

I hope I won't be abusing your fine hospitality if I begin by breaking a rule. I once asked a widely known speaker if there was any one best way to start off a talk like this and he told me to go consult a manual on public speaking, look up the rules, pick out one -- just any rule at random -- and break it. Then I decided that if breaking one rule was a good idea, breaking all of them ought to be better still; and probably before I am finished I shall do just that.

My purpose on this occasion is to discuss with you certain unique aspects of the voluntary health movement in America and more particularly the aims and achievements of one of the leading agencies of that movement, an organization known as The National Foundation, which is supported by the March of Dimes. And the rule for speakers which I have chosen to break is the one that says, "Avoid if possible any discussion of finances wherever this subject may be a cause of local embarrassment -- for example, if the organization or project you are discussing happens to be operating in the red."

Furthermore, in violating this rule for speakers, I am not going to make it a simple break. I want to do it in a big way. I want to make it a compound fracture by actually congratulating the March of Dimes of Rhode Island and of Kent County on the fact that, temporarily, they are showing deficits.

Now, why do I say this? Is being in the red a thing to be proud of?

The fact is, it can be just that. It depends on the business you are in, and what caused you to get in such a condition. If you are a manufacturer of soap, an operating deficit means that something is wrong somewhere. Maybe you are spending too much money on soap operas.

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Kent County - debt due to Police Agency

But if you are in the business of fighting disease and helping the sick and the crippled and the helpless who are victimized by that disease, then an operating deficit may mean that something is right somewhere. It may mean that you have had an epidemic in your community, that people needed help, and that you stepped in and gave them that help regardless of your own current assets and current liabilities. It may mean that your organization was putting people ahead of dollars.

On the other hand, show me the voluntary health agency that has amassed a great surplus of unused funds in its treasury, and I will show you an organization that is either unneeded or that is not fulfilling the needs that it should.

And so I congratulate the March of Dimes organization in Rhode Island and in Kent County. When it was needed -- as it certainly was last year during an outbreak of paralytic polio in this area, it went ahead to give the care that residents of this community had to have and could not afford to pay for themselves. At stake was human life and human usefulness, and when these are the values in the balance, the March of Dimes moves in, even if it has to go into the red.

The thing to do about the deficit of between \$8,000 and \$9,000 in March of Dimes funds for Kent County, and of \$35,000 for the State of Rhode Island, is not to criticize, but rather to contribute -- to help the organization out of those deficits by our support as individuals and neighbors. When a soap manufacturer operates at a deficit, it may be the smart thing to sell it short. When an agency like the March of Dimes organization operates at a deficit, the thing to do is to invest in it. What you and your community get back from your investment is a thing beyond price.

Nevertheless, the March of Dimes and other leading voluntary health agencies of America have been under heavy attack from certain quarters in these past few years. This criticism is not on the ground of financial deficits -- it is far more specious and frivolous than that -- but it is making public support harder to get, and hence, from another direction, it is influencing those deficits.

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I think it is time to clear the air. I think it is time these critics were answered. I thin it is time to review for you the composition of these health agencies, their methods and procedures, the contribution they make to the well-being of the nation.

There are many agencies, as you know, in the health field -- too many, we are told, all going to the public in annual drives for funds. And among the M as you have heard, there are some that never should have been started at all. I don't know whether anyone has yet set up a Foundation for Reducing the Seven-Year Itch to a Six-Year-Itch -- but it won't surprise me if someone does.

However, it is also true that in business, in the manufacturing industries, mining, agriculture, the retail field, there are companies that never should have been started at all. And just because you may learn that some ~~idiot~~ ^{one} has formed a corporation to manufacture a baseball with a steel spring in it to enable home run hitters to break the record of Babe Ruth, you don't rush to the phone and order your broker to sell United States Steel short. As business men, you do not condemn the great corporations, the legitimate leaders, well-established concerns with long records of outstanding performance, just because there also happen to be marginal or crackpot or fly-by-night ventures in these same fields.

Actually, the national voluntary health agencies in this country that are over ten years old, with twenty or more chapters and with programs involving expenditure of \$1,000,000 or more, number just eleven. This is the list of agencies operating on a scale that can be called "national" and that conduct annual campaigns for funds. Exactly eleven! And of course, because all are voluntary, you don't have to give unless you are moved by your conscience, your compassion, or whatever other feelings you may have. Among the eleven, you can choose all, or some, or one -- or none.

What is their crime, then? I find it easy enough to discover what their good works have been, for a better America, a healthier America. Their critics seldom go to the trouble to detail or describe this side of the picture, but anyone who wishes to find out about the worth of what they are doing will, I can assure you, be quickly convinced. Just go to one of the clinics for children with birth defects or rheumatoid arthritis -- the special treatment centers which the March of Dimes is supporting in many parts of the country -- and watch what happens there.

You won't see advertising or fund-raising literature or tear-jerking campaign appeals. This is action, the real thing, the fight for life itself and for life worth living. You will see whole teams of top-flight specialists in those March of Dimes clinics, gathered around one small patient, and you will watch them working together as they try to win that life struggle.

And again and again, you will see the fight won, the thrilling victory by big doctor and little patient: the regaining of lost function, the restoration of lost hope. And if you find that you can't watch very much of this without getting a little damp around the eyes, nobody will blame you one bit. Those tears won't be jerked. They'll come of their own accord. And best of all what you see will appeal not only to your emotions, but to your good common business sense. You will come away with the knowledge, the understanding, that enables you to make wise decisions when it comes to judging the work of these eleven agencies that you want to support.

You will want to know, too, the kind and calibre of people who are managing these organizations. I can tell you right here and now. These eleven leading voluntary health agencies are governed by boards of trustees and directors, in all about 600 intelligent and responsible citizens of proved leadership. All are volunteers. But all are chosen in the same way and from the same level of top-drawer experience and ability as are the trustees and directors of leading

organizations in other walks of life. The books of the health agencies are audited annually by certified public accountants, they publish annual reports of their activities and finances, and they are subject to federal, state and local laws.

So here we have the alleged criminal -- the health agencies; here we have the alleged victim -- the public; but we still haven't discovered the crime. It is significant, I think, that most of the critics are quite preoccupied with how these agencies get their money but so often are completely uninterested in what they do with it. It is significant and revealing, I think, that the attacks on them fail to distinguish between long-established organizations with bright records of creativity and productivity, and those that "never should have been started at all." In fact, the propaganda goes so far as to lump them all together, deliberately and deceptively, the good with the bad, even to the length of mentioning fraudulent fund-raising schemes in one breath and the most effective health agencies in the next! And this tells you less about the health agencies than it does about their critics.

Well, what is at stake here? What is the crime of the voluntary health movement which some detractors so studiously avoid specifying in their blanket indictment? Beyond demonstrating the traditional devotion of America's millions of health volunteers to their respective causes -- the compassion for the sick and the helpless, the neighbor-to-neighbor code of conduct which has been a part of the very heart and soul of this land ever since the Pilgrim fathers set foot on it in 1620 -- I think these agencies have been most useful and effective in their role as pioneers, as innovators, as sources of support and encouragement to the exploring, independent minds in laboratory and clinic.

It was this stamp of character and mentality in the scientific world that produced the polio vaccines, and before them, the medical weapons to combat so many past scourges of mankind.

Creativity, you know, is one of the few absolute indispensables of a progressing society. There is no ceiling on it, no limit to its potential. While it lives and breathes, the humanly impossible is the barred window of yesterday and the open door of tomorrow. But the breath that keeps it alive is the breath of freedom. The climate in which it thrives is the climate of the free will. And a very good weather vane of that climate is the freedom of enterprise which the people of this country are willing to support, whether in the area of business or in the area of health and welfare. You should know what I am talking about. You are -- all of you -- carrying on the fight to preserve freedom of enterprise in a world where it is getting scarcer and scarcer. If the voluntary health agencies have committed a crime in fighting to retain their voluntary character, then I say you ought to know what sort of crime it is.

Perhaps the best example of the "crime" of this kind committed by a voluntary health agency is the victory of this country over polio. It is also one of our finest examples of doing the humanly impossible -- the barred window of yesterday and the open door of tomorrow. For some of our most respected scientists, only a few years ago, were saying that the secrets of polio would be impossible to crack.

Today, as you know, six years after the advent of the Salk vaccine, paralytic polio in America has declined by more than 90 per cent. And it was a voluntary health agency -- not the United States Government, with all its billions of dollars, its multiplicity of multimillion dollar subdivisions in health and welfare -- but a single health agency, supported voluntarily by the people of America through the March of Dimes, that made this victory possible.

The achievement is unsurpassed, and in many ways unequalled, in the history of man's fight against disease. Never before had professional acceptance, mass production, and large-scale public use of a preventive been expedited to bring about control of a disastrous epidemic disease so speedily and so effectively.

I give you the Salk vaccine, they as Felony Number One committed by the health agencies. What does it mean to you, in terms of dollars and cents in your personal bank account? What does it mean in terms of assets and liabilities in the balance sheet of the corporation that employs you?

Statistics necessarily are little more than best guesses when they are used to suggest what might have happened but didn't. However, there is no question that many thousands of Americans, especially our children and young people have been spared crippling and death through the use of the Salk vaccine. The "best guess," mathematically arrived at, puts the number saved from this disease during the six years since 1955 at about 30,000 individuals. Assuming this, the saving of lives would approximate 2,000. The saving in costs of medical care would total over \$75,000,000. And the preservation of human usefulness, in terms of probably lifetime earnings, would exceed \$1,000,000,000.

But bear in mind that whereas these are six-year estimates, the blessings of a working preventive of disease go on and on, to the end of time. The real worth of the Salk vaccine to America, to future generations, is beyond calculation.

Whatever that astronomical sum is, you and your descendants will share in the saving. So will your business. Your loss of work hours due to illness -- or to the very real fear that once struck into the hearts of parents all over America every summer -- is proportionately reduced. Repeat or match the polio achievement in the drive of science upon other great disease problems, and your insurance costs go down, your health plans become less costly to carry on, and the nation's complex of medical personnel and medical facilities can be turned in full force on other problems of our time, such as the care of that enormously expanding sector of our population above the age of 65.

When the March of Dimes organization announced its decision to go into birth defects three years ago, many people were surprised and puzzled. Why birth defects? Was this a problem -- one, that is, deserving the attention of a national organization going to the public for millions of dollars every year?

They were even more surprised when the scientists who had urged this decision of the board of The National Foundation declared birth defects to be the Number One child health problem in America today. People were amazed -- and many doctors among them -- to learn that one out of every sixteen babies born in this country has a significant congenital defect; and by "significant" we means defects which, if not taken care of, can mean life-long handicap and even untimely death. They were astonished to learn that each year, 250,000 infants are born in this country with this shadow of crippling, illness or death hanging over them.

Now, I have roughly sketched in for you the possible benefits to yourselves, to business and industry, from a single preventive of a single disease. But as compared with birth defects or arthritis, polio was a very small source indeed of human damage. There are more than 600 types of birth defects. And the number of new cases every year -- the cases we know about, that is, for many birth defects do not show up until later in life -- is some six or seven times as great as the polio incidence used to be in a year of heavy epidemics.

Science can find ways to prevent many of these congenital defects and to treat others so that they are alleviated or the handicap reduced. It has already found some of these answers. Heart surgery is saving lives today that only a few years ago would have been given up as hopeless. Methods have been developed for detecting inborn metabolic disorders -- for example, by a simple test of the urine of infants, one failing of metabolism is discovered, and where it occurs, a change in diet can avert mental retardation that would result if the condition were not corrected early. So-called shunt operations relieve hydrocephalus which often accompanies the birth defect known as open spine.

There are many more of these modern corrections and preventions, and there will be still more if the people of America will back up these researches with the necessary support. Thus once again we shall get a return on our investment beyond the power of all statistics to measure.

The fact is that the American people give about half as much money to provide health for the living as they do to provide funerals and tombstones for the dead. Collectively, you are spending just about ten times as much money on alcoholic beverages as you give to all philanthropic health causes. Your liquor bill last year was \$9,861,000,000. What you gave for health was \$980,000,000. It makes a very neat ten-to-one ratio -- the kind statisticians like.

These agencies are a symbol, and more than a symbol -- a working example -- of the very principle our nation stands for. I am speaking of the principle of free enterprise, as distinguished from monolithic government control and government management of all enterprise. In the field of health, these are your most stalwart sentinels, your most strategic outposts.

The secret of their success is the same as that which has spelled success for American business and industry and for the entire system of free enterprise. That secret is freedom of action -- freedom to take on a problem, explore it, call upon the best available brains to devise a plan of action, and then work on it -- work and work and work -- until the obstacles begin to crumble and something of value is created that alleviates or obliterates the problem.

The potential of The National Foundation has scarcely been tapped. Its position of leadership and influence in the fight against disease is undeniable. It is a bulwark of strength to the whole field of virology, which it has helped develop from an infant science and which now gives promise of eventual control of a host of serious diseases, probably including cancer. Its work in genetics has blazed new trails in man's search for knowledge of heredity, of the procreation, growth and development of human cells, and the factors which influence their development. It finds itself today in a uniquely advantageous position to make forceful and historic impact upon the two great crippling conditions of this age -- birth defects and arthritis.

I would leave with you one more thought about the local March of Dimes of this State and this County. Since we know how and why these units of this great agency have incurred their deficits, let us praise rather than blame them. But let us not end our praises with words. Let us work and give and spread the word among our neighbors to do the same, to the end that the red ink in which this record in which this record is written today can be changed to black tomorrow. In the fight against illness and despair, against disability and the great losses of human usefulness, there is so much -- so very much -- still to be done.

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