**REMARKS OF REPRESENTATIVE JOHN F. KENNEDY, REVERE HOSPITAL FUNDRAISING DINNER, REVERE, MASSACHUSETTS, JANUARY 26, 1948**

You men and women are gathered here tonight for one of the noblest purposes in human experience – the alleviation of sickness and suffering. This project which you have undertaken in behalf of the people of Revere will be another link in the great chain of medical institutions which serve the nation. I wish you earnestness and devotion in your task and may success mark your efforts.

But as you approach and solve your own problems of community health, I urge you not to overlook the large problem – the health of all Americans. There are many Reveres scattered throughout the nation where present medical facilities are inadequate. Many of these communities lack the public spirited leadership which has been displayed here tonight. Many of them are just not financially able to give their people the advanced techniques and the highly specialized equipment which medical science has developed.

Some kind of governmental assistance, on a material scale, is inevitable if the miracles of modern medicine are to be made available to all our people regardless of race, creed, color, or income. What type of assistance will be given, will be determined by public opinion and the effect it has on your elected representatives.

Public opinion is a tremendous force in our country. When brought to bear on the problem of national health it is likely to be decisive. It is your job – you doctors, nurses, hospital officials and interested laymen – to see that the public at large is fully acquainted with all the evidence material to the ultimate decision. Hold full and complete discussions as to how we can achieve the highest level of national health and at the same time maintain the standards and integrity of the medical profession. Help in molding public opinion along these lines and you will render a real service to your country.

As you well know, governmental policies are not formulated by public officials operating in a vacuum. In our democracy there are three general ways in which the non-governmental members of our body politic contribute to the strength and success of our national policies. One of the best illustrations of the ways in which public opinion operates can be found in our foreign policy.

The first role of public opinion is to fix the limits within which our foreign policy must operate; either to support or weaken particular courses of action. Foreign policy in this country can never get very far ahead of, or very far behind, public opinion. If a particular policy receives public support it is likely to succeed. If it does not, in the long run it will be doomed to failure. In 1937, public opinion was not prepared to support even a quarantine the aggressor foreign policy. Today it is apparent from the way in which the friendship train has stirred public imagination, from public opinion polls, from editorial and commentator opinion, that the public is increasingly aware of the kind of world we inhabit and of the implications of that world.

It will be this public opinion that will determine whether we take action for the present emergency arising from the worst drought, flood and freezing conditions in Europe since the Napoleonic era; whether we take action for the next four year period for economic recovery from the war; and whether we also go on to take steps to establish a world economic pattern that will promote generally progressive standards of living and stable conditions that are compatible with a peaceful world.

The second function which the public plays with respect to foreign policy is that of executing it. In normal times the day-to-day buying habits of the American people, for instance, have almost as much to do with our economic foreign relations as so-called “policy decisions” in Washington. So does their buying restraint in times like these. Similarly with UNESCO. It is well and good to adopt a charter which says – "it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed." But the adoption of the charter accomplished little if people do not aid in the educational reconstruction of war-devastated countries, make their personal opinion felt in their communities, take an active part in training for peace, join personally in adult education, and promote good will and understanding among the racial and religious groups in their communities.

The third function of the public is to provide the ferment of constructive thinking, to make sure that the fullest possible discussion is given to any particular subject, that all possible alternatives are carefully canvassed so that from this free enterprise of ideas the best will emerge into what we call public opinion. It is not too much to assert that the foreign policy of tomorrow will be the result of the studies and discussion that are going on today all over the country.

So with the problem of national health. Public discussion can provide the ferment of constructive thinking. Public opinion can fix the limits of national policy – either to support or weaken particular courses of action. Public opinion can aid in executing the policy once determined. It is your responsibility as citizens and community leaders to see that this public opinion is formulated on a sound, substantial basis.

*Source*: [Papers of John F. Kennedy. Pre-Presidential Papers. House of Representatives Files](http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKREP.aspx?f=1), Box 95, "Revere Hospital Drive, 26 January 1948." John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.