

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

I have signed into law S. 3184, a bill which would extend and expand the authorities for providing Federal assistance to States and communities for alcohol prevention and treatment programs. I have done so because I am concerned about the serious problems of alcoholism and drug abuse in this country, which this bill attempts to address.

We need to find new ways to prevent alcoholism and drug abuse and to assist the rehabilitation and cure of the victims of these cruel diseases. In extending the Comprehensive Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism Prevention, Treatment and Rehabilitation Act of 1970, S. 3184 continues the State grants on alcoholism, and provides special new authorities for Federal research on alcoholism.

In approving this legislation, however, I must register my concern that this is far from the best way to reduce the tragic toll of alcoholism and alcohol abuse.

S. 3184 is based on a policy of perpetuating the maze of categorical Federal health programs and adding even more to the Federal requirements in these programs. This approach is a disservice to those who need effective delivery of health care and to those who must pay the bills -- the taxpayers.

In my 1977 Budget, I proposed a consolidation of 16 existing Federal health programs, including grants for alcohol prevention and treatment programs, into a single block grant which would enable States and localities to assure that people in need receive comprehensive health care.

The Congress has, however, not seen fit even to hold hearings on my proposal. That proposal is based on the proposition that Federal regulation of programs should be reduced and more reliance should be placed upon State and local governments in analyzing the problems and determining priorities for spending the taxpayers' money. The Congress' refusal to consider this approach is irresponsible.

Fewer Federal programs and a reduction in the number of rules and regulations accompanying each of them would allow States and local governments to respond more quickly and sensibly to the health needs of their residents. Consolidation of funding into a single block grant with a more equitable distribution formula would better direct Federal health assistance to those most in need throughout the nation. The mountain of Federal requirements and red tape imposed upon States and localities prevents them from using limited health resources in the most effective way and adds needlessly to administrative costs.

I urge the Congress to enact my proposed "Financial Assistance for Health Care Act." I firmly believe that is the right way to meet our health needs and the sound way to develop health systems that work for the American people.

In the meantime, I have signed S. 3184 so that in the interim assistance will be provided for these important programs.

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