

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR DOLE FOR
PRESS CONFERENCE ON DISABILITY AGREEMENT

I FEEL CONFIDENT THAT I AM SPEAKING FOR MANY MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE AND SENATE WHEN I SAY THAT I AM VERY PLEASED TO BE ANNOUNCING THE RESOLUTION OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY DISABILITY INSURANCE ISSUE. FOR THE BETTER PART OF TWO YEARS, WE IN CONGRESS HAVE BEEN WORKING TO DEVELOP A BIPARTISAN APPROACH TO DISABILITY REFORM AND TO FORGE A BILL THAT PROTECTS THE INTERESTS OF THE DISABLED WITHOUT LEADING TO RUNAWAY GROWTH IN THE PROGRAM. I THINK WE HAVE ACCOMPLISHED THAT IN THIS CONFERENCE AGREEMENT. JUST THIS MORNING, WE RECEIVED THE FINAL SIGNATURES ON THE CONFERENCE REPORT, GIVING THIS LEGISLATION THE UNANIMOUS SUPPORT OF ALL OF THE HOUSE AND SENATE CONFEREES.

REACHING THIS AGREEMENT HAS BEEN A LONG AND DIFFICULT PROCESS. THE LEGISLATION MANDATING THE CONTROVERSIAL PERIODIC ELIGIBILITY REVIEWS WAS APPROVED BY CONGRESS AND SIGNED INTO LAW BY PRESIDENT CARTER IN 1980. THE RESPONSIBILITY TO CONDUCT THE MORE THAN 2 MILLION REVIEWS THEN FELL ON THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION, BUT WITHOUT ANY SPECIAL LEGISLATIVE PROVISIONS FOR ASSESSING THE ELIGIBILITY OF PEOPLE WHO HAD BEEN ON THE ROLLS FOR MANY YEARS. MANY PROBLEMS HAVE BEEN UNCOVERED SINCE THE REVIEWS BEGAN IN 1981. WHILE THE ADMINISTRATION UNDERTOOK A SERIES OF ADMINISTRATIVE INITIATIVES TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF THE REVIEW PROCESS, PROBLEMS REMAINED THAT REQUIRED LEGISLATIVE REMEDIES. IT IS UNFORTUNATE FOR ALL CONCERNED THAT THESE

PROBLEMS WERE NOT ANTICIPATED WHEN THE ORIGINAL LEGISLATION WAS ENACTED.

THIS CONFERENCE AGREEMENT MAKES MAJOR CHANGES IN THE WAY DISABILITY REVIEWS ARE CONDUCTED. FOR THE FIRST TIME, A CLEAR STANDARD OF REVIEW FOR PEOPLE ON THE ROLLS WILL BE SPELLED OUT IN THE LAW. A FINDING OF MEDICAL IMPROVEMENT OR SOME OTHER CHANGE IN THE BENEFICIARY'S CONDITION WILL BE REQUIRED ALONG WITH ABILITY TO WORK IN ORDER FOR BENEFITS TO BE TERMINATED. IN ADDITION, CLEAR STANDARDS OF RULEMAKING WILL BE SPELLED OUT FOR THE SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION WITH THE GOAL OF REDUCING SOME OF THE CONFUSION SURROUNDING THE CRITERIA BEING USED BY THE STATE AGENCIES, ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGES AND THE FEDERAL COURTS. IT IS MY HOPE THAT THESE AND MANY OTHER PROVISIONS OF THE CONFERENCE AGREEMENT WILL PROVIDE A NEW SENSE OF CONFIDENCE TO THE DISABLED POPULATION IN THE ACCURACY AND FAIRNESS OF THE DISABILITY REVIEW PROCESS.

THIS LEGISLATION IS NOT PERFECT, OF COURSE. THE PROBLEMS WE HAVE SEEN IN THE DISABILITY INSURANCE PROGRAM ARE COMPLEX AND VIEWS VARY WIDELY ON THE BEST WAY TO RESOLVE THEM. BUT IN MY VIEW, THIS IS A GOOD COMPROMISE THAT BALANCES THE VARIOUS INTERESTS. THE BASIC ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR DISABILITY BENEFITS HAVE BEEN CLARIFIED AND MADE MORE EXPLICIT. THIS SHOULD ALLOW THE REVIEWS, WHICH WERE SUSPENDED BY THE ADMINISTRATION

LAST SPRING, TO BE RESUMED IN AN ORDERLY WAY AND CONDUCTED ON A UNIFORM, NATIONWIDE BASIS.

MANY PEOPLE ARE TO BE COMMENDED FOR THE ROLE THEY PLAYED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS LEGISLATION. CONGRESSMAN PICKLE, CHAIRMAN OF THE HOUSE SOCIAL SECURITY SUBCOMMITTEE, AND THE HOUSE CONFEREES SHOWED A REAL WILLINGNESS TO TRY TO ACCOMMODATE THE SENATE POSITION ON REFORM. THE SENATE CONFEREES--SENATORS PACKWOOD, ROTH, DANFORTH, LONG, BENTSEN, AND MOYNIHAN--AND OTHER OF MY COLLEAGUES--SENATORS COHEN, HEINZ, LEVIN, DURENBERGER AND HELMS, TO NAME A FEW--HAVE WORKED DILIGENTLY TO HELP RESOLVE THIS DIFFICULT ISSUE. FINALLY, I'D LIKE TO NOTE THE SUPPORT WE'VE RECEIVED FROM THE ADMINISTRATION IN HELPING TO DEVELOP THIS COMPROMISE AGREEMENT.

IN CLOSING, WE HOPE TO SEE THIS LEGISLATION SIGNED INTO LAW IN THE VERY NEAR FUTURE. WE EXPECT TO FILE THE CONFERENCE REPORT ON THE 1984 SOCIAL SECURITY DISABILITY AMENDMENTS TONIGHT AND HOPE TO HAVE IT APPROVED BY BOTH HOUSES AND TO THE PRESIDENT'S DESK BY NEXT WEEK.