

Bob Dole



NEWS

U.S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

SENATE MAJORITY LEADER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Thursday, July 27, 1995

Contact: Clarkson Hine
(202) 224-5358

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY ACT OF 1995

Earlier this year, I promised to introduce legislation to get the federal government out of the business of dividing Americans, and into the business of uniting Americans.

Today, I am fulfilling this commitment.

The Equal Opportunity Act of 1995, which I introduce today, stands for a simple proposition: the federal government should not discriminate against, nor should it grant preferences to, any individual because of that individual's race, color, ethnic background, or sex.

Protecting the Rights of Individuals

Whether it's employment, or contracting, or any other federally conducted program, our government in Washington should work to bring its citizens together, not divide us. Our focus should be protecting the rights of individuals, not the rights of groups through the use of quotas, set-asides, numerical objectives, and other preferences.

Let me be frank. While I have questioned and opposed group preferences in the past, I have also supported them. That's my record and I am not hiding from it.

But many of us who supported these policies never imagined that preferences would become a seemingly permanent fixture in our society. They were designed to be temporary remedies, targeted at specific problems suffered by specific individuals.

Unfortunately, during the past twenty-five years, we have seen the policies of preference grow, and grow, and grow some more...pitting individual against individual, group against group, American against American.

For too many of our citizens, our country is no longer the land of opportunity--but a pie chart, where jobs and other benefits are often awarded not because of hard work or merit, but because of someone's biology.

We have lost sight of the simple truth that you don't cure discrimination with more discrimination.

I fully expect that the professional civil rights establishment in Washington will be out in force denouncing this initiative, defending the status quo, and claiming that we are somehow "turning back the clock" and unravelling decades of civil-rights "progress."

And no doubt about it, great progress has been made in the four decades since the civil rights revolution began with the landmark Brown versus Board of Education decision.

Countless young men and women of all races attend and graduate from our finest universities. Thousands of African-Americans have been elected to public office--in Congress, in state legislatures, as mayors of our nation's largest cities, as Governor of Virginia. And Colin Powell has inspired us all, rising from the ranks of the R.O.T.C. to become our nation's top military official, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Educational Opportunity

But for the millions of Americans who each day evade the bullets, send their kids to substandard schools, and wade through the dangerous shoals of our nation's underclass...progress seems to be nothing more than a mirage. A mirage that fades away, leaving the stark realities of life behind.

And what are those realities?

The reality is that the National Assessment of Educational Progress has released its findings on the reading ability of America's graduating high school seniors for 1994. According to the study, only 12 percent of black high school graduates are "proficient" in reading. Fully 54 percent have "below basic" reading skills, which means they are condemned to fifty more years of life on the bottom rung of the economic ladder.

These children don't need preferences. They need schools that work.

(more)

Fighting Crime

The reality is that the United States Justice Department estimates that one out of every twenty-one black men in America today can be expected to be murdered, a death rate double that of U.S. soldiers during World War II.

Last week, 12 year-old Quinton Carter of Queens Village, New York, was shot dead in a dispute over 25 cents with a 16-year old. The viciousness of this senseless act is no longer shocking to us because children killing other children in arguments over sneakers or other items of clothing have become all too commonplace.

These young men and women--the victims of violence--don't need preferences. They need more police...More protection from the scourge of crime...And laws that keep violent criminals behind bars.

Restoring the Family

And, the reality is that millions of children today are born into homes without fathers. In some neighborhoods, the out-of-wedlock birthrate has climbed to a staggering 80 percent. And study after study has concluded that children of single parents are far more likely than those in two-parent homes to fail in school, or to be a victim or perpetrator of crime.

Again, these children don't need preferences. They don't need a set-aside. They need homes...And families and communities that care.

It is time to stop making government policy by race because making government policy by race is a diversion from reality...An easy excuse to ignore the problems that affect all Americans, whatever their race or heritage may be.

We must begin by ending the ridiculous pretense of quota tokenism--special contracts, a set-aside there, a couple of TV stations, a seat or two in the cabinet. This is a band-aid. A diversion. A corruption of the principles of individual liberty and equal opportunity upon which our country was founded.

Starting Point in National Conversation on America's Future

This legislation may not be perfect. And it certainly will not solve all our problems. But it is a starting point--a starting point in a national conversation, not just on the future of affirmative action, but on the future of America.

Twelve years ago it was my privilege to serve as floor manager for the legislation marking Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday as a federal holiday.

And in leading off the final debate on that bill, I said these words: "A nation defines itself in many ways; in the promises it makes and the programs it enacts; the dreams it enshrines or the doors it slams shut." End of quote.

A nation also defines itself by how it treats its citizens. Does it divide them by focusing on the policies of the past? Or does it unite them by focusing on the realities of the present?

The choice is ours.

###