REGARDLESS of how we, as individual physicians, may feel about the role of the federal government in the individual practice of medicine, the time has long since passed when we can afford the luxury of ignoring it.

In past years the influence of the government on medicine has been mostly in general areas and perhaps least of all in that of pediatrics; but under the present administration there has been a decided change.

For this reason it seems necessary to me to call to the attention of all Fellows of the Academy the particular items in President Kennedy’s message of February 26, 1962, which relate specifically to the practice of Pediatrics.

These may be considered to be three in number: The first of these dealt with the subject of immunization.

On this topic President Kennedy said:

I am asking the American people to join in a nationwide vaccination program to stamp out these four diseases (whooping cough, diphtheria, tetanus, and poliomyelitis) encouraging all communities to immunize both children and adults, keep them immunized and plan for the routine immunization of children yet to be born. To assist the states and local communities in this effort over the next 3 years, I am proposing legislation authorizing a program of federal assistance. This program would cover the full cost of vaccines for all children under 5 years of age. It would also assist in meeting the cost of organizing the vaccination drives begun during this period, and the cost of extra personnel needed for certain special tasks.

There would certainly be few, if any of us, who would quarrel with the goal of producing universal immunization of infants and pre-school children.

Most of us, however, would wish to point out that the remarkable decrease in both the mortality and morbidity, first from smallpox, later from diphtheria, pertussis, and tetanus, and most recently from poliomyelitis, presents indisputable evidence of the efficacy of the present system of immunizations under the private practice of medicine.

Experience would seem to indicate that apathy, indifference, and ignorance, rather than the cost of the vaccines, have accounted for the great majority of those who have not been vaccinated. If this be true, then if any additional money is to be spent on such a program, it might best be spent in the form of Public Education than in an attempt to change an already proven successful method of immunization through the private physicians and the hospital and local health clinics.

The second item refers to the proposal of the establishment of a new Institute for Child Health and Human Development within the National Institutes of Health. This was considered by the Executive Board of the American Academy of Pediatrics at its Washington meeting in April of 1961 and along with all other organized pediatric groups in the country, it was approved as meeting a long over-due need. Pediatricians have been mindful of the splendid work done by the existing Institutes of Health but with a great majority of their emphasis placed upon disease entities or body systems, the needs of human growth and development frequently went unmet. This newly proposed institute hopefully should provide a real impetus to research and further progress in this area.

The third item of special interest to Pediatrics is that of Mental Retardation. Here President Kennedy told of his creation of a Panel on Mental Retardation and its goals, and we quote:
I have asked the Panel on Mental Retardation which I appointed last year to appraise the adequacies of existing programs and the possibilities for greater utilization of current knowledge. It will review and make recommendations with regard to (1) the personnel necessary to develop and apply new knowledge; (2) promising avenues of investigation, and the means to support and encourage research along these lines; and (3) improvement and extension of present programs of treatment, education and rehabilitation.

I expect the Panel's report before the end of this year and we should then be ready for the next phase of the attack upon this problem. I am confident that the work of this Panel will help us chart the path toward our ultimate goal of preventing this tragic condition.

Of particular interest to us as pediatricians is the multi-disciplinary character of the membership of this panel. Three of those listed are Fellows of the Academy, Drs. Robert E. Cooke, Reginald Lourie, and Edward Davens, the latter of whom is Chairman of the Academy's Committee on the Handicapped. It has been brought to our attention that in many localities, the influence of the psychiatrist in this area had become increasingly felt even to the extent that laws have been passed requiring Psychiatric Boards for those who would head institutions dealing for the mentally retarded. It would seem therefore, quite important that the pediatricians take a deep interest in this subject and indicate their rightful concern and knowledge of the total problems of the mentally retarded child.

The American Academy of Pediatrics is not, from the very nature of its charter, a lobbying organization and has no desire to be so.

Its individual Fellows, however, as citizens and practitioners of pediatrics, are urged to make use of their political birthright which permits them to contact their own legislators and give their own opinions regarding any proposed legislative matter concerning which they may feel that they have special interest and special knowledge.

It is for this reason that I call your attention to these items of President Kennedy's message which merit the careful consideration of each and every one of us.

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Philadelphia 12, Pa.
PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE: PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY'S HEALTH
MESSAGE TO THE CONGRESS
Carl C. Fischer
Pediatrics 1962;30;157

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