

News from Senator

BOB DOLE



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ACTION BEGINS ON DOLE LEGISLATION TO STRENGTHEN EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE DISABLED

Washington, DC -- A subcommittee of the Senate Finance Committee held a hearing on legislation by Sen. Bob Dole (R-KS) to make permanent the removal of disincentives in the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program for disabled recipients who work.

At the hearing, Sen. Dole told of the need for his legislation - S.2209, commonly called "The Employment Opportunities for Disabled Americans Act" - and urged speedy congressional approval.

"Persons with disabilities want to work and participate meaningfully in their society," said Sen. Dole. "My legislation provides them a chance to reach their goals without jeopardizing their economic or medical security."

The legislation would allow SSI recipients to continue receiving cash payments up to the income "breakeven point", which currently amounts to \$757 monthly plus whatever state supplementary payments may be paid. In addition, Medicaid coverage would be extended regardless of employment income.

Sen. Dole read a letter from one handicapped individual to underscore the need for legislation. "'I do not like feeling like a moocher," Sen. Dole read, "'I know that the world does not owe me anything because of my disability. I want to make my own way as much as possible...How wonderful it would be to be able to work as much as my strength would allow.'

"The recent Lou Harris survey of one thousand disabled Americans reveals some significant but shocking data," Sen. Dole testified. "Two-thirds of all disabled Americans, between age 16 and 64, are not working. Only one in four disabled adults work full-time. And working disabled persons are more satisfied with life and have better self-perceptions, than those who don't work.

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"There are, of course, many reasons why persons with disabilities face difficulty in entering and succeeding in the competitive workplace. Legislation alone will not provide the outline for the long-term economic survival and happiness of handicapped persons throughout this country.

"Disabled persons are similarly disenfranchised due to a lack of appropriate training, inadequacies of public transportation, and the fears and attitudes of employers who fail to recognize the productive potential of handicapped applicants.

"In 1980, we took a major step in addressing the important issue of the disincentive factor connected with SSI by enacting the so-called Section 1619 Program at the Social Security Administration. But disabled persons, their parents and their guardians, have often been reluctant to consider work under Section 1619 because they knew it was temporary.

"Clearly, Section 1619 has had its positive effects. By making this program permanent, and by initiating several improvements in the program, more individuals will be able to benefit from this legislation as a stepping stone to competitive employment," said Sen. Dole.

The cost-effectiveness of the Dole bill is estimated to save the federal government up to \$4,000 annually for every handicapped persons who works. More than 8,500 of the nation's 2.6 million disabled SSI recipients now participate in the temporary version of the legislation, which is due to expire in 1987.

Also testifying before the Senate finance subcommittee were Dorcas Hardy, commissioner of the Social Security Administration, and U.S. Rep. Joe Bartlett (R-TX), sponsor of a similar bill pending in the House.