

Bob Dole



NEWS

U. S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER

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CONTACT: WALT RIKER
(202) 224-5358

DOLE INTRODUCES LEGISLATION TO EXAMINE DISCRIMINATION
AGAINST PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES WORLDWIDE

WASHINGTON - Today I am introducing the Disability Rights in American Foreign Policy Act of 1993. It is a short bill, and requires just one thing: that the Secretary of State include an examination of discrimination against people with disabilities in the annual report on human rights mandated by the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961.

I am pleased that this bill comes before the Senate with strong bipartisan support. Senators Harkin, Helms, McCain, Leahy, Simon, D'Amato, Durenberger, Kennedy, Inouye, Lugar, Mitchell, Jeffords, Hatfield, Kassebaum, Moynihan, and Hatch join me as co-sponsors of this measure.

Neither the length nor simplicity of this bill should obscure its promise or power, which is to introduce for the first time an explicit recognition of the rights of people with disabilities in American foreign policy. Our nation was founded on the concept of human rights. Recently, we celebrated the two hundred and seventeenth anniversary of American independence. As children, we all learned the immortal words which begin the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

These sentiments were later echoed in the Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations in 1948, the first international accord on human rights in world history: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." Just last month, the world's commitment to the proposition of universal human rights was reaffirmed in Vienna, at the first World Conference on Human Rights in twenty-five years.

On July 26, 1993, we will commemorate the third anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. As members of this chamber know well, ADA heralded a new approach to disability in our nation. Although for over 70 years we have enacted federal disability programs and limited legal protections, we had never before made either a clear or comprehensive national mandate for the elimination of discrimination.

But ADA has done more than prohibit discrimination, as important as that is. With the passage of ADA, we determined our national policy on disability would be based on the positive values of equality of opportunity and inclusion.

It is past time we included these principles in our human rights policy. This bill will do that, and send a message around that world that America respects the rights of all people, including those with disabilities.

Indeed, America's greatest export has been its concept of human rights. Let us continue that tradition with this bill. I sincerely hope this measure will not only encourage people with disabilities all over the world, but prompt other governments and non-governmental organizations interested in human rights to take close interest in the circumstances of people with disabilities.

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- 2 -

I am mindful that there will be objections to even this modest measure. For example, some may say the situation of people in developing nations is so difficult that attention to the disabled is an unaffordable luxury. I do not agree. In my maiden speech before this body almost 25 years ago, I insisted that Americans with disabilities must be recognized as full, contributing partners in the building of this nation. But today I realize how parochial these words were. People with disabilities, of whatever region or nation, must be recognized as full, contributing partners in the building of the world.

According to the United Nations, of the 500 million people worldwide with disabilities, 80 percent live in developing nations. The rights of these individuals cannot wait until it is convenient to recognize them. Moreover, this year's World Bank report on development finds that disability is a serious impediment to economic growth in developing countries.

And let me note further, Mr. President, with anger and sadness, that the manufacture of disability is one of the great industries of the world. Today, millions of people become disabled from war and civil strife, in Bosnia and Hercegovina, in Somalia, and in too many other places in the world. This bill is preparation and hope for peace.

Mr. President, others may argue that we are advocating special rights for people with disabilities. Again, I disagree. We ask merely that they not be denied opportunities accorded others.

In closing, Mr. President, let me note that this bill is only a beginning, and there is much more to be done. Two years ago I joined with Senators Simon, Harkin, and Helms in proposing amendments to a reauthorization of the Foreign Assistance Act that would provide for the first time a specific mandate for aid to people with disabilities. As I said at that time, "It is our duty to provide assistance to other nations as they struggle to design medical and rehabilitation services for their citizens with disabilities." That legislation never made it into law, but I intend to take up this matter again at an appropriate time.

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