

Remarks at Conference on Salk Vaccine  
April 22, 1955

By: Oveta Culp Hobby



REMARKS\*

ATTACHMENT D

By  
Oveta Culp Hobby  
Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare

Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of the President and of all the people whom your government serves, I welcome you to this meeting and thank you for coming here today.

Our mission is an important one, and although the problem which we hope to help solve is exceedingly complex, our role can be stated very simply. We are gathered here at the request of the President to seek out and consider all the available data with respect to the availability of the Salk vaccine. This technical information is essential to the report the President has directed that I make to him.

The ultimate purpose all of us have, of course, is to confer the greatest good on the greatest number of people to whom polio presents the greatest threat.

The announcement of the successful tests of the vaccine was made on April 12, and on April 14 the President directed his request for a study. In the brief space of the days that have passed, signs of considerable confusion, misunderstanding and anxiety exist concerning the availability, the distribution of the new vaccine. I am sure all of us would agree to that extent that all of us can contribute to minimizing the confusion we will be performing a public service, and an important public service.

Represented here today are the medical and public health professions, the pharmaceutical and drug industries and many other groups concerned with the problem.

I am happy to welcome all of you. I know you will understand when I extend a particularly warm welcome to the National Foundation for Infantile

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Paralysis. The success of the Foundation and its president, Mr. Basil O'Connor, in maintaining public interest over the years and in providing financial support for an intensive, persistent and diversified research program is an inspiring case history of democracy in action.

The discovery of the Salk vaccine is a story of millions of Americans giving freely of their dimes and dollars in a great cause. It is a story of dedicated and painstaking effort by many thousands of scientists, of an historical and brilliant achievement by one of them, Dr. Jonas Salk.

This meeting would not have been possible without the magnificent work of Dr. Thomas Francis Jr., and his group who conducted the mass test last year, nor of the pioneering efforts of such men as Dr. John Enders, of Harvard and Dr. David Bodian of Johns Hopkins. And this meeting could not go forward without the leaders from America's great pharmaceutical and biological products industry who are present. Their faith in the vaccine prior to the final knowledge of its efficacy and their willingness to undertake production on a large scale in the hope that lives might be saved this year instead of next is a stirring example of vision and courage.

It is our hope that you are prepared to present essential facts and recommendations which you have developed by reason of your specialized qualifications and viewpoints. Here are the essential facts as we see them.



After many years of patient, dedicated investigation by many individuals and groups, a safe and effective vaccine against poliomyelitis has been developed by Dr. Salk. The proof and efficacy of the vaccine's safety was not at hand until ten days ago.

In the hope that the age-old annual toll of young lives and limbs might be reduced, if not completely checked this year, the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis and several leading manufacturers of



vaccine invested large sums of money to insure that sizeable amounts of the vaccine would be available before the full impact of this year's polio season was felt.

The dramatic publicity accompanying the report of the vaccine's efficacy has aroused an enormous amount of public interest.

The supply of vaccine on hand now or likely to become available during the next few months is far short of the needs and demands. The theory exists in some quarters that sizeable amounts of vaccine may appear in black markets, that prices may rise beyond reason, and that, as a consequence, many individuals in the most susceptible age groups will not receive the preventive. Concern over these possibilities has been expressed by individual members of the Congress, and legislation has already been proposed which would require that the Federal Government supervise distribution of the vaccine.

These, as I have said, are the basic facts.

Without attempting to suggest a formal agenda, may I say that in my opinion there are two major questions which require the most careful kind of study.

First and foremost is the question of supply. I think it is fair to say that very great misapprehension exists at the present time concerning this central fact -- how soon, within the understandable limits of productive capacity, will there be sufficient supplies of vaccine to take care of the children of America. Second, there is the question of distribution -- what steps are necessary to assure that vaccine on hand goes first to the most susceptible age groups in the population.

We know that we can expect all pertinent data from this group with respect to the first question, and your thoughtful consideration in an attempt to find the answer to the second one.



Before introducing your chairman, may I mention one more important fact concerning this conference. It has been called, as you know, at the direction of the President, and will provide essential data upon which I shall be making our report to him. The report will go forward as quickly as possible.

It is the Department's intention, as early as possible, to provide the press with appropriate background material. Release to the press and thus to the public of the conclusions which we are able to reach and the recommendations themselves will follow in due, and I am sure the earliest, course.

Gentlemen, I need not remind you that the American people expect great results from this meeting. Your responsibility is indeed a very heavy one. It rests on all of us who have special knowledge with respect to this tremendous instrument of good for mankind. Most particularly, all of us share in a grave concern about the production and the orderly procedures of distribution. They represent a challenge which I have every belief we can meet and move towards mastering here today.

Now I should like to introduce to you your chairman, although for most of you this introduction is superfluous. You know him as a distinguished physician, as an educator, and as one who is familiar not only with the medical aspects of our problem, but also with the problem of distribution of new and scarce drugs.

Ladies and gentlemen, I present your chairman, Dr. Chester S. Keefer.

