

TALKING POINTS FOR KEYNOTE ADDRESS TO THE
GOVERNOR'S CONFERENCE ON THE PREVENTION
OF CHILDHOOD DISABILITIES
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 7, 1989
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BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the conference is to generate interest, encourage involvement and support, and increase awareness of the preventability of certain developmental disabilities.

Those in attendance are knowledgeable professionals who have come together to share what they know and to learn how to better meet the needs of persons with disabilities in Kansas.

The services available in Kansas represent the type of coordinated statewide effort which reflects state-of-the-art practice. The problem in Kansas as in other states is that the need for the program or service far surpasses the availability.

Partly as a result of this situation there are many persons with developmental disabilities whose conditions could have been prevented.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE 101ST CONGRESS

The 101st Congress was a successful session in passing federal legislation of interest to persons with disabilities and their families. Senate passage included:

S.933 -- The Americans with Disabilities Act
The Reauthorization of the Education of the Handicapped Act
Vocational Education Reauthorization
Amendments to SSDI to ensure adequate health insurance coverage for the working disabled.

An increase in the Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) level from \$300 to \$500 annually

THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

Although the prevention of developmental disabilities is and must be a focus of our domestic policy we must also be concerned about the everyday lives of persons with developmental disabilities.

That's why the enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act is so important. This historic civil rights legislation has passed the Senate and is now pending in the House.

When enacted, the ADA will provide clear, consistent, enforceable civil rights protection to individuals with disabilities by prohibiting discrimination in employment and public accommodations.

This legislation requires new facilities to be accessible, and existing ones to be modified if that can be done without excessive difficulty or expense.

The ADA will open up many opportunities making for a more inclusive America. New buses, trains and subways will be accessible and telephone companies will provide relay services that will permit individuals with hearing and speech impairments to use telephones.

The enactment of ADA is only half the equation. We must also do all that we can to assure that preventable disabilities are in fact prevented.

WAR ON DRUGS

One step in this direction was taken when Congress fully funded a major new anti-drug program. If we are really serious about preventing developmental disabilities, we must win the war on drugs.

It has been estimated that nationally there are 375,000 infants born each year addicted to drugs. Many of these children will experience life long irreversible developmental disabilities.

A recent survey of 36 U.S. hospitals found that more than one in ten women used illegal drugs during pregnancy.

The new federal legislation provides funds not only for much needed stiffer penalties for pushers and users, but for more education which will help in our prevention efforts.

Drug abuse is an international nightmare. I have written to the President about the need for humanitarian efforts on an international scale. I have proposed a combined US-USSR effort to deal with drug and alcohol abuse.

EARLY INTERVENTION

Another major federal effort which relates to the prevention of disabilities is contained in Part H of P.L 99-457 (The Education of the Handicapped Act). This law provides federal funds for the establishment of coordinated multidisciplinary interagency services to eligible children from birth until age 3. This program authorizes services to children and their families.

One impetus for the establishment of this program was recognition of those preventable disabilities caused by a lack of early stimulation.

This is why child care is such a priority issue. By the end of 1987, 72% of women with children between the ages of 6-17 were in the workforce.

Adequate child care provides not only early intervention, but it assures the safety of our nation's children. Every year nearly 8,000 children die from preventable injury and another 50,000 become permanently disabled.

CHILD ABUSE

Adequate child care reduces the risk of accidental injury, as well as child abuse and neglect -- another cause of preventable disability.

It is disturbing to note that when the Governor's Commission on Children and Families compared Kansas to the rest of the nation, they found the rate of sexual abuse in Kansas to be twice the national rate.

This tells me that regardless of what the Federal government does, we need the involvement of the entire community, business, churches, and civic organizations in order to assure the basic health and safety of our children.

WIC PROGRAM

On a more positive note, I am pleased to report on the recent reauthorization of the WIC (Women, Infants and Children's) Program which is administered by the Department of Agriculture.

AIDS

Infectious diseases are another cause of preventable disability. The number of HIV positive children being born and surviving for longer periods is increasing. This is especially problematic because over half of the mothers of HIV positive children are unaware that they are carrying the virus at the time they deliver.

Although this problem is not as acute in Kansas as it is in other parts of the nation, the response of Kansas in terms of mandatory AIDS education is important to the prevention of a disease that knows no boundaries.

NATIONAL PLAN

The National Council on Disability, an independent Federal agency comprised of 15 members appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate advises the President and the Congress on national disability policy. In their report, Towards Independence, they note that we have the knowledge, technology, and resources to prevent many primary and secondary disabilities. What is needed, they claim is a national plan on the prevention of disabilities.

Any good plan in this area will require several components including: an awareness of the problem, education for the public, specific education for professionals, generation of community support, availability of treatment and the provision of services.

In Kansas, a good effort has begun.