

Remarks by:
ROBERT MORGAN, Attorney General

Dedication of Four New Buildings,
John Umstead Hospital
May 2, 1971

You honor me by allowing me to share with you this wonderful day at John Umstead Hospital. I am pleased to be with you for the very name of this hospital brings to my mind memories of years of close association with Mr. John Umstead, a noble champion of the cause of our citizens who suffer from mental illness and mental retardation. Because he cared, he left a firm imprint upon North Carolina.

You who are intimately connected with the Department of Mental Health, and especially those of you who form the team at John Umstead Hospital, are, through your dedicated efforts, a living tribute to this fallen leader. In the same way, you honor all those who have championed the cause of the people you treat and care for.

You know, it takes a particular kind of person to carry the torch for the mentally ill and mentally retarded. It takes a person willing to pass up more popular causes which draw public praise from the rich and the powerful for a cause which all too often is shared by a few who are concerned and compassionate.

It means passing up causes which mean prestige and social prominence for hard work on behalf of persons who often do not

understand they are the beneficiaries or lack the capacity to express their appreciation.

John Umstead was a "particular kind of person", for he chose the plight of the mentally ill and retarded as his special "thing" and by doing so made his mark on this State.

I cannot think of ^{the} Dr. Umstead and others who have so labored without thinking also of the words of one of our great Presidents, Franklin Roosevelt, who said:

"I am fighting, as I have always fought, for the rights of the little man as well as the big man - for the weak as well as the strong, for those who are helpless as well as for those who can help themselves."

There are too few who share this determination, but, thank goodness, there are some and the erection and dedication of these buildings here on the campus of this fine State facility is evidence of their continuing effectiveness and concern. And there is other evidence, also.

Just in the short span of my adult life, wonderful advances have come in the care and treatment of our citizens who are burdened with mental illness. All of us are more than glad our institutions no longer are considered as the end-of-the-road places for the mere confinement for the mentally ill. We treat

and often cure, we assist in returning persons to productive roles in our society, and, of course, provide a pleasant and attractive controlled environment when that is required.

Just a glance at the average stay for first-admission patients of North Carolina's four psychiatric hospitals today tells us that remarkable changes have occurred. With advances in medicine and allied sciences, these hospitals now are able, through intensive short-term care, to help significant numbers of our citizens to the point they are able to return to their communities and home environments, to their loved ones, and many to a very productive role in society.

But new programs also bring new problems to the dedicated staff and employees in our hospitals. It simply takes more power to provide short-term, intensive care. I know of your desire to provide better care to your patients, and I hope the General Assembly will also recognize the urgency of this need.

The completion of this MEDICAL SERVICES BUILDING is a most significant step forward in the treatment of patients. It is significant for it recognizes, in a very tangible way, that patients who suffer with mental illness also often have physical illnesses. In our State psychiatric hospitals, we must treat the illnesses of the entire body along with the mind.

It is urgent that the Department of Mental Health be provided the resources and manpower with which to increase its capability for diagnosing and treating neurological and neuro-surgical correctable disorders. Can we continue to ignore this area in the face of autopsy studies which indicate many patients need not have died with proper diagnosis and neurosurgical care?

On a recent visit to one of our hospitals, I was told of an amazingly large number of persons who had died there from correctable disorders, for neurosurgical facilities were not available.

How cruel it is to confine a person who cannot help himself and allow a disorder to ravage his mind and body and bring about an agonizing but sure death. We must do better.

Sympathy for the family of a loved one is needed far less than proper treatment to preserve life. I am glad to learn that within a few weeks the Department will have the services of a neurosurgeon. If the persons are committed by our State Court to our State Hospitals, it is only right that they receive adequate treatment and rehabilitation. It is only right that concerned and compassionate citizens of this State muster the support needed to provide it.

North Carolina may now be ready for another giant step forward in the treatment of the mentally ill. Can we not so marshal our resources that we can provide more treatment for citizens in their home areas? It seems to me, it should not be merely an idle dream to think in terms of local treatment of many people by taking to and developing our manpower and know-how in local communities, and by coordinating and combining the State and local efforts.

"It was said, in an earlier age, that the mind of man is a far country which can neither be approached nor explored. But, today, under present conditions of scientific achievement, it will be possible for a nation [and a state] as high in human and material resources as ours to make the remote reaches of the mind accessible. The mentally ill and the mentally retarded need no longer be alien to our affections or beyond the help of our communities." John F. Kennedy, Remarks Upon Signing Bill for the Construction of Mental Retardation Facilities and Community Mental Health Centers, October 31, 1963.

Let me just share with you for a few minutes some thoughts on mental retardation. You know my heart and my efforts, as well as yours, have long been committed to these less fortunate citizens.

We have indeed come a long way in North Carolina. And for every advance, I have been grateful, but not satisfied. We must keep moving and I am confident you share my feeling of urgency that we must marshal our efforts for giant steps forward.

Mental retardation is a handicap which affects at least 200,000 North Carolinians. The anguish and concern of those afflicted is compounded by the terrific economic drain due to the fact that many of these individuals, at present, cannot contribute to the economy. This does not have to be.

"Albert Einstein once said it would be a great cause of regret and would put all mankind into jeopardy if the life sciences did not keep up with tremendous advances of the physical sciences. This is nowhere more apparent than in the field of mental retardation." John F. Kennedy.

In recent years, we have seen advances in medicine, education, psychology, and the social sciences which now make available methods to lessen the suffering as well as the economic loss created by mental retardation. We now know of the importance of early recognition and planned intervention into the lives of children and their families. We know the importance of providing comprehensive programs within communities in each reach of families and children who need help.

We are now seeing the advantage of having Regional and Community Residential Centers which not only provide direct services but also can provide support for beginning programs and for training necessary personnel. We have witnessed an upsurge of determination on the part of the parents and friends of the retarded to bring all of their energies to bear in finding ways to make more effective help available. We have seen a renewed interest in our universities and colleges in the field of mental retardation.

At the very base of these new and revitalized approaches to mental retardation is the philosophy of "normalization". For too long the retarded have been isolated and kept apart from the main stream of life to which, with proper help, they can actively contribute.

It is just as important to integrate the mentally retarded into our society and make full use of their abilities as it is to make a special effort to do this for the physically handicapped. It was my pleasure earlier this week to be a part of a concerted effort to bring to the attention of Legislators and the public alike, the great contribution to be made by the physically handicapped. A similar effort must be made for the mentally handicapped.

As Americans and North Carolinians, we take pride in our resources. We have become increasingly conservation-conscious and rightfully so. What resources are more valuable than human resources? In my mind, we should allow no ability to be dormant, no intellect to remain unexpanded, and no personality to be stymied by isolation, inactivity and lack of challenge. We are not wealthy enough as a State or Nation to afford the luxury of squandering human resources.

I think it significant to note the ascendance of the new concept of "Child Advocacy". Every effort will be made to advocate not only the needs of children but also to see that their rights are protected and expanded.

In my opinion, we seek no more for the retarded than our Constitution guarantees for every citizen in North Carolina. They are a special group only in that our expectations for them have been to restrained and that as citizens of this State they, for too long, have been denied the benefits that the rest of us take for granted.

This is easy to say, but more difficult to do. However, to my mind, we could make a significant start by following the example of Soloman who, in answer to the Lord's question, "What shall I give thee," replied, "Give ... thy servant an understanding heart ..."

Certainly, in dealing with the mentally ill and mentally retarded, understanding hearts are required. These buildings which we dedicate today are evidence that North Carolinians, Legislators and citizens alike, possess this quality.