

NEWS

U. S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

SENATE MAJORITY LEADER

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AFFIRMATIVE ACTION UPDATE

As the Washington Post reported today, the overwhelming majority of the American people believe that the race-counting game has gone too far.

Now, I am proud of my own civil rights record. I have supported affirmative action in the past. That's no secret.

But my past record did not disqualify me last December from asking the Congressional Research Service to compile a list of all federal preference laws and regulations.

And my record does not disqualify me today from raising legitimate questions about the continuing fairness and effectiveness of "affirmative action," particularly when the affirmative-action label is used to describe quotas, set-asides, and other group preferences.

Equal treatment, not preferential treatment, should be the standard. Equal opportunity, not equal results, must be the goal.

Earlier today, my distinguished colleague from Maine, Senator Cohen, gave a very eloquent speech on the Senate floor where he pointed out that America is not a color-blind society...and he's right. Discrimination continues to exist. The color-blind ideal is just that--an ideal that has yet to be achieved in the America of 1995.

But do you become a color-blind society by dividing people by race? Do you achieve the color-blind ideal by granting preferences to people simply because they happen to belong to certain groups? Do you continue programs that have outlived their usefulness or original purpose? The answer to these questions is, of course, a resounding "no."

I look forward to the completion of the President's review of all federal affirmative action policies, but if the President is seeking a magical "third way," I suspect he's going to run into a dead end: when it comes to the issue of group preferences, you are either for them or against them. There can be no splitting the difference, no "third way."

With that said, let's hope that reason prevails as we continue down this road. If we keep our voices low and our intentions good, the debate over affirmative action can, in fact, be an opportunity to unite the American people, and not to divide us.

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