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NEWS

U.S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

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## FULFILLING AMERICA'S PROMISE: TECHNOLOGY AND THE DISABLED

IN ANNUAL DISABILITY POLICY ADDRESS,  
DOLE HAILS ADVANCES IN TECHNOLOGIES FOR DISABLED;  
NEW STRIDES ONLY A BEGINNING -- AMERICA NEEDS TO DO MORE

Sunday, April 14, was a special anniversary for me. It was on that date during World War II I was wounded and joined the ranks of America's disability community.

We are a large, diverse community, from all walks of life, of every race and creed, and with the same hopes and dreams as other Americans.

Since joining the Senate, it has been my custom to remember this anniversary each year by speaking about an issue important to Americans with disabilities.

So today I will discuss a revolution in technology for the disabled -- a quiet but extraordinary revolution that is bringing us closer to our national goals of independence and full participation.

### New Technologies for the Disabled

Today's technologies for the disabled are yesterday's science fiction pipedreams.

For my friend Kyle Hulet in Hutchinson, Kansas, technology provides a new world of independence. Kyle has only limited use of his hands, and has had to depend on others for the simplest things -- even turning the lights on in his room.

But with a new environmental control unit strapped to his wheelchair, which operates much like a TV remote control, Kyle can run 16 appliances, including lights, tv, and stereo.

Jenni Koebel of Topeka, who cannot speak and has limited use of her hands, taps out words on the keyboard of a communication device -- that then speaks with a voice synthesizer. Sure, the voice is a little mechanical, but Jenni's intelligence and charm shine through.

When Jenni visited me sometime back, she was a high school student. Today, she is enrolled in my alma mater, Washburn University. Technology has helped make this possible.

Even the venerable wheelchair has gone high tech. For too long wheelchair users have been described as "wheelchair bound" or "confined to a wheelchair." This stereotype unfortunately contained some truth -- wheelchairs were heavy and awkward.

That is, until innovators like Marilyn Hamilton came along. Marilyn, who became a wheelchair user following a hang-gliding accident in 1978, asked why chairs couldn't be light, compact, fast -- and good looking.

And when no one could give her a good answer, she went out and built a chair that was all these things. And then helped set up a company, Quickie Designs, to build those chairs for others.

And for the amputee, artificial legs made of new plastics can now mimic the spring and bounce of the natural footstep.

Perhaps the toughest test for these artificial limbs is sports. And the toughest sports events for disabled athletes can be found at the Paralympic games.

For example, in 1992, Tony Volpentest of Edmonds, Washington, ran the 100 meter dash in 11.63 seconds, just 1.83 seconds off Carl Lewis's Olympic record. Tony was born without hands or feet, and uses two high tech artificial legs.

The 1996 Paralympics will be held later this year in Atlanta, following the Olympics. Over 120 countries will be represented -- and with talent like Tony's, we are talking real competition among world class athletes.

In the future, we can expect even more astounding devices -- such as systems that will allow blind people to freely navigate city

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streets using signals beamed from Global Positioning Satellites overhead. And sophisticated voice recognition systems that will automatically closed caption videophones of the future.

The bottom line here is simple. For people with every kind of disability -- whether sensory, cognitive, motor, or communication -- technology can provide tools to speak, hear, see, learn, write, be mobile, work, and play -- in short, to live as fully and independently as possible. Technology increasingly allows people with disabilities to make the same choices about their lives -- good and bad -- that other Americans often take for granted.

#### The Information Superhighway

Mr. President, one can hardly open a newspaper or turn on the TV these days without hearing about the Internet -- the worldwide hook up of thousands of computers. For the price of a local phone call, an individual can retrieve information from almost anywhere on the planet.

But for Holly Haines, the Internet is about a job. Holly lives in rural Pennsylvania. The nearest traffic light is eight miles away -- a lot like western Kansas where I grew up. Because of muscular dystrophy, Holly rarely leaves home.

Several years ago Holly called my office, asking for some help in getting access to the Internet through a local university. She had a job offer at a national database company, but to call the company's computer directly every day would have meant huge, unaffordable long-distance phone bills.

Well, Holly got on the Internet and went to work. And about a year ago the Microsoft Network called to offer her a job as supervisor of "Chat World."

Every day hundreds of network subscribers talk on-line in the virtual town square of Chat World. Life in the virtual world can get pretty wild, and Holly is Chat World's Mayor and Miss Manners rolled into one. She oversees a staff of 75 people.

By the way, Microsoft never had a clue that Holly was disabled when they hired her. And here's the important lesson. For Holly, and for millions of Americans with disabilities, the Internet is both a great equalizer and a great opportunity.

#### Fulfilling the Promise of Technology

Mr. President, the news is not all good. Thousands of Americans with disabilities cannot afford these technologies, some of which cost thousands of dollars. In my home state of Kansas, the Legislature has recognized this problem and recently authorized an annual appropriation of \$100,000 to help pay for technology.

And in the Balanced Budget Act, I sponsored a provision with Senator Conrad to allow Medicare beneficiaries to use their own funds to pay for more sophisticated technologies, by supplementing Medicare's payment for a standard item.

But we need to do much, much more.

The second big issue is that we must be careful that new technologies -- whether personal computers, the Internet, or whatever -- are designed to be accessible to the disabled from the start. We have learned the hard way how expensive it can be to retrofit buildings and streets. We don't need to learn that lesson twice.

In this regard, the new Telecommunications Act has several provisions designed to encourage companies that manufacture telecommunications equipment or provide services to make their products accessible to the disabled. Another provision in the Act also provides for more closed captioning of TV and video programs.

#### Americans with Disabilities Act

In closing, I would like to say a few words about the Americans with Disabilities Act. ADA was passed six years ago. Some people claim that I have backed off my support for ADA. That's simply not true. But I believe, and have always believed, that ADA can work, must work, for everyone -- people with disabilities, government, and business. I am trying hard to see that happens.

The poet Archibald MacLeish once wrote, "America was always promises." The technology revolution, together with important laws like ADA, are helping people with disabilities realize America's promises.