

News from Senator

BOB DOLE



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SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE TO TACKLE DIFFICULT REFORMS IN 97TH CONGRESS

WASHINGTON -- Senator Bob Dole (R.-Kansas), incoming chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, made the following statement at today's first meeting of the committee in the 97th Congress:

"This month, Americans begin a new course, along lines already broadly chartered by her President-elect and demanded by her people. The Senate of the United States renews and refreshes its own mandate to lead. Each one of us is present at the creation of a new administration and more-- a new attitude toward government itself, its possibilities and its limitations. An idea is struggling to be born, and to us falls the privilege and the challenge of shaping and nurturing it to fruition. Millions of Americans look to us to give life to their expression of popular will, to appeal to the best in their nation, and to write responsibly into law a new freedom and a reiteration of incentive as the key to economic prosperity and social justice for all.

"Many of us find ourselves in a new and unaccustomed position. We have become the majority, entrusted with legislating. It is a change for those of us who have been in this city as long as I have, and who at times over the last 20 years nearly accepted the likelihood of permanent minority status. Now, we have been given a mandate for change - and history, not to mention the voters, will judge us harshly if we behave with timidity or shirk in any way from the test before us. That does not mean we will behave irrationally. We will reform, not raze.

"As chairman of the Finance Committee, I expect to stand at the forefront of those who seek to redress the relationship between government and an economy it has unfortunately come to dominate in recent years. For 165 years the Finance Committee has overseen the domestic economy and standard of living. Three Presidents - and several would-be presidents, have occupied the chairman's seat. To serve in that position is to join the company of distinguished ghosts. 150 years ago, the committee first gained and then lost control of the entire appropriation process. In our own century, it has surrendered jurisdiction over banking and currency and veterans' benefits to other committees formed expressly for these functions. Even so, Finance continues to hold a powerful hand in the policy deck. Legislation under its jurisdiction in 1981 includes all federal tax and tariffs, social security and public assistance programs, unemployment insurance, medicare and medicaid, general revenue sharing and - regrettably - a national debt fast approaching a trillion dollars.

"All told, these areas account for nearly half the entire federal budget and in the months ahead, Finance will find itself dealing with reform proposals ranging from welfare changes to capital gains. There will always be room for compromising over details - but no room at all for retreat from basic principles. In 1981 we must be willing to stand up and cast the difficult vote that will insure a viable social security system for future generations of recipients. We must fashion a package of tax reductions that will stimulate productivity, attack inflation at its roots, and create badly needed jobs in the suffering corners of America. We must restore our traditional cutting edge of the world market place and begin the process of long-term recovery for the auto and other recession-hit industries. Finally, we must find ways to eliminate waste from the federal budget without abandoning our historic commitment to individuals truly in need.

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"This is an ambitious agenda. But then, none of us were elected to ruminate about change or ponder progress. We were sent here to make them happen. America has problems in 1981, serious ones. But she has potential that more than matches any or all of them. Insofar, as the Finance Committee can help to realize that potential, I am determined that we will do so. In the tradition of chairmen from Henry Clay to Harry Byrd, Sr., to Russell Long. It is an activist legacy that Finance inherits, most recently from my distinguished colleague, the senior Senator from Louisiana, who for 14 years has been virtually synonymous with the committee and its work. I often think that headline makers in this and other cities' newsrooms have a stamp that they use periodically, reading, 'Russell Long, powerful Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, said today...'

"Senator Long's power derived, not from his position with the majority, nor even from his mastery of the legislative process alone - although no one among us has a greater mastery. Over the years he has used his knowledge and his power to shepherd numerous pieces of important legislation through this committee and the Senate itself: major tax bills in 1969, 1971, 1975, 1976, and 1978, trade legislation, social security solvency, and revenue sharing - the legacy of the long years is an impressive one. This list is the product of a capacious mind, an instinct for compromise, a home-spun humor that casts our work in perspective, and an appealing alliance of fiscal hardheadedness and social compassion. His power derives from his absolute command of the field of financing, and his absolute professionalism in leading others less versed than he.

"To fill such shoes is yet another challenge - a personal one, a political one. But each of us will confront many such challenged in 1981 and how we meet them will, to use Lincoln's phrase, 'Light us down, in honor or dishonor, to the latest generation.'

"I know my colleagues. I respect you for your ability, your ideas, and your commitment. I know that none of us has a monopoly on wisdom, and I know that all of us have been asked by the American people to put aside politics as usual in this time of economic peril. We will cut taxes in 1981. We will put incentive back into the domestic economy. We will tackle the tough problems of social security and chronically sick industries. We will begin the process of making free enterprise truly free again. Most of all, knowing each of us in this room, I have no doubt that we will meet the challenge of leadership. Our consciences as well as our constituents will accept nothing less."

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