

Rocky & RFK Clash Over Mental Care

Gov. Rockefeller and Sen. Kennedy clashed sharply today over the issue of state care for the mentally ill.

Rockefeller called Kennedy's recent criticism of the state mental health program a "political gimmick" and accused him of "trying to trade off human misery."

Kennedy, who touched off the controversy three weeks ago after visiting two state schools for retarded children, reacted to Rockefeller's charge with evident pain.

"I have been involved with mental retardation for many years," said the Senator, whose older sister Rosemary has long been a hospitalized mental patient.

Rocky Puzzles Kennedy

"I don't feel that the remarks of the Governor are helpful in improving the condition of our state's most unfortunate citizens."

Then Kennedy said of the Governor, "Sometimes I can't figure him out."

These were the sharpest exchanges since Kennedy's visits to state schools for the retarded in Rome, N. Y., and at Willowbrook on Staten Island early this month.

On Sept. 10, testifying before a joint state legislative committee, Kennedy said: "There are many (patients)—far too many—living in filth and dirt, their clothing in rags, in rooms less comfortable and cheerful than the cages in which we put animals in a zoo."

'He's Uninformed'

"I think it's a case of him being completely uninformed," Rockefeller said yesterday in an Albany TV interview.

"He just came here from Massachusetts and he doesn't know that New York State adopted a master plan for mental health which his late brother recommended to the national Congress.

"He didn't know that the reason for the overcrowding was that people in these hospitals had been so sympathetic to pleas of the parents to take the children in. They didn't have to take the children in. The tragedy in a family where there is one of these children is such that the hospitals opened their arms beyond their capacity . . ."

Kennedy called the Governor's attack "intemperate."

"I don't question that he is as interested as I am in making progress in this unhappy field," he said. "But I would like to see everybody working together in this state to deal with this problem."