

News from Senator

BOB DOLE



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DOLE INTRODUCES RESOLUTION TO CAPTION SENATE PROCEEDINGS;
WANTS EVERYONE TO SHARE IN THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

Washington, D.C. -- Showing his continued support for the rights of people with hearing impairments, Senator Bob Dole (R-Ks) introduced a resolution that requires closed-captioning of televised Senate floor proceedings. The following is his statement:

MR. PRESIDENT, TODAY I AM INTRODUCING A RESOLUTION WHICH WILL ENABLE MILLIONS OF AMERICANS WITH HEARING IMPAIRMENTS TO TUNE IN TO THEIR DEMOCRACY BY REQUIRING CLOSED-CAPTIONED BROADCASTING OF SENATE FLOOR PROCEEDINGS. I AM VERY PLEASED TO HAVE THE MAJORITY LEADER JOIN ME IN INTRODUCING THIS RESOLUTION, AS WELL AS SENATORS MCCAIN, HARKIN, WILSON, LEAHY, DURENBERGER, DANFORTH, MURKOWSKI, BOSCHWITZ, HATCH, AND JEFFORDS. THE PROPOSAL IS IDENTICAL TO ONE I SPONSORED LAST YEAR WITH SEVERAL OF MY COLLEAGUES WHO ARE JOINING ME TODAY.

CLOSED-CAPTIONED BROADCASTING ALLOWS THE AUDIO PORTION OF A PROGRAM TO BE DISPLAYED IN PRINTED FORM ON THE TELEVISION SCREEN. THE CAPTIONS ARE ONLY RECEIVED IF A PERSON HAS A SPECIAL DECODING DEVICE ATTACHED TO A TELEVISION SET.

THERE IS NO TECHNOLOGICAL REASON WHY CAPTIONING CANNOT BE USED TO EXPAND THE VIEWING AUDIENCE OF THE SENATE TO INCLUDE OUR DEAF AND HEARING-IMPAIRED CITIZENS. REAL-TIME, INSTANTANEOUS CAPTIONING HAS BEEN AVAILABLE SINCE 1982 AND IS NOW USED IN BROADCASTS OF PRESIDENTIAL SPEECHES AND PRESS CONFERENCES, NEWS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS PROGRAMS, AND EVEN SOME SENATE COMMITTEE HEARINGS. THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ALSO RECENTLY APPROVED A PROPOSAL TO REQUIRE CAPTIONING OF ITS TELEVISED PROCEEDINGS.

THERE WOULD OF COURSE BE SOME COST INVOLVED IN PROVIDING THIS SERVICE FOR THE SENATE, BUT I BELIEVE IT IS A SMALL PRICE TO PAY TO MAKE THIS BODY ACCESSIBLE TO ALL AMERICANS.

THE PROPOSAL I AM INTRODUCING TODAY SIMPLY AMENDS THE RESOLUTION SETTING FORTH THE RULES REGARDING TELEVISIONING OF SENATE SESSIONS. IT DOES NOT SPECIFY WHAT TYPE OF EQUIPMENT SHOULD BE USED OR WHETHER THE CAPTIONING SHOULD BE DONE IN-HOUSE OR BY A COMMERCIAL SERVICE. THESE AND OTHER PRACTICAL DETAILS OF IMPLEMENTING THE RESOLUTION WOULD BE WORKED OUT BY THE SENATE RULES COMMITTEE, WHICH HAS BEEN EXPLORING THE VARIOUS OPTIONS FOR SEVERAL YEARS.

ALL THE MAJOR ORGANIZATIONS REPRESENTING AMERICANS WITH HEARING IMPAIRMENTS SUPPORT CLOSED-CAPTIONING SENATE PROCEEDINGS -- AND FOR GOOD REASON. THEY RECOGNIZE THAT THE KNOWLEDGE GAINED FROM OBSERVING THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS IN ACTION MAKES FOR A MORE INFORMED AND INVOLVED CITIZENRY. AND THEY BELIEVE, AS I DO, THAT AS CITIZENS AND TAXPAYERS, HEARING-IMPAIRED AMERICANS ARE AS ENTITLED TO WITNESS THE DEBATES OF THEIR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES AS THEIR FELLOW AMERICANS WHO CAN HEAR.

MR. PRESIDENT, WE BEGAN OUR EXPERIMENT WITH TELEVISION IN THE SENATE BECAUSE WE BELIEVED THAT THE MORE PEOPLE PARTICIPATE IN OUR DEMOCRACY, THE STRONGER IT BECOMES. OUR VIEWERS MAY NOT ALWAYS BE IMPRESSED OR ENTERTAINED BY WHAT THEY SEE. BUT THEY AT LEAST HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO JUDGE FOR THEMSELVES WHETHER THEY ARE BEING WELL-SERVED BY THEIR ELECTED LEADERS. IT IS TIME TO EXTEND THAT OPPORTUNITY -- AND RIGHT -- TO THE MORE THAN 20 MILLION AMERICANS WHO ARE DEAF OR HEARING-IMPAIRED.

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