

Speech by: Robert Morgan
Attorney General

To: Employees Banquet
Broughton Hospital
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I am pleased to be able to share this evening with you, and I thank you for giving me this opportunity.

When giving me the details of this evening, I was impressed by a comment by Bill Gamble: "It will be most interesting to you to know that in the past we have invited all employees that have had 20 years service; however, for this year, we have found that we have so many employees with 20 years of service that we are unable to accommodate all of them and their guests. Thus, we are forced to permit only those with 25 years of service to attend our banquet. I think that this exemplifies the dedication that our employees at Broughton Hospital have toward the institution."

I was interested in this comment, and I do think it is one of the many examples of loyalty and dedication

that the employees and directors have for this institution. I am indeed honored to be here and to share an evening with such distinguished guests.

It is obvious that you do not have the philosophy of life that many do - the "live and let live" attitude - but that you here tonight would say "live and help live," because for 25 years that is what you have been doing.

And, I believe your "live and help live" philosophy is catching. There is a strong movement afoot in the State today to help our citizen inmates in our mental hospitals. I am convinced that those in the mental health field, those of us in elected positions, and the people of this State are no longer content with a status quo attitude. Instead, they have reached the point where they are going to demand quality care and treatment for those in our institutions. This means that our citizens so confined will be given an individual and realistic opportunity to be cured and to improve his or her mental condition.

I believe this change in attitude is what sparked the mental hospital controversy of this year. Perhaps

it is unfortunate that public controversy was necessary but, then again, I suspect that all of you here were delighted to see that wall of indifference you have been fighting all these years crumble. I do not believe in sensationalism, and I do not want to see this happen in our State, but constructive controversy is good, and I think we will begin to see that this particular controversy going on will begin to move the mental health system forward.

A wall of indifference - I can understand and sympathize with your frustration, because my interest in the care of the mentally ill goes back further than just this discussion. It goes back to when I first began to seek election to a statewide political office, and I cited the need for better mental health as one of our most pressing problems. My interest - and my frustration - goes back to my service in the Legislature when the difficult task of appropriating funds to needs was in progress, and I could feel the lack of citizen concern and participation.

I remember well one afternoon when I was visiting a young doctor in one of our mental institutions to consult

about a client of mine, and it was 98 degrees that day. He had one small electric fan, and this is the office where he tried to treat patients. Yet, when I rode downtown after the interview, I looked at our State Office Buildings and from window after window there jutted an air-conditioning unit!

I wondered about our values and whether we actually had let the people know that they had a choice. Did we let the people know of the priorities?

Legislators listen to people - people are who elect them - people are who keep them in the Legislature - and people are the ones they are there to serve. But, people cannot be responsive to the needs of this State unless we take a positive position and inform them of the inadequacies in our system. This is why I believe this discussion that is now going on can be constructive. I will honestly admit to you here tonight that at one point, I even stated that I hoped the controversy would continue, not because of a love for conflict, but because it appeared that for the first time the issues were being aired and the public informed.

If we keep this sense of mission and help this movement that is developing, I believe our actions will be contagious and stronger public support will be forthcoming.

And, let me warn you of another force on the horizon - the courts. I do not want to see our mental health system in this State taken over by the federal court, and this is what is happening in the State of Alabama. The court there by an Interim Emergency Order is forcing immediate action on three fundamental conditions to insure adequate and effective treatment. The three conditions being demanded by the federal court are:

- (1) A humane psychological and physical environment;
- (2) qualified staff in numbers sufficient to administer adequate treatment; and
- (3) individualized treatment plans.

Now, these three fundamental conditions should be primary in every mental institution and every patient has a constitutional right to such treatment, but I would rather have an orderly plan administered by the State than have masters appointed by the court and a time limit to implement such orders.

Because of dedicated people as you, I am sure we come closer to this ideal of the fundamental conditions than many states, and particularly this is true of this hospital; however, this should not be an ideal; it should not be just a dream; this should be a reality. Don't be shy about stirring the sediment. We must make others aware of the necessity of giving these fundamental freedoms to those who cannot make their voices heard.

Let us all renew our sense of mission and take a lesson from that first woman of courage who did so much for those less fortunate - the amazing Dorothea Lynde Dix.

At the time Dorothea Dix first realized the plight of the mentally ill, she was a sickly, nervous and excessively shy New England spinster, 40 years of age.

One cold March day in 1841, she was asked to take a Sunday School Class in the House of Correction at East Cambridge, Mass. She returned home that night so shocked at what she had seen she could not sleep. What Miss Dix had seen was the condition of four insane persons held in confinement by the enlightened townsmen of East Cambridge. These four unfortunates were not criminals. They were not

even listed as "furiously mad." They were "harmless lunatics," to use the then current phrase. Yet, they were kept in one dark, airless room, the walls of which were white with frost.

From that point and for the next 45 years - to the end of her days - she fought to end the almost universal superstition that insane persons were born depraved and that nothing could be done except to confine them as if they were wild and potentially dangerous animals.

As she hit State Legislature after State Legislature, she became the most powerful and courageous lobbyist this country has ever known. What drove this woman with such an indomitable resolve? Years before her time she realized, what the federal court in Alabama demanded, that our citizen inmates are entitled to not less than a realistic opportunity to cure or improve his or her mental condition and that ^{the} opportunity must be given in a humane psychological and physical environment!

The people must come to understand, as John F. Kennedy did in 1963, when he made this statement, that "[m]ental illness and mental retardation are among our most critical

health problems. They occur more frequently, affect more people, require more prolonged treatment, cause more suffering by the families of the afflicted, waste more of our human resources, and constitute more financial drain upon both the public treasury and the personal finances of the individual families than any other single condition."

"Our most critical health problem" - this statement could be made today, 10 years later. But, I am an optimist. Ten years from now, I am very hopeful that mental illness will not be our most critical health problem. But, we must kindle public interest. We must not let this movement that is abroad die before we insure that the quality and extent of services has been broadened to meet all the needs of our citizens confined.