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SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER



NEWS
FROM:

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DISABILITY POLICY

DOLE SUPPORTS REAUTHORIZATION OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES
EDUCATION ACT; BILL GUARANTEES STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES
A FREE AND APPROPRIATE PUBLIC EDUCATION

On April 14, 1969, I gave my first speech on the Senate floor. I spoke about people with disabilities -- the challenges they face in their daily lives, and how appropriate services can make a big difference by giving them a shot at opportunities others take for granted.

Thus, as I leave the Senate today, it with a sense of symmetry and continuing mission that I am pleased today to rise in support of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

IDEA, as it is often called, gives states important financial help to educate students with disabilities, and in turn provides students with disabilities with the guarantee of a free and appropriate public education.

There are some issues that transcend politics, foster a bipartisan spirit, and result in legislation that makes a real and lasting difference. In my view, disability has always been one of those issues.

And perhaps no legislation has been more important in improving opportunity for young people with disabilities than IDEA. In 1975, I helped craft the first IDEA legislation. At that time, as unbelievable as some may find it today, millions of young people were not allowed into school simply because they had a disability.

IDEA has helped change that. And IDEA is as important today as it was 21 years ago. But the world has changed, and so too must IDEA. This latest reauthorization bill cuts administrative red tape, provides states's more flexibility in spending federal funds, demands greater accountability for educational results, and helps educators maintain safe schools -- without sacrificing any of the important protections IDEA gives students with disabilities.

I want to acknowledge the hard work of Senators Frist and Harkin. Their efforts have paid off in a good bill, and I congratulate them.

I do not know what judgements historians of the future will make of my record in the Senate. But, for me, I can think of no more important issue in a personal sense than disability, one that I have pursued with more constancy or greater pride, or has made a greater difference in people's lives. I hope others will reflect that what I did was right, not merely convenient.

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