

59-SHB-FGC
State Inst. Gen

Printed in the Minneapolis Morning Tribune, August 10, 1959:

"I wish to commend the Minneapolis Morning Tribune for the recent poll (July 26) regarding the state mental health situation. This type of publicity incites interest and encourages public participation in the stepped-up program being carried on by the state and its responsible citizens in the field of mental health.

"The 1959 legislature was keenly aware of the need for treatment of the mentally ill outside of our institutions and so we provided a substantially increased appropriation for out-patient clinics in the amount of \$770,000 for the next biennium in contrast to the \$342,000 appropriation two years ago.

"The construction work on the new institution at Brainerd is being expedited so that needed beds will be available soon.

"In recent weeks the Minneapolis Star and Tribune have published articles and editorials which stated that 'the legislature cut the financial support for operations of the state hospitals -- notably in the amounts designated for staff personnel, for drugs and clothing.'

"The original department requests for appropriations were screened by the governor and substantially reduced. After nearly four months of exhaustive work by my finance subcommittee and numerous trips to institutions for a first-hand look at proposed expenditures, we came up with an appropriation for the seven mental hospitals that represented an increase of \$2,406,135 or 7.49 per cent over the previous biennium. The total expenditures for the mental hospitals was \$34,528,478.

"The subcommittee was composed of three liberals and two conservatives. All agreed that we had adequately financed the needs of the hospitals without wasting taxpayers' money.

"The total welfare appropriation was \$113,393,842 -- an increase over the previous two years of \$10,073,253. The governor had recommended over \$116,000,000.

"The legislature increased the amount included in the appropriation for drugs by 8 per cent over the amount expended in the fiscal year of 1958 for mental hospitals. For the institutions for the mentally retarded (excluding Brainerd) we provided for an increase of over 20 per cent over 1958.

"The drug picture is further enhanced by improved purchasing procedures. They are also able this biennium to buy smaller quantities at contract prices. The division of procurement has indicated that they are keeping a close watch on the expiration of patents so they can advertise for competitive bids on many products.

"Following is an example of a few extreme savings that can be made during the coming biennium: the price of one tranquilizer dropped from \$16.80 to \$4.75; another from \$141.50 to \$24.00; and a third dropped from \$14.50 to \$4.00.

"Patient population decreases, plus the improved purchasing procedures, will actually result in a substantially greater per capita drug allowance than the dollar percentage would indicate, although it does represent a decrease from the department request.

"Supplementation to the drug allowances were made in the past from the institution contingent fund. Should an emergent situation arise, necessary supplementation could again be requested out of this fund, continued in the amount of \$200,000 for the coming biennium.

"A transfer authority was authorized permitting shifting of funds between institutions as needed.

"In studying the per capita expenditures for clothing for patients, the subcommittee found a wide variation between institutions. The hospital at Rochester was successful in holding down its clothing expenditure by contacting relatives for items of wearing apparel. The committee felt this was commendable as it helped keep up patient morale and strengthen ties between the patient and his home.

"In spite of this, however, we appropriated substantially the same over-all amount for clothing as expended in fiscal 1958.

"With increased turnover of mentally ill patients (many of whom would be wearing their own clothing, during a short period of hospitalization), continued decreases in the mentally ill population and encouraged family responsibility -- the per capita clothing allowances for the coming period might well reflect an increase.

"One of the most costly factors in operating an institution is personnel. We found that nearly all of the hospitals had not employed all of the personnel allowed them by the 1957 legislature. Instead they used the money allocated to the unfilled positions to pay for a cost-of-living increase and in some cases granted merit increases.

"The 1959 legislature provided enough money for a cost-of-living salary increase and for merit increases. This means that all of the unfilled positions can now be utilized. We cut the number of employees in some institutions and increased others, based upon proven need.

"In one hospital there was one employe to every one and one-half patients. This compared most unfavorably to the much higher ratio in other institutions.

"One of the issues that stirred up the most heated controversy was the elimination of commissary privileges for superintendents and physicians living on the hospital grounds. Instead of permitting them to take what they wanted out of the storeroom, we provided \$175 a month to buy groceries for their families and provide for laundering and household supplies.

"In addition the state provides them with living quarters furnished with heat and utilities. A slightly smaller adjustment was made for physicians living on and off the grounds.

"The senate finance committee deliberated soberly and with a keen sense of our responsibilities to not only the patients and their families, but to the taxpayers.

"We can be proud of our institutions and the dedicated people who staff them. It was the considered judgment of both liberals and conservatives in both branches of the legislature that we have made progress in the cure and care of our mentally ill. There is reason to believe that this orderly progress will continue."

Sen. Fay George Child, Maynard, Minn., chairman, finance subcommittee on public welfare.