

CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA
APRIL 5, 1980

CONGRATULATIONS - AND A CHALLENGE

THIS IS A SPECIAL EVENING FOR ME, AS I KNOW IT IS FOR EACH ONE OF YOU. IT IS A TIME TO SALUTE YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS, TO SAVOR THE SELF-DISCOVERY THAT COMES WITH ATHLETIC COMPETITION, AND TO DEMONSTRATE TO ANYONE WHO CAN STILL DOUBT THAT AMERICA'S HANDICAPPED HAVE ARRIVED.

TONIGHT, WE SAY TO EVERY AMERICAN THAT SYMPATHY IS NO LONGER GOOD ENOUGH. THE TIME HAS COME TO JUDGE PEOPLE ON THEIR ABILITIES - NOT THEIR DISABILITIES. WE PREFER INDEPENDENCE TO DEPENDENCE, OPPORTUNITY TO PATERNALISM.

THE SPONSORS OF THIS EVENING, AND OF THIS TOURNAMENT, KNOW THAT THE DRIVE AND SKILL DISPLAYED ON THE BASKETBALL COURT IS BUT ONE SMALL INDICATION OF THE UNTAPPED RESOURCES OF THIRTY-FIVE MILLION HANDICAPPED PEOPLE IN THIS COUNTRY. WE TALK ABOUT AN ENERGY SHORTAGE - AND IT IS REAL - BUT WHAT ABOUT THE BRAINS SHORTAGE, THE TALENT SHORTAGE, THE AMBITION SHORTAGE? IF WE ARE TO REMAIN THE WORLD'S GREATEST NATION, CAN WE AFFORD FOR A MINUTE TO SACRIFICE ANY OF THE CONVICTIONS AND ABILITY THAT ENERGIZE THIS ROOM TONIGHT?

OF COURSE WE CAN'T. WE CAN'T BE SATISFIED, EITHER, WITH THE STATE OF THE HANDICAPPED IN AMERICA. FOR PROBLEMS REMAIN. EVEN COMPASSION, WELCOME AS IT MAY BE, IS A POOR SUBSTITUTE FOR A PAYCHECK OR PERSONAL INDEPENDENCE. AND NONE OF US CAN REST UNTIL THE DAY WHEN ALL BARRIERS, PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL AND ECONOMIC, ARE REMOVED FROM THE PATHS TO PERSONAL HAPPINESS FOR THE DISABLED MAN OR WOMAN IN THIS COUNTRY DEDICATED TO THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS.

FOR ME, ONE WAY TO CONTRIBUTE TO HASTENING THAT DAY IS TO USE MY POSITION IN THE UNITED STATES SENATE, WHERE THE HANDICAPPED HAVE HISTORICALLY SPOKEN WITH A FRAGMENTED VOICE, TO BRING YOUR CAUSE BEFORE THE NATION'S LAWMAKERS. IT IS A LONGSTANDING BATTLE, BY NO MEANS OVER. BUT WE'VE BEEN MAKING PROGRESS.

DESIGNING A FAIR SOCIETY

I NEEDN'T REMIND YOU THAT THE DISABLED FACE MANY PROBLEMS IN TODAY'S SOCIETY. ONE OF THE MOST FRUSTRATING - AND CERTAINLY ONE OF THE MOST NEEDLESS - IS THAT WHICH COMES ABOUT BECAUSE OF INACCESSIBLE DESIGN. IN THIS DAY AND AGE THERE IS NO REASON UNDER THE SUN WHY BUILDINGS CANNOT BE DESIGNED TO ACCOMODATE THE MOBILITY LIMITATIONS OF THE HANDICAPPED.

BUT THINGS AS THEY SHOULD BE AND THINGS AS THEY ARE ARE OFTEN DIAMETRICALLY OPPOSED.

FOUR YEARS AGO, I INTRODUCED A BILL WHICH ALLOWED FOR A TAX DEDUCTION OF UP TO \$25,000 TO GIVE AN ECONOMIC INCENTIVE TO PRIVATE BUILDERS AND BUILDING MANAGERS TO REMOVE ARCHITECTURAL BARRIERS TO THE HANDICAPPED.

A. Harris
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THE IDEA WAS A GOOD ONE, BUT UNDER TERMS OF THE BILL PASSED IN 1976, IT COULD NOT SOLVE THE ENTIRE PROBLEM. FOR ONE THING, THE PROGRAM WAS A TEMPORARY ONE, DUE TO EXPIRE IN 1979. FOR ANOTHER, IT ADDRESSED ARCHITECTURAL BARRIERS ONLY - NOT PROBLEMS OF TRANSPORTATION WHICH REALLY GO HAND IN HAND WITH ACCESS.

IN THE THREE YEARS SINCE THE ORIGINAL BILL WAS PASSED, AMERICA HAS TAKEN MORE NOTICE THAN EVER BEFORE OF THE PROBLEMS - AND THE POTENTIAL - OF HER HANDICAPPED CITIZENS. NONE OF THIS CAME ABOUT BECAUSE YOU RELAXED OR SAT BACK AND WAITED TO HAVE YOUR DAY IN THE COURT OF PUBLIC OPINION.

BUT GREATER PUBLIC SENSITIVITY IS WORTH LITTLE, UNLESS IT TRANSLATES INTO LEGISLATION PROTECTING HANDICAPPED RIGHTS. SO MUCH REMAINS UNDONE, EVEN AS WE MEET TONIGHT. THERE ARE STILL HANDICAPPED AMERICANS WHOSE LIVES NEVER KNOW HOPE, WHO FEEL THEMSELVES UNJUSTLY CONDEMNED TO THE TREADMILL OF ECONOMIC DEPENDENCE.

BUT AT LEAST THE ACCESS PROBLEMS ARE BEGINNING TO BE MET. A YEAR AGO, I INTRODUCED A NEW VERSION OF THE ARCHITECTURAL BARRIER BILL, THIS TIME BROADENED TO INCLUDE ACCESS TO TRANSPORTATION AS WELL AS BUILDINGS. HOW CAN YOU HOPE TO GET A JOB IF YOU CAN'T GET THROUGH THE DOOR TO HAVE AN INTERVIEW? HOW CAN YOU PICK UP A PAYCHECK IF YOU CAN'T GAIN ACCESS TO A BUS OR SUBWAY TO TAKE YOU DOWNTOWN?

I'M PROUD THAT THE UNITED STATES SENATE WENT ALONG WITH MY PROPOSAL, AND THAT THE TAX INCENTIVES WE TEMPORARILY PASSED IN 1976 ARE NOW EXTENDED THROUGH 1982. I'D LIKE TO SEE THE \$25,000 LIMIT DOUBLED - GOD KNOWS PRICES HAVE DOUBLED - BUT AT LEAST WE'VE MADE A START.

SSI AND DISABLED RIGHTS

NOW THERE IS ANOTHER FIELD IN WHICH OUR WORK HAS JUST BEGUN. WE HAVE TORN DOWN PHYSICAL BARRIERS IN PUBLIC BUILDINGS - BUT WE HAVE YET TO ELIMINATE BUREAUCRATIC BARRIERS IN PUBLIC PROGRAMS. LET ME GIVE YOU AN EXAMPLE.

THE SSI PROGRAM WAS ORIGINALLY CONSTRUCTED ON THE PREMISE THAT HANDICAPPED PERSONS DO NOT - INDEED, CANNOT - WORK. IT ASSUMED ALMOST AUTOMATICALLY THAT THE DISABLED MAN OR WOMAN WAS BOUND FOR A LIFETIME OF CONFINEMENT - A PATERNALISTIC ATTITUDE THAT MAY HAVE MADE SOME DEGREE OF SENSE FORTY YEARS AGO, BUT WHICH IS TOTALLY UNACCEPTABLE TODAY.

THE FACT IS, AND THIS VERY GATHERING PROVES IT BETTER THAN ANY WORDS OF MINE, THAT THE HANDICAPPED ARE CAPABLE OF FAR MORE THAN SOCIETY HAS TRADITIONALLY ACCORDED THEM. ON THE BASKETBALL COURT, AND IN THE JOB ARENA, AMERICA'S DISABLED ARE ENTITLED TO EVERY CHANCE TO PROVE THEMSELVES, TO BE ALL THAT THEY CAN BE.

WITH THIS IN MIND, I'VE TRIED TO DESIGN MODIFICATIONS TO THE ORIGINAL SSI PROGRAM THAT ENCOURAGES THOSE HANDICAPPED PEOPLE WHO WISH TO WORK TO DO SO. FOR INSTANCE, I WOULD ALLOW A PERSON WHO WAS ONCE DISABLED AND RECEIVING SSI TO RECEIVE IT AGAIN, EVEN IF HE FINDS WORK IN BETWEEN. AS THE SYSTEM STANDS NOW, MANY PEOPLE ARE DETERRED FROM SEEKING EMPLOYMENT BECAUSE OF DELAYS IN REGAINING SSI BENEFITS IF THEY ULTIMATELY FIND THEM NECESSARY.

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IN ADDITION, FROM LONG STANDING EXPERIENCE WITH SHELTERED WORKSHOPS, I'VE CONCLUDED THAT WORK DONE IN SUCH PLACES SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS EARNED, RATHER THAN UNEARNED, INCOME. I WOULD ALSO ALLOW PERSONS SUFFERING FROM A MEDICAL DISABILITY TO CONTINUE RECEIVING CASH PAYMENTS EVEN AFTER THEIR EARNINGS REACH A LEVEL OF SUBSTANTIAL GAINFUL ACTIVITY. IT IS UNFAIR AND UNREASONABLE TO EXPECT THAT A DISABLED PERSON CAN JUMP IMMEDIATELY FROM PUBLIC ASSISTANCE INTO A JOB WHICH CAN THEN COVER ALL MEDICAL AND DISABILITY-RELATED EXPENSES - AND STILL MAKE UP FOR LOST SSI BENEFITS.

I'D ALSO CONTINUE MEDICAID BENEFITS TO HANDICAPPED PERSONS WHO MEET OR EQUAL THE MEDICAL LISTINGS, AND WHOSE EARNINGS SURPASS THE BREAK-EVEN POINT. WE SHOULD BE CONCERNED WITH GETTING THE DISABLED INTO JOBS, NOT ENFORCING A SET OF BUREAUCRATIC RULES THAT TEND TO DISCRIMINATE AGAINST THAT GREAT OBJECTIVE.

FOR YEARS, THE HANDICAPPED HAVE SUFFERED FROM WORK DISINCENTIVES. NOW THE TIME HAS COME TO BEND THE RULES THE OTHER WAY ... TO PROVIDE INCENTIVES TO WORK, AND INDEPENDENCE TO MEN AND WOMEN WHO MIGHT OTHERWISE NEVER EXPERIENCE THE ADVENTURE OF SELF-REALIZATION.

TWO OTHER INITIATIVES

TWO OTHER BILLS AWAIT PASSAGE, AND BOTH ARE DESERVING OF THE SERIOUS CONSIDERATION OF EVERY AMERICAN. ONE IS SENATE BILL 446, WHICH WILL AMEND THE 1964 CIVIL RIGHTS ACT TO PROHIBIT JOB DISCRIMINATION AGAINST THE HANDICAPPED.

THE OTHER IS SENATE BILL 10 NOW AWAITING FINAL ACTION BY A HOUSE-SENATE CONFERENCE. WHICH FOR THE FIRST TIME WILL GIVE THE JUSTICE DEPARTMENT SPECIFIC AUTHORITY TO UNDERTAKE LEGAL ACTION TO ENFORCE THE CONSTITUTIONAL AND OTHER FEDERALLY GUARANTEED RIGHTS OF AMERICA'S HANDICAPPED.

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MAKING YOUR VOICE HEARD

HISTORICALLY, ONE OF THE PROBLEMS THAT HAVE AFFLICTED THOSE CAMPAIGNING FOR HANDICAPPED RIGHTS IS THEIR INABILITY TO INFLUENCE POLITICIANS. YOUR VOICE HAS BEEN MUTED, YOUR ORGANIZATIONS FRAGMENTED.

NOW, I'M DELIGHTED TO SAY, ALL THAT IS CHANGED. JUST LAST WEEK, AT A CAPITOL HILL CAUCUS ROOM, WE SAW FORMATION OF THE LEAGUE OF DISABLED VOTERS, A PROMISING DEVELOPMENT FOR ALL OF US WHO KNOW THAT PRIVATE LIVES CAN BE BETTERED THROUGH PUBLIC ACTS.

AND NEXT YEAR HAS BEEN DESIGNATED BY THE UNITED NATIONS AS THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF DISABLED PERSONS, A YEAR TO FOCUS MORE INTENSIVELY THAN EVER BEFORE ON THE UNFINISHED AGENDA BEFORE US. BEFORE 1981 IS OVER, RANK AND FILE AMERICANS WILL KNOW MORE THAN EVER BEFORE ABOUT THE PRESSING NEEDS IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, HOUSING AND PHYSICAL ACCESS. THEY WILL UNDERSTAND MORE PRECISELY THE STRIDES BEING MADE IN REHABILITATION, THE PROMISE OF MAINSTREAMING, THE POTENTIAL THAT TECHNOLOGY AND BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH OFFER FOR A BRIGHTER TOMORROW.

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THEY WILL KNOW THESE THINGS - AND THEY WILL LIFT THEIR VOICES TO MAKE CERTAIN THEY COME TRUE. THAT'S THE WAY THE AMERICAN POEPL~~E~~ ARE. THEY HAVE NEVER NEEDED A GOVERNMENT TO INSTILL IN THEM CONCERN FOR THEIR NEIGHBOR. BUT YOU AND I, WORKING TOGETHER WITH THE U.N., THE LEAGUE OF DISABLED VOTERS AND OTHER SUPPORTIVE GROUPS, MUST KEEP THE ISSUE ON CENTER STAGE.

MAKING THE SYSTEM WORK FOR AMERICA'S HANDICAPPED

IN AN ELECTION YEAR, THERE IS ALWAYS A DEBATE BETWEEN THOSE WHO ASK IF THE SYSTEM CAN BE MADE TO WORK FOR THE BENEFIT OF THOSE WHO LIVE WITHIN IT. I'VE SPENT MY LIFE TRYING TO PROVE THAT IT CAN.

FOR MUCH OF MY LIFE, I'VE KNOWN FIRST-HAND THE PROBLEMS THAT GO WITH BEING A HANDICAPPED AMERICAN. I COUNT AMONG MY PROUDEST MEMORIES THE ASSOCIATIONS I'VE ENJOYED WITH BLIND OR DEAF OR PHYSICALLY OR EMOTIONALLY CRIPPLED PEOPLE OF ALL AGES. FOR THEY HAVE SHOWN ME MORE THAN STRENGTH. THEY HAVE DISPLAYED MORE THAN COURAGE. THEY HAVE SHOWN TO ME, AT LEAST, THE FIBER THAT MADE THIS THE GREATEST COUNTRY ON THE FACE OF THE EARTH.

THIS YEAR, WE ARE ENGAGED IN A GREAT CONTEST, THE OBJECT OF WHICH IS TO DIRECT AMERICA ONCE MORE ALONG THE CLASSIC PATHS THAT SET HER APART FROM OTHER NATIONS, AND AT THE SAME TIME MADE HER LEADER OF ALL THOSE WHO BELIEVE THAT FREEDOM IS BETTER THAN TYRANNY. HERE AT HOME, WE'RE BEGINNING TO BREAK DOWN THE ANCIENT TYRANNY OF NEGLECT, PREJUDICE, OR SIMPLEMINDED IGNORANCE THAT HAS FOR TOO LONG CONDEMNED MILLIONS OF HANDICAPPED PEOPLE TO A LIFE OF SYMPATHY INSTEAD OF OPPORTUNITY.

THE SYSTEM CAN WORK; I KNOW, BECAUSE I'VE SEEN IT WORK IN MY OWN LIFE. I'VE SEEN IT WORK IN YOUR LIVES, BECAUSE EVERY TIME YOU GO OUT ON A BASKETBALL COURT, EVERY TIME YOU RAISE YOUR ARMS IN ATHLETIC COMPETITION, EVERY TIME YOU BRING TEARS OF PRIDE TO YOUR PARENTS AND FRIENDS, YOU TELL THE DOUBTERS THAT THIS IS YOUR AMERICA, TOO. THE ECONOMY SHOULD INCLUDE YOUR ASPIRATIONS. THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS SHOULD RESPOND TO YOUR NEEDS.

THE EARLY PASSAGE OF THE BILLS I'VE DESCRIBED TONIGHT WILL HASTEN THE DAY WHEN OUR COMMITMENT TO THE HANDICAPPED IS AS ENTHUSIASTIC AS YOUR COMMITMENT TO COMPETE. IT WILL MEAN THAT OUR SUPPORT FOR YOUR ECONOMIC AND CAREER GOALS IS WRITTEN IN THE IMPERISHABLE INK OF FEDERAL LAW.

EVERY TIME A CRIPPLED CHILD WALKS OR A BLIND MAN ENTERS A NEW WORLD
THROUGH BRAILE, WE CAN ALL HOLD OUR HEADS A LITTLE HIGHER. BUT NO ONE
CAN BE PROUDER THAN YOU - AND IT IS A PRIVILAGE FOR ME TO BE HERE TO
SAY WELL DONE - KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK.