

Speech by: Robert Morgan
Attorney General

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DEDICATION OF LEE-HARNETT MENTAL HEALTH CENTER

I thank you for letting me share this occasion with you. I know the Lee-Harnett Mental Health Center is a source of pride to each of you for it is a community endeavor. You have come together in a spirit of unity and brotherhood to care for those less fortunate. You have seen a need where those stricken by mental anguish could be healed and given hope. And you have given those so stricken an opportunity to come back into society and give as you have given. They can now be a volunteer.

Do you know what the word "volunteer" means - literally means - from Webster's Dictionary - "one who enters into, or offers himself for, any service of his own free will."

"Offers himself" - I expect this phrase can provide many an individual story of human worth, personal dignity, concern for human rights, or to borrow John F. Kennedy's words, many a "Profile in Courage."

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.

I cannot think of those people who have for this cause 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 for 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 this fine community mental health center 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 of 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

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.

North Carolina is now taking another giant step forward in the treatment of the mentally ill. We are marshalling our resources to provide more treatment for citizens in their home areas. Local manpower and know-how, combined and coordinated with State efforts, supply a much-needed advancement in mental health care.

"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 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 easy 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

There is another major concern in the area of mental health which I sincerely hope will receive immediate and thorough attention from community centers such as this one. I am speaking of the growing problem of drug abuse in North Carolina.

The SBI statistics reveal a continuous rise in the number of drug users in this State, particularly among the young. The tragedy is not only what they are doing to themselves but the hurt they are inflicting upon their families and their communities, for communities need their youth.

We cannot lose patience and complacently shrug our shoulders and say, "It will not happen to my child", or if you do not have a child, "It's not my problem". It is your problem, because it is a growing problem of your community, your State, and your nation.

You must be concerned that our young people are experimenting with drugs. There is another statistic that parallels this rise in the use of drugs--the rise

in crime. And yet, there are those who scoff at the problem of drug use in relation to crime.

Let me tell you the sad story of one such man:

This young man from the Eastern part of our State got high on drugs--a "clean high", as some members of the drug community call drug use as contrasted with the use of alcohol. This young man, while under the influence of drugs, while on a "clean high", picked up his own small baby and slammed her against the wall, killing her. Later he realized what he had done and attempted to hide the nearly dead child in a trash dump. It was discovered there in that trash dump where it had died, and the father was tried and sentenced to life in prison.

However, before being sentenced, he was asked by the presiding judge if there was anything he would like to say. The actual court record reveals this young man's tortured thoughts and feelings:

"Yes, there is, Your Honor. Like the Solicitor says, it is a tragic thing for a person to let himself be taken into this drug world and not really understand what it is all about and yet think that he does know all the time. In thinking as to what has happened to me, if only time could be turned back, with a little more

understanding, just to change one second of one's life.

"These things would never happen, if only the young people in society, like myself, understood what was going to happen when they permit themselves to go into this type of conduct.

"I certainly don't condone what has happened as to me and it is going to be a hard thing for me to have to live with the rest of my life--this burden on my shoulders and the shame that it has caused my family.

"But I just hope that as a result of this, maybe there are young people here in this city and this country of ours, and all over the world, who can look at me as an example and not let themselves get off into this same situation that I have gotten myself into.

"I wish there was some way to change it all. That is all I can say, sir."

A similar statement, but in different words, might come from a young husband, who while under the influence of drugs, brutally killed his wife and left his infant child to perish from inattention by her side; or from a young soldier who committed a bold daylight robbery in an attempt to support a drug habit acquired in Vietnam.

So, whether you are directly concerned with a drug problem--your community is, your State is, and your nation is. And the keys to the problem--prevention and help for those so addicted. Community mental health centers provide an opportunity we cannot afford to miss in reaching and helping these unfortunate people.