



NEWS from
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STATEMENT OF SENATOR BOB DOLE

WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON HANDICAPPED INDIVIDUALS

Today is a noteworthy day in the lives of millions of Americans, for it marks the opening of the first White House Conference on handicapped individuals. Years of planning have gone into this Conference, which is being held to focus attention on special concerns of handicapped persons, and to discuss how this group---as consumers and members of society---can work most effectively to find solutions to their problems. I know that countless dreams and aspirations are riding on the expected results of the conference.

This week, at the Sheraton Park Hotel, some 2,700 persons are assembling to participate in the White House Conference as delegates or observers. It will be an impressive assembly of persons, and the group will be quite knowledgeable on the topics to be discussed. Fifty (50%) of the delegates are handicapped consumers; 25% are professionals working with the handicapped. In addition, persons from all parts of the world are coming to observe the programs and activities scheduled during the week.

This conference is unprecedented in terms of scope and magnitude. I think we Congressmen have a responsibility to attend the conference activities, to study in detail the final report to Congress, and to work towards implementing the recommendations which are made. Senators and Representatives are invited to attend any of the workshops and programs, and there will also be opportunities to caucus with state delegations.

Handicapped individuals have a right to an education, to jobs, to housing, to entertainment, etc. However, despite the progress which has occurred, there are still problems in the area of equal opportunity and accessibility. This consumer group is fast becoming our "next" minority, and I expect they will let us know if the situation doesn't continue to improve.

Perhaps once it was acceptable to have a paternalistic attitude towards our 30 million handicapped citizens. Today, such an attitude is obsolete and unacceptable. As the title of the conference states, handicapped persons are individuals. There is no justification for treating them as one body with identical needs. Rather, their individuality should be recognized and their achievements encouraged.

This is the reason behind the White House Conference on handicapped individuals. I hope that my colleagues will give it their full support.