

Bob Dole



NEWS

U.S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

SENATE MAJORITY LEADER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Friday, August 11, 1995

Contact: Clarkson Hine
(202) 224-5358

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

DOLE WELCOMES DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP COUNCIL CONTRIBUTION TO DEBATE OVER GROUP PREFERENCES

All too often in our political discourse, we concentrate on the differences separating the two parties, rather than emphasizing those areas on which there is agreement or at least the potential for agreement.

Last week, the Democratic Leadership Council--through its think tank, the Progressive Policy Institute--issued an important paper outlining its views on affirmative action. Although I don't agree with every point made in this paper, it does suggest that there is ample room for Republicans and open-minded Democrats to forge a new consensus on the meaning of equal opportunity.

I have three observations about the D.L.C. paper that I would like to share now with my Senate colleagues.

Similarity to Principle Underlying Equal Opportunity Act

One. The paper calls for the "phase-out" of mandatory preferences in contract set-asides, public jobs, and hiring by private firms that do business with the government on the grounds that these preferences "put government in the business of institutionalizing racial distinctions." The D.L.C. says that these distinctions are "hardly a good idea for a democracy held together by common civic ideals that transcend group identity."

This position is very similar, if not identical, to the principle underlying the Equal Opportunity Act of 1995, which I introduced late last month with Congressman Charles Canady of Florida and more than 80 other Congressional Republicans. The Equal Opportunity Act would prohibit the federal government from granting preferences to anyone on the basis of race or gender in three key areas: federal employment, federal contracting, and federally-conducted programs.

The D.L.C. apparently supports this proposition, but wants a gradual phase-in of any ban on group preferences, not their immediate elimination.

In other words, our difference is one of timing, not one of principle.

It's my hope, however, that the D.L.C. will come to understand that if discrimination is wrong, it is wrong today as well as tomorrow...and ought to be ended immediately.

In fact, the D.L.C. goes much further than the Equal Opportunity Act by calling for the outright repeal of "Lyndon Johnson's 1965 Executive Order requiring federal contractors to adopt minority hiring goals and timetables." In its paper, the D.L.C. argues that these guidelines "encourage employers to hire women and minorities on a rigidly proportional basis," a statement that is directly at odds with President Clinton's own affirmative action review.

In my view, it is appropriate for the federal government to require federal contractors not to discriminate in employment. That was the original purpose of Executive Order 11246. Unfortunately, bureaucratic implementation of the executive order has converted it from a program aimed at eliminating discrimination to one that relies on it in the form of preferences. Our first priority should be to restore the original meaning and purpose of the executive order, not to repeal it, as the D.L.C. has suggested.

New Civil Rights Agenda

Two. The D.L.C. argues that we need to replace government preferences for groups with new public policies that "empower" individuals to get ahead regardless of race, gender, or ethnicity. The D.L.C. argues that an empowerment agenda is critical to "striking a new bargain on racial equality and opportunity."

(more)