20 years less than for Americans as a whole.

I firmly believe that the National Service Corps is a significant new means of attacking these problems.

In the same way that thousands of our people have volunteered to serve in remote, dangerous and almost unknown corners of the world, we are convinced that Americans are equally willing to take on the toughest jobs in this country, whether in a city slum, an Indian reservation, or a mining town.

The National Service Corps would consist of a small number of qualified, carefully trained Americans chosen for their skill and their quality. It would provide an opportunity for these people to offer themselves full time to work with fellow Americans who are in need. Corpsmen would not be technical assistance experts. The program would not be service to people, but working with people.

The Corps could call the attention of the nation to the plight of invisible millions--and illustrate that the needs of the deprived are not only the special interest of a few dedicated professions, but a deep national interest.

Specifically, what would the corpsmen do? Many local groups are so enthusiastic about the prospects for this program that they have written detailed appeals for corpsmen. Already, we have received so many requests that even the Corps at full strength could not fulfill them all. One example will demonstrate what I mean.

The San Carlos Apache Tribal Council at the Arizona counties of Gila, Graham and Pinal has asked for six corpsmen to live with the tribe. Seventy-five percent of these tribe members are unemployed. Half the families receive less than \$500 a year in income. Housing conditions are desperate. Two rooms house 14 for eating, sleeping, and cooking. The houses are cold in the winter and so hot in summer that people must live outdoors. There is no running water.

Two of the six corpsmen would be general construction workers, experienced in plumbing, wiring, carpentry and masonry, who would help in construction and maintenance of homes.

One would be a farm assistant with knowledge of family agriculture to teach techniques of animal husbandry, family gardening, small machinery maintenance, and repair.

Two corpsmen would teach reading, writing, and accounting skills to adults.

The sixth corpsman would be an assistant to work with families on nutrition, infant care, preservation of food, and home medical care.

As a companion effort, corpsmen would help train others to teach these subjects so that corpsmen would, after a period of time, be able to turn their duties over to local volunteers.

Each corpsman would take the lead in instituting recreation and productive group activities.

This is one example of what six corpsmen could do. The story could be paralleled in hundreds of different places in this country where persons are in critical need.

The Corps would not compete with existing groups or displace them. It would consult and cooperate with interested local service groups--and in this sense the program would be a tribute to the great numbers of Americans working on these problems in their own communities.

We believe that the existence of a National Service Corps additionally will attract many more people to the service professions, most of which badly need personnel.

That is not to say that the social agencies, the psychologists, the psychiatrists, the mental institutions and all the other forces which

operate for the general good are to be "somehow supplanted" by, let us say, a young man or woman or a retired person who wishes to give a helping hand. They are central to the concept of this legislation. The professional societies, whose members I just mentioned, endorse this bill enthusiastically. Once again, their endorsement demonstrates the need of people to serve as well as the need of those who must be served.

While corpsmen would work with people in many settings and at varied tasks, every project must meet two conditions. First, it must provide for work with the people who most need help. Corpsmen would not be sent to localities which have sufficient local resources and programs. They would concentrate on the "pockets" of need where there are not sufficient people or resources.

Second, it would be inappropriate and destructive to superimpose this program over local community efforts. We are determined that a new bureaucracy shall not be built. We intend to work through existing state and local agencies and institutions. The Corps would consider projects only at local request--only after a locality has specifically invited corpsmen to perform jobs that have been clearly defined.

The local request would have to be a basic statement--not of what the community wanted to get for free from the government, but how it would use the people this program will provide. Consistent with the purpose of stimulating increased volunteer efforts at the local level, each project request would have to present a plan for the phasing out of corpsmen.

The demand for this program is clearly demonstrated by the expressions already received from state and local public and private organizations serving migratory workers, Indians, residents of depressed or isolated rural areas, or of urban slums, and persons cared for in institutions.

That there are a great many people who would and could serve in the program is equally clear. The analyses of recruitment showed overwhelming support by the two groups which would supply most of the corpsmen--college students and retired persons. We have tested the appeal with those in the overseas Peace Corps and find that even after two years of service abroad, a significant number would serve in a domestic corps.

Our surveys and the conclusions of prominent scholars in these fields show that a tenth of our population is fallow. Millions of Americans who have years of productivity and service to offer are dormant. Retired teachers, craftsmen, tradesmen really don't want to go to the seashore to fade away. They want to help. So many of these people have come forward that I am convinced they can accomplish something unique in this country, something undone by all the federal, state, county and private agencies, something still to be done.

The traditions on which this program would depend is one of the basic strengths of our nation. That is the tradition of helping your neighbor. We are by nature hospitable and generous. In our colonial period, everyone was a volunteer. This voluntarism is alive today. It finds a magnificent example in the men and women of the Peace Corps, but it is present here at home, as well.

In 1958, New York's Metropolitan Hospital initiated an experiment in the use of teen-age volunteers. The first contingent of volunteers was to be recruited by radio announcements. As a result of the announcements, 1,000 teen-agers applied for fifty volunteer openings.

In the summer of 1961, the Junior Red Cross of New York had 2,400 teen-age volunteers working in 100 vacation playgrounds and 49 city voluntary and veterans hospitals in the New York area.

The American people have repeatedly and heroically responded to their country's call in wartime. There has been little demand that they also serve in time of peace. But just as our people have volunteered to serve in remote corners of the world, they are now willing to assume equally difficult jobs in this country--whether on an Indian reservation, in a big-city slum, or in a mental hospital.

This program would ask Americans to invest a year of their lives--at no salary and under spartan conditions, to help millions of their fellow citizens who, through no fault of their own, are denied the essentials of a decent life.

We are proud to admit that this concept is idealistic. We urge you to help make this idealism a reality.

I think it is well to remember that we can talk about democracy, about the free enterprise system, about how effective our economic programs have been in the United States and the prosperity of our citizens. But, in the last analysis, people in our own country and across the world are going to be impressed less with what we say, than what we do.

We can have the Polaris submarine and Gordon Cooper and John Glenn, but if we also continue to have large numbers of Indians who have lived for decades as second-class citizens, if we have migrant workers whose problems are being ignored, if we have mentally retarded and they are not being adequately helped, then no matter how many orbits our astronauts make around the globe, no matter how the gross national product grows, we will leave other peoples unimpressed.

Our definitive actions to deal with our ills and our faults are what is going to make the difference in what people think of us around the globe.

This program that we are recommending is not the end-all. It does not have the complete answer.

It does, however, Mr. Chairman combine the idealism of the American people and the willingness of our citizens to help one another, together with important constructive steps toward remedying serious ills.