

REMARKS OF REP. TANGRETTI

25TH ANNIVERSARY OF HEAD START

JUNE, 1990

(USUAL GREETINGS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS)

THANK YOU FOR INVITING ME HERE TO
HELP COMMEMORATE THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY
OF OPERATION HEADSTART.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS. HOW LONG AGO THAT
SEEMS, AND HOW MUCH HAS BEEN ACCOMPLISHED
SINCE THEN THROUGH THIS EXTRAORDINARY
PROGRAM KNOWN AS HEADSTART!

HEADSTART, AS EVERYONE KNOWS, WAS
ONE OF THE GREAT SOCIETY PROGRAMS LAUNCHED BY
PRESIDENT LYNDON JOHNSON IN THE 1960s.

SOME OF THE GREAT SOCIETY PROGRAMS
HAVE NOT FARED SO WELL, BUT HEADSTART IS
NOT ONE OF THEM.

IN FACT, MANY REGARD IT AS ONE OF JOHNSON'S GREATEST AND MOST LASTING ACHIEVEMENTS...AND I AGREE WITH THAT ASSESSMENT.

NOT SINCE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE FREE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM AND PASSAGE OF CHILD LABOR LAWS HAS GOVERNMENT DONE AS MUCH FOR OUR CHILDREN AS HEADSTART HAS.

MORE THAN A CENTURY AGO, RALPH WALDO EMERSON OBSERVED THAT THE TRUE TEST OF A SOCIETY LIES IN HOW IT TREATS ITS CHILDREN.

WHAT WAS TRUE THEN IS TRUE NOW. NO CIVILIZATION CAN PROSPER UNLESS IT DEALS CONSTRUCTIVELY WITH THE FUTURE AS PERSONIFIED BY ITS CHILDREN.

YET, IT CAN BE REASONABLY ARGUED THAT CHILDREN TODAY ARE AMONG THE MOST DEPRIVED MEMBERS OF OUR SOCIETY.

A DISPROPORTIONATE NUMBER OF THOSE WHO LIVE IN POVERTY TODAY ARE CHILDREN.

NATIONAL FIGURES INDICATE THAT ALMOST HALF THE MOTHERS OF CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF 6 ARE WORKING. MEANWHILE, WE HAVE A DAY CARE CRISIS IN WHICH THE NUMBER OF DAY CARE SLOTS IS NOT KEEPING PACE WITH THE ENTRY OF MOTHERS INTO THE WORKFORCE.

AGAIN, LOOKING AT NATIONAL FIGURES, 81 PERCENT OF DIVORCED FATHERS NO LONGER PAY CHILD SUPPORT AFTER THREE YEARS.

WHO ARE THE REAL VICTIMS? THE CHILDREN.

IT IS ESTIMATED THAT THREE OUT OF FIVE FAMILIES OF WORKING POOR OR UNEMPLOYED HAVE NO HEALTH INSURANCE. AN ESTIMATED 50,000 CHILDREN ARE BORN TO THESE FAMILIES EACH YEAR IN PENNSYLVANIA.

AND THE RISKS HERE, ALTHOUGH NOT
VISIBLE TO THE PUBLIC AT LARGE, ARE VERY
REAL -- HIGHER INFANT DEATH RATES, LOWER
BIRTH WEIGHTS AND GREATER LONG-RANGE
HEALTH RISKS FOR THE INFANTS.

WHO ARE THE REAL VICTIMS? THE
CHILDREN.

HEADSTART IS DOING ITS JOB OF
PREPARING SMALL CHILDREN AND HELPING
THEM TO OVERCOME SOME OF THE
DEPRIVATIONS OF THEIR BACKGROUND.

AND BECAUSE OF H_EADSTART, MANY
YOUNGSTERS ARE WAY AHEAD OF WHERE THEY
WOULD HAVE BEEN HAD HEADSTART NEVER
EXISTED.

BUT CLEARLY, MUCH MORE NEEDS TO BE
DONE IF WE ARE TO MEET EMERSON'S
CHALLENGE OF THE TRUE TEST OF A SOCIETY.

WE'VE HEARD IT BEFORE, BUT ONE
HOPE THAT THE 1990S WILL TRULY BE THE
"DECADE OF CHILDREN"...THE TIME WHEN WE
FINALLY BEGIN TO MEET OUR RESPONSIBILITIES TO OUR FUTURE.

AND WHEN THAT TIME ARRIVES, IT
WILL HAVE AS A MODEL AND A GUIDE THE
FIRST 25 YEARS OF HEADSTART.

I WOULD LIKE TO THANK YOU ALL FOR
THE CHANCE TO SPEAK BEFORE YOU TODAY.
BUT MORE IMPORTANT, I WOULD LIKE TO
THANK YOU ON BEHALF OF THE STATE
LEGISLATURE, AND THE PARENTS, AND
ESPECIALLY THE CHILDREN OF PENNSYLVANIA
FOR THE IMPORTANT WORK YOU ARE DOING.

AND NOW, ON TO THE NEXT 25 YEARS.