

News from Senator

BOB DOLE



(R - Kansas)

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 1984

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DOLE HAILS SOCIAL SECURITY DISABILITY INSURANCE COMPROMISE

Washington--Senator Bob Dole (R-Kansas), Chairman of the Senate Committee on Finance, today praised the final agreement reached by House and Senate conferees on H.R. 3755, the Social Security Disability Amendments of 1984, as "a major accomplishment, one that should provide a new sense of confidence to the disabled population."

Counting spouses and children, almost 4.8 million Americans benefit from Social Security Disability Insurance.

The final accord announced by Senator Dole this afternoon must now be approved by the House and Senate before going to President Ronald Reagan for his signature.

"This legislation represents a major accomplishment, one that should provide a new sense of confidence to the disabled population in the Social Security disability review process," Senator Dole said today. "The agreement has broad bipartisan support and will make major changes in the way disability reviews are conducted. For the first time, a clear standard of review will be spelled out in the law.

"A finding of medical improvement or some other change in the beneficiary's condition will be required in order to terminate benefits," Senator Dole said. "In addition, clear standards of rule-making will be spelled out for the Social Security Administration with the hope of reducing some of the confusion surrounding the criteria being used by the state agencies, administrative law judges and the Federal courts."

The Committee on Finance Chairman noted that, over the past three and one-half years, "hundreds of thousands of disability beneficiaries have been reviewed and found ineligible for benefits. Much to our regret, the Federal rules of eligibility were not always being applied on a uniform, nationwide basis. For good reasons, real concerns were raised about the accuracy and fairness of the eligibility review process. If we are successful in this legislation, we should be able to restore some order to the chaos we have seen in the disability insurance program."

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Senator Dole explained that, for over two years, the Congress has worked to develop a bipartisan approach to disability reform and to forge a bill which could protect the interests of the disabled population without promoting the runaway growth the program experienced during the 1970s.

"With the cooperation of the Reagan Administration, I believe we have a piece of legislation that meets those objectives," Senator Dole said. "The basic eligibility criteria for disability benefits have not been changed--only clarified and made more explicit. This should allow the reviews, which were suspended by the Administration last spring, to be resumed in an orderly way."

The Kansas Senator expressed his appreciation "to all of the people who helped make this compromise possible." That list, he noted, included Representative J.J. Pickle (D-Texas), Chairman of the House Social Security Subcommittee, "and my colleagues in the Senate who have sought a resolution to the difficult issue of disability reform, particularly Senators William S. Cohen (R-Maine), John Heinz (R-Pennsylvania) and Carl Levin (D-Michigan)."

Senator Dole reminded that the legislation, which mandates a review of Social Security's 2.7 million disabled workers every three years, was originally passed by the Congress in 1980 and signed into law by former President Jimmy Carter. "It is unfortunate," Senator Dole said, "that the Congress did not anticipate in 1980 the problems that would result by requiring that such a massive review be conducted in such a short period of time."

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