

## News from Senator

# BOB DOLE



(R - Kansas) SH 141 Hart Building, Washington, D.C. 20510

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 20, 1983

CONTACT: WALT RIKER,  
SCOTT RICHARDSON 202/224-6521

### REMARKS OF SENATOR BOB DOLE

#### WOMEN'S EQUITY ACTION LEAGUE ANNUAL AWARDS DINNER

#### "PROGRESS AND POVERTY AMONG AMERICAN WOMEN"

Our purpose this evening is to pay tribute to eight women of demonstrated leadership and capability, whose outstanding achievements in the private sector symbolize the vast resource of human talent which American women represent.

Today, there are some 600 women holding top executive positions with major corporations. There has been dramatic growth in the number of women entering such traditionally male-dominated fields as law, medicine, accounting and engineering. For women in science 1983 has been a banner year. Last June, one of our honorees, Dr. Sally Ride, a physicist, became the first American woman to journey into outer space. More recently, Dr. Barbara McClintock set another milestone by becoming the first woman to earn a coveted Nobel Prize in medicine for research solely her own.

These are the success stories. Yet we cannot let these shining accomplishments blind us to the harsh economic realities facing millions of other American women. For there has been another trend among American women, not one of progress, but one toward poverty. Currently, about one-third of all households living below the poverty level are headed by women, most of whom are divorced with children, or elderly widows.

#### A NEED FOR A SUSTAINED RECOVERY

Fundamental to improving the economic status of women will be a sustained economic recovery. To be sure, women are already benefitting by the broad based recovery currently underway and inflation has been cut to 3.9% in 1983, down drastically from a frightening 12.4% in 1980.

But threatening the economic health of the nation are skyrocketing deficits. Our national debt now stands at a staggering \$1.3 trillion dollars. Yearly projected deficits fall in the \$180-200 billion range.

Some believe these deficits don't matter. I disagree. The risks are too high to delay action. I have called for a budget summit involving the President and Congressional leaders, Republicans and Democrats, so that a deficit-reducing compromise can be worked out. I urge this organization, concerned as it is with basic issues of fairness and economic justice, to join me in that call. As a representative of women -- one of the fastest growing poverty groups in America society -- you have a vital interest in cutting the deficits which imperil our continued progress toward economic health. For it has been sadly demonstrated that when the economy falters, it is those on the bottom rungs of the economic ladder who suffer the most.



## SECURING ECONOMIC EQUITY FOR WOMEN

But sustained economic recovery won't be enough, not if economic barriers remain which preclude women from sharing fully in the fruits of economic prosperity. Last June, the Senate Finance Committee held an unprecedented two full days of comprehensive hearings on economic discrimination against women. These hearings revealed a number of difficult, complex issues, the solutions which in many instances may take time. However, there are two areas which I consider to be of particular importance and where I see the potential for legislative action in this Congress.

### 1. PENSION REFORM

A top priority for me, as it is, I know, for the Women's Equity Action League, is private pension reform. Many women's organizations have long argued that the laws governing our private pension system fail to adequately address the special needs of women, both as the wives of workers who participate in private pension plans, and as workers who seek to become eligible for pensions of their own.

For instance, rules relating to the minimum age for pension plan participation, vesting and break-in-service rules may fail to adequately address women's unique work patterns. And in many ways, the law may ignore the importance of pension benefits to the economic security of a non-employed spouse.

Over the past several weeks, I have been working with other members of the Finance Committee, the pension industry, and interested women's organizations, including W.E.A.L., developing a consensus proposal, which I introduced yesterday. To address the special needs of employed women, the bill would lower the minimum age for participation and vesting and liberalize certain break-in-service rules. To address the needs of homemakers who must depend on the spouse's retirement benefit, the bill would significantly expand the availability of survivor's benefits.

The proposal is not intended to eliminate all potential inequities in our private pension system. However, it does represent a meaningful first step which will provide real, tangible economic benefits to women both as employees and as wives of workers.

### 2. CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT PROGRAM

A second area of paramount importance is the need to strengthen our child support enforcement program. Perhaps the most serious economic problem facing female heads of households is lack of adequate child support. More than 8.4 million women are raising children whose fathers are absent.

Thirty percent of these women and children are living in poverty. Although most of these women should receive child support payments, obligations have been established on behalf of only 4 million of them and 53% of these receive only partial payment or no payment at all.

The Child Support Enforcement Program was established in 1975 to provide a federal-state program of child support enforcement for both welfare and non-welfare recipients. But currently, there are wide variations in the effectiveness of state programs and heavy administrative costs that are primarily borne by the federal government.

The Reagan Administration and many in Congress, including myself, believe that the program can and should do a better job. Accordingly, the Administration has developed a bill, cosponsored by all the Republican members of the Senate Finance Committee, which I believe lays the foundation for real program improvement. Hearings are currently underway and I hope final legislative action can be taken by Congress before the end of the session.



KEEPING THE PROMISE OF THE 1970's

Just as securing fundamental civil rights for women was the issue of the 1970's, securing economic equity for women will be the issue of the 1980's. But continued, strong enforcement of our anti-sex discrimination laws remains important. For, while significant progress has been made in eliminating sex discrimination from employment, education, housing, and credit, problems remain.

The scope of one of our most effective anti-sex discrimination laws, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, is under challenge in the case of Grove City. currently pending in the Supreme Court. The question presented is whether Title IX prohibits sex discrimination in all programs operated by an educational institution receiving federal funds, or only in those specific programs directly receiving federal aid.

I have joined Representative Claudine Schneider and many other members of Congress urging the court to adopt a broad reading of Title IX. It is implausible to me that Congress intended a piecemeal approach whereby an educational institution could reap the benefits of federal aid for one program, but be free to discriminate in all the rest. Hopefully, the court will adopt our arguments. If not, I will pursue legislation to clarify the law.

CONCLUSION: THE NEED FOR A CORNERSTONE

A healthy economy, pension reform, strengthened child support enforcement, vigilance in maintaining civil rights guarantees -- these are all necessary building blocks in our progress toward insuring true equality for women. Yet, we are building without a cornerstone, without a constitutional guarantee of equality.

We need a solid foundation for our progress. We need the ERA. But until that comes, we must seize every opportunity to tear down the remnants of discrimination and clear the path for the invaluable contributions that women can and will bring to our national life.