

Bob Dole



NEWS

U. S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER

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CONTACT: CLARKSON HINE
(202) 224-5358

SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER BOB DOLE REMARKS TO NATIONAL GOVERNORS ASSOCIATION

HEALTH CARE, WELFARE REFORM & CRIME: DOLE UNVEILS FEDERAL GUN BUY-BACK INITIATIVE

I think the best use of my time here this morning is to keep my remarks short and leave plenty of room for discussion. The Republican Congressional Leadership and I spent two solid hours last evening in a round table health care discussion with Republican Governors, and we all went away from table having learned a great deal.

Health Care

And let me first turn to the many changes that have occurred in the health care reform debate since we met last August in Tulsa.

I think everyone involved in that debate--and that certainly includes all of us up on Capitol Hill--have learned a lot in the past months, and I salute President and Mrs. Clinton for starting the national discussion.

One fact that was originally ignored in the discussion, but which more and more Americans now agree upon, is the fact we have the best health care system in the world.

No, our system isn't perfect. It's bureaucratic. It's expensive. And sometimes it's unfair. But I believe there is a growing consensus among Republicans and Democrats--as evidenced by your unanimous vote yesterday--that we can improve our health care system without destroying the quality and choice Americans expect--and without giving complete and total control to the federal government.

As I said last week in responding to the State of the Union--Republicans are ready to fix what truly needs to be fixed--and to do it now.

The debate should not be one of "it's the President's plan or nothing." There are many proposals on the table--and most of them have both their share of good ideas and bad ideas.

For example, many of you have concerns that Republicans proposal do not preempt E.R.I.S.A.

On the same hand, you also have concerns with the Cooper bill, which leaves states totally responsible for the costs of their Medicaid programs.

These issues, along with price controls, mandatory alliances, and global budgeting will all be debated in the coming months.

I might add that every single Republican proposal--and the call to action you passed yesterday--resolve the problems cited so dramatically by the President last week.

For example, we heard about the couple who lost their coverage when the husband lost his job. Every bill introduced by Republicans solves that problem. In fact, we could have solved that problem three years ago if the Democrat leadership had permitted us to pass a bill authored by then-Senator, and now-Secretary of the Treasury Lloyd Bentsen.

And those 81 million Americans with pre-existing conditions the President cited. Their problems are solved by each Republican bill--and were part of the old Bentsen bill, as well.

Let me repeat a warning that I gave in August--reform will not happen unless there is bi-partisan cooperation. And my definition of bi-partisan does not include picking off one or two Republicans.

(MORE)

Notwithstanding all the rhetoric of late, including threats of a veto, and the name-calling that Mr. Magaziner engaged in yesterday--attacking organizations and journalists who raise questions about the Clinton plan as "liars"--I still believe Republicans and Democrats can come to an agreement on a bill this year.

It won't look like any one bill out there now--but it will hopefully have the strongest elements of all. And the reforms we can agree on are not insignificant.

Granted, they may not turn the system upside down as envisioned by some at the White House---but they will make a big, big, difference.

And despite all the talk on this issue, one other thing has not changed since we met in August, and I said these words: "Make no mistake, we all still have much to learn on this issue. After all, we have not yet heard from consumers, providers, businesses, or governors at Congressional hearings on this issue."

The hearing process will take a long time. And I continue to believe that as we debate the President's plan, we can and should act right now to make some much-needed improvements in our system.

Crime

Last August, I told you that fighting crime was on the top of the agenda of House and Senate Republicans--and that hasn't changed one bit.

The president devoted a good portion of his State of the Union speech to crime, and I know he discussed it with you yesterday, as well.

Let me say right up front that locking violent felons in jail and throwing away the key won't solve our crime problem by itself. Yes, we have to work with our young people to ensure they understand that there is a right and wrong.

That said, however, I think we can all agree that we have seen far-too many news stories about violent felons committing a horrible crime soon after they were released from jail after only serving a fraction of a prior sentence. And there's one fact that you can't argue with. If they had been kept in jail, they couldn't have committed another crime.

That's why the anti-crime bill passed by the Senate makes incarceration a top priority--\$500 million in state grants to build and operate detention facilities for violent juveniles; \$3 billion in grants for state prisons and boot camps; and another \$3 billion for ten new regional prisons to which states can send their most violent criminals--if they adopt a reform called "truth-in-sentencing."

Having met with many of you last evening, and having watched portions of your discussion on C-Span yesterday, I am well aware of your concerns on this issue.

And the bill passed by the Senate is not perfect. It's the work of politicians, not technicians. So, as the President did yesterday, let me also invite you to tell us what does work, and what we can do to ensure an effective federal-state partnership in the war on crime.

Federal Gun Buy-Back Program

One idea that has taken off at the local level is the idea of buying back guns...with cash, with toys, with clothes, even with tickets for sporting events. In Chicago, more than 1,000 weapons, including a projectile launcher, were recently exchanged in a "guns-for-shoes" program sponsored by the Foot Locker company and the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce. And last Christmas, all of America cheered a young man named Fernando Mateo, a New York City carpet store owner who initiated his own "toys-for-guns" program.

The jury is still out on whether these gun buy-back efforts actually reduce crime. But as a skeptical New York City Police Chief Raymond Kelly recently put it, "I've converted. I'm a believer."

I'm prepared to be a convert and a believer, too. And that's why I will introduce legislation later today that will lend a helping hand to these local initiatives by establishing a federal gun buy-back program, administered by the Attorney General.

Under this program, the federal government will match local and state gun buy-back efforts on a dollar-for-dollar basis. The

purpose of this program is not to supplant state and local efforts, but to assist them with supplemental funding--\$15 million for fiscal 1994 and another \$15 million for fiscal year 1995. Once the local effort gets off the ground, the federal program can step in with additional funding.

If my numbers add up, the federal gun buy-back initiative--working together with state and local initiatives--could result in removing more than 1 million guns from our streets within the next two years.

Obviously, this gun buy-back initiative will not stop crime...not by a long shot. Legitimate questions can be raised about the mechanics of these programs. And these questions must be answered. But the war on crime will be won not with one big step, but with many, many small steps...small steps taken at the local level and by the states...and, yes, here in Congress.

Welfare Reform

President Clinton promised during the campaign to "end welfare as we know it." But the fact is that--because of your efforts at the state level--by the time he finally gets around to introducing his legislation, welfare "as we know it" may well already have changed.

This is one area where Governors and state legislators are light years ahead of the federal bureaucracy. You have been tackling this problem head-on for years, with programs that impose tougher work requirements, and recognize both the financial and the social costs of illegitimacy.

Many of you are doing what the federal government should have done long ago--and that's seeking to reverse the dramatic increase in illegitimacy by removing from the current system provisions that offer more money to single mothers when they have more children, and that offer more money when the father moves out of the home.

As Richard Nathan wrote in yesterday's New York Times, "There are 213,000 heads of welfare families who are 16 to 20 years old and have one child. We need to reach this vulnerable group, which stays on welfare longest, to nip the welfare culture in the bud."

Unfunded Federal Mandates

As we work on legislation this spring, it seems to me our top priority should be to stay out of your way...to stay away from the "one size fits all" answers that are typical of Congressional action, and to allow you the authority and flexibility to see what works and what doesn't.

Clearly, what you don't need is legislation that would create yet another unfunded federal mandate, by forcing you to pick up the tab for massive community service job programs for welfare recipients. I note that Governor Wilson estimates that the type of legislation the President is discussing would cost California \$432 million in 1997 and nearly double that in 1998.

Before opening it up, I do want to stress that on health care, crime, welfare reform, or any other issue, Republicans in the House and Senate see ourselves as responsible players.

The voters didn't send us here to stand in the President's way, but they also didn't send us here to stand on the sidelines and not participate.

When we believe the President is moving America in the right direction--as he did with NAFTA--then Republicans will support him. But when we honestly believe he is moving in the wrong direction, then our duty is to offer alternatives that put us in the right direction. And when the fact that we're outnumbered here prevents us from doing that, then we simply have to oppose the President's proposals.

There is room for cooperation on the major issues of the day, and I look forward to your continued involvement in the search for solutions.

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