

Bob Dole



NEWS

U.S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER

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AIDS & IMMIGRATION AMENDMENT

Washington -- Senate Republican Leader Bob Dole today made the following remarks on the Senate floor on an amendment regarding AIDS and immigration:

Mr. President, Bill Clinton, during his presidential campaign, promised to "lift the current ban on travel and immigration to the United States by foreign nationals with H.I.V." This policy was first initiated by Congress in 1987. The Senate voted in favor of it, ninety-six to zero, and the House accepted the provision without a vote.

Mr. President, I believe that the lifting of the current ban -- which is within the power of the President to lift by Executive Order -- is premature and will very likely strain our already overburdened health care system. The amendment being offered today retains the current ban unless changed by law.

A PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE

I want to emphasize that this is not a battle about who cares more about people who are sick. However, there will be those who will turn this vote into a political contest and who will argue that those of us opposed to lifting the ban at this time are callous and heartless. They will argue that the history of America and the greatness of this country is based on the willingness of this country to accept people in need.

But, Mr. President, that's not the issue. This is not an anti-immigration issue. This is not a gay issue. This is a public health issue, and it is an economic health issue. There is nothing callous or heartless about protecting the physical and financial health of the American people.

No doubt, Mr. President, Aids is a tragic disease. It has taken the lives of approximately 175,000 Americans and has afflicted more than a million other Americans. It is a communicable disease that is not confined to the intravenous drug user or the gay population. It is being spread on an increasing basis through heterosexual contact. It infects the old, the young, men, and women, rich or poor. There is no doubt in my mind that what we confront is an epidemic -- one that will call on all our resources to address.

AMERICANS COME FIRST

While I realize that some of the fears about Aids are unfounded, I fail to see how permitting more people infected with the Aids virus to permanently immigrate into America will in any way contribute to the health and well-being of the American public, or help us resolve the very serious issues facing us here at home.

Mr. President, I believe that out of fairness to the American people -- who are already, and rightly so, demanding a more equitable and affordable health care system -- lifting the ban at this time would appear unwise until such time as a number of troubling issues are thoroughly addressed.

By some estimates, the cost of caring for an Aids patient can well exceed \$100,000 per case. I do not believe that all immigrants with the H.I.V. Virus who are permitted entry into this country will be able to afford these astronomical expenses. It seems reasonable to believe then, that many of those who are granted permanent entry into this country will eventually fall onto the public rolls.

(MORE)

TAXPAYERS EXPOSED

Would taxpayers be forced to pay the astronomical cost of treatment for these patients -- in effect, establishing "health care asylum" in America? What will be the effect of these Aids patients on our already strained health care system? And how do we justify these added costs to the American public -- a public who will pay over \$800 billion for health care this year alone, and who are concerned about the thirty-seven million uninsured, and those already here who are confronting the aids virus.

EDUCATION EFFORTS UNDERMINED

Mr. President, on top of the billions of dollars we have spent on Aids research, our nation has invested untold millions of dollars to educate the public about the spread of the Aids virus. Would the American taxpayer have to pay to educate these emigres, or are we willing to take our chances that these individuals will act responsibly?

Mr. President, our current law provides for a waiver authority allowing those infected with certain infectious diseases, including the Aids virus, to enter the United States for a limited period of time. These waivers are granted for humanitarian purposes for individuals who wish to enter the U.S. For treatment or education purposes, or to those who already have an immediate family member legally residing in the U.S. Who arguably can provide them with the necessary financial and emotional resources. No one is arguing that this waiver authority should be altered.

KEEP BAN IN PLACE

However, Mr. President, until we have better information on what the effect will be on the American public if the ban is lifted, I am opposed to any change in our current policy. This amendment would require a thorough study to be conducted to evaluate the full implications of the lifting of the ban. Upon completion of the study, if deemed appropriate by the Congress and the President, a policy change can be instituted legislatively.

In the meantime, we, in Congress, have an obligation to ensure that no policy changes are enacted that will in any way compromise the financial and physical health of the American taxpayer. At this time, our information available on the implications of lifting the ban is not adequate to make this decision.

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