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TOWARD ACHIEVING SOCIETY'S FULL POTENTIAL
by
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Mental Retardation---Treatment and Prevention

From the White House last week, President Nixon pledged expanded federal support in the effort to open better lives for the mentally retarded and to prevent the occurrence of retardation. Following a meeting with the President's Committee on Mental Retardation, he announced his commitment to two major national goals:

- *To reduce by half the occurrence of mental retardation in the United States before the end of this century,
- *To enable one-third of the more than 200,000 retarded persons in public institutions to return to useful lives in the community.

As a member of the Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs, and a Senator who has a special interest in legislation for the handicapped, I share these goals with the President, and am familiar with what they entail.

Toward Realizing These Goals

Improved prevention will require much wider application of recent biomedical advances that can help obstetricians avoid prematurity, a major cause of retardation; immunization against rubella and measles, so dangerous during pregnancy, and new diet therapy for metabolic disorders. It will also call for improvement in the delivery of medical, nutritional and educational services to expectant mothers and young children.

Unlocking the door to new opportunities for today's institutionalized retarded is an equally worthy challenge. Within institutions, review procedures aimed at identifying persons ready to enter the community must be improved. Counseling, job training, placement services and suitable living arrangement must be made available in the community.

Federal Efforts, Encouraging

Federal assistance in the field of mental retardation has been evolving during the last 15 years. During this period, the federal government has set in motion the allocation of federal resources to assist states and localities in developing comprehensive services for the mentally retarded. Federal spending has increased more than one-third during the past three years, to an estimated \$668 million in Fiscal Year 1972. Appropriations for the Developmental Disabilities Act were more than doubled over the initial request of \$11 million. The final total on funds for DDA is \$25.965 million. Of this amount, \$21.715 million is for formula grants to states for community services.

National Goals, Realistic and Achievable

Today more than six million Americans are afflicted by mental retardation; and at the present rate of occurrence, more than four million of the 142 million children estimated to be born in America between now and the year 2000 will grow up retarded. But, I am convinced that during the coming generation, this number can be sharply reduced. Already we have most of the knowledge and many of the techniques required. The rest is within the reach of research. I am further encouraged by the President's announcement last week to mount a coordinated national effort to reduce mental retardation and to minister more effectively to its victims. Launching this program was a directive from the President initiating a review process throughout the federal government. All executive departments are to evaluate their programs with a view to providing maximum support to the President's Committee on Mental Retardation. He also directed the Department of Justice to take steps to strengthen the assurance of full legal rights for the retarded and the Department of Housing and Urban Development to assist in the development of special housing arrangements to facilitate independent living for retarded persons in the community.

These directives represent only the beginning of an all-out national effort, one in which I intend to support vigorously in the Senate.