

Lectures Vol. 1 – Tab K (Pst. SG yrs.) cover

Public Health and Private Lives

By

C. Everett Koop, MD, ScD

A Response on Receiving the Cosmos Club Award 1989

Cosmos Club

Washington, DC

October 19, 1989

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The Cosmos Club is a relatively unique social club in Washington, where membership is based not upon family background, money, or one's position in society, but rather on achievement. It was originally a literary club, but now is much more universal in membership. The club boasts of a large number of Pulitzer prize winners, of Nobel prize winners, of Cosmos Club Award winners, and more recently of winners of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, whose pictures are framed along the corridor that parallels Massachusetts Avenue and runs the length of the original building. I made the latter two collections, but not the former two and this address was given on the occasion of my receiving the Cosmos Club Award of 1989, just fifteen days after I had left my role as Surgeon General and was once again a member of the private sector.

I announced at the onset that I wanted to talk about the experiences of citizen C. Everett Koop as he participated in one corner of the American national government over the previous eight years. Not a "kiss and tell" story. It began with a frank assessment of how I felt and what I thought I should do in those eight long months I waited for confirmation as Surgeon General.

The premise of my remarks was that government service forces you to know more than you already know – even more than you may care to know -- about the way our democracy works and about the motives, good and bad, of one's fellow citizens, which includes colleagues and close friends – and of course, about yourself.

I covered what I thought, at that time, were the highlights of my eight-year stint as Surgeon General.

I truly bared my soul in this exposition and concluded with the sure knowledge that one can make a difference in public service and that the difference may be in oneself, as well as in one's nation. Both are definitely worth the trouble.