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CAPITOL COMMENT

by U.S. Senator Bob Dole

During the first week of the 92nd Congress I introduced a bill seeks to close the "information gap" for many of our country's 42 million handicapped citizens.

Not very many Americans are aware of the nature and extend of disability or of the human and economic problems it imposes. I, however, am familiar with the many difficulties handicapped persons confront daily, and have found that incomplete and inaccessible information is something common to all of these problems.

My bill proposed the creation of a central clearinghouse for all information concerning services and resources pertinent to the disabled. Much information on and for the handicapped already exists, as do many services and some financial aid; but none is of any use unless it is known and easily accessible to those persons who are in need.

What seems at once encouraging and frustrating to me is the fact that we presently have the know-how and resources to restore to productive lives many more disabled persons than are now being served. My legislation would connect the two together: the disabled and the available resources. This union would result in benefits both to the handicapped individual and to our nation's economy, gains that would far outstrip the funds or energy expended in establishing such a center.

A recent report from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare partially illustrates the tragedy of the disabled' "information gap." In the area of rehabilitation, HEW indicated that about 25 per cent of America's handicapped have not received rehabilitation services and do not know where to seek help.

This is not only true of rehabilitation, but unfortunately much the same can be said for information about employment, health care and
(MORE)

CAPITOL COMMENT -2-

economic aid. Knowledge of research findings, technical assistance and information about what other governmental units and private concerns are doing to accommodate handicapped people, lack any coordination.

My bill (S.41) would establish a National Information and Resource Center for the Handicapped within the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. It is designed to insure that all information relating to the handicapped is consolidated and made available to those individuals in the form they can use.

It would provide a contact point for the handicapped and their families, private organizations, professional groups and city and state officials who desire information or direction.

Such a center would fill a great void. It is an answer to a specific and well-defined need and would meet this need at a reasonable cost. Senate Bill 41 would appropriate \$300,000 for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1972. The Center would require a small staff to receive and direct inquiries to specialized contacts --- to universities, individuals, organizations and agencies that have special knowledge or have worked successfully on aspects of these problems.

This legislation has been warmly received by all sectors of the handicapped community. Its groundwork on Capitol Hill is now firm. I plan to make every effort to assure its enactment in the 92nd Congress, and believe its chances for passage are very good.

The Center's effect on Kansans and on all Americans will be several-fold. The 42 million Americans who belong to the handicapped minority will be the immediate and long-term beneficiaries of the Center's service; but America will be the ultimate beneficiary, through increased contributions, well-being and personal fulfillment of the handicapped.

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