

**Senator Bob Dole**  
**National Disability Employment Awareness Month Observance**  
**Department of State**  
**October 19, 1999**

LET ME BEGIN MY THANKING [ADD NAMES] FOR THE INVITATION TO JOIN YOU TODAY, AND TO CELEBRATE NATIONAL DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS MONTH.

TODAY I WANT TO TALK ABOUT TWO THINGS. FIRST, I WANT TO TELL YOU WHAT THEME OF THIS MONTH'S OBSERVANCE, "OPENING DOORS TO ABILITY," MEANS TO ME.

I ALSO WANT TO TALK ABOUT THE "COUNTRY REPORTS ON HUMAN RIGHTS," AND WHY RECOGNIZING THE SITUATION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN THESE REPORTS IS SO IMPORTANT.

BOTH PERSONALLY AND PROFESSIONALLY, DISABILITY HAS BEEN VERY IMPORTANT TO ME. THIRTY YEARS AGO, IN 1969, I GAVE MY FIRST SPEECH ON THE SENATE FLOOR AS THE NEWLY ELECTED JUNIOR SENATOR FROM KANSAS.

IT WAS ABOUT AN EXCEPTIONAL GROUP WHICH I JOINED DURING WORLD WAR II. AS I SAID THEN, IT IS A GROUP NO ONE JOINS BY PERSONAL CHOICE, AND IT IS A GROUP THAT NEITHER RESPECTS NOR DISCRIMINATES BY AGE, SEX, WEALTH, EDUCATION, SKIN COLOR, RELIGIOUS BELIEFS, POLITICAL PARTY, POWER, OR PRESTIGE.

IT WAS ALSO A GROUP THAT FOR TOO LONG HAD KNOWN EXCLUSION. MAYBE NOT EXCLUSION FROM THE FRONT OF THE BUS, BUT PERHAPS FROM EVEN CLIMBING ABOARD IT. MAYBE NOT EXCLUSION FROM PURSUING ADVANCED EDUCATION, BUT PERHAPS FROM EXPERIENCING ANY FORMAL EDUCATION. MAYBE NOT EXCLUSION FROM DAY-TO-DAY LIFE ITSELF, BUT PERHAPS FROM AN ADEQUATE OPPORTUNITY TO DEVELOP AND CONTRIBUTE TO HIS OR HER FULLEST CAPACITY.

OF COURSE, I WAS TALKING ABOUT PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES. PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES FACE SIMPLE YET DEEPLY FRUSTRATING BARRIERS IN EVERYDAY LIFE. FOR THE PERSON WHO USES A WHEELCHAIR, STEPS CAN PREVENT ENTERING OR MOVING ABOUT. BUT RAMPS AND LIFTS CAN MAKE IT ACCESSIBLE -- WITH ALL IT MAY OFFER -- WHETHER A JOB, AN EDUCATION, OR REGISTERING TO VOTE.

THAT'S WHAT THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT IS ABOUT.



ACCESSIBILITY AND ACCOMMODATIONS ARE NOT CONVENIENCES FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, BUT ARE ESSENTIAL IF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES ARE TO BE PRODUCTIVE AND ACTIVE CITIZENS.

AGAIN, THESE ARE OFTEN SIMPLE THINGS. FOR A PERSON WITH LIMITED VISION, A REGULAR MENU MAY BE USELESS, WHERE A LARGE PRINT MENU ALLOWS EASY ORDERING.

THE SAME PRINCIPLE APPLIES TO THE WORKPLACE.

ADA IS ALSO ABOUT THE FUTURE, WHERE AFTER ALL, WE ALL SHALL LIVE. AS A PRACTICAL MATTER, DISABILITY IS MORE AND MORE COMMON. MEDICAL SCIENCE INCREASINGLY ALLOWS PEOPLE TO SURVIVE ONCE FATAL ACCIDENTS OR ILLNESSES, BUT WITH LIFELONG DISABILITY.

WE SIMPLY CANNOT AFFORD THE WASTE OF MILLIONS AND MILLIONS OF DISABLED PEOPLE WHO ARE OUT OF WORK. TODAY, WE ARE ALREADY EXPERIENCING LABOR SHORTAGES, WHICH CAN BECOME A BRAKE ON ECONOMIC GROWTH. INDEED, IN ABOUT 15 YEARS, AS THE BABY BOOMERS BEGIN TO RETIRE, THE SITUATION WILL BE MUCH WORSE. IN FACT, GOVERNMENT ECONOMISTS PREDICT A SHARP SLOWDOWN IN ECONOMIC GROWTH AFTER 2010 BECAUSE OF FLAT LABOR GROWTH.

I WISH ADA WAS THE TOTAL SOLUTION TO EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, BUT IT'S NOT. SOME OF BIGGEST BARRIERS ARE ONES WE CANNOT SEE, AND ONES NO LAW CAN REMOVE -- ATTITUDES. TOO OFTEN WE OVERLOOK THE TALENTS AND ABILITIES OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, WHO ARE ALSO OFTEN FRIENDS OR FAMILY, COLLEAGUES OR COWORKERS. THIS IS SOMETHING WE SHOULD ALL THINK ABOUT.

LET ME NOW TURN TO "COUNTRY REPORTS ON HUMAN RIGHTS PRACTICES."

IN MY VIEW, JUST AS THE U.S. TAKES LEADERSHIP IN OTHER ASPECTS OF WORLD AFFAIRS, WE HAVE AN OBLIGATION TO ASSUME LEADERSHIP IN ESTABLISHING THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES WORLDWIDE.

INDEED, AMERICAN LEADERSHIP AFTER WORLD WAR II LEAD TO THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL ACCORDS ON HUMAN RIGHTS, INCLUDING THE UNITED NATIONS CHARTER IN 1945 AND THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN 1948.

ALTHOUGH THESE AGREEMENTS AND OTHERS PROVIDE AN ESSENTIAL



FOUNDATION FOR RESPECT FOR THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, THEY TELL US NOTHING ABOUT THE ACTUAL HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION.

TO REMEDY THIS LACK OF INFORMATION, IN 1993 I INTRODUCED A BILL TO DIRECT THE SECRETARY OF STATE TO EXAMINE DISCRIMINATION AGAINST PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN THE ANNUAL COUNTRY REPORTS ON HUMAN RIGHTS PRACTICES. SINCE 1977, THE COUNTRY REPORTS HAVE OF COURSE BECOME THE AUTHORITATIVE SURVEY OF HUMAN RIGHTS WORLDWIDE, CLOSELY READ BY OTHER GOVERNMENTS AND HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS.

FORTUNATELY, THE SECRETARY OF STATE WAS LISTENING. EVEN BEFORE ANY LEGISLATIVE ACTION, THE COUNTRY REPORTS FOR 1993 INCLUDED FOR THE FIRST TIME A SHORT SECTION ON THE STATUS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN 190 COUNTRIES, FROM AFGHANISTAN TO ZIMBABWE.

SOME REPORTS HAVE BEEN DISTURBING. IN ONE COUNTRY, FOR EXAMPLE, INFANTS BORN WITH BIRTH DEFECTS ARE CONSIDERED SORCERERS, AND SOMETIMES KILLED AT BIRTH. HOWEVER, THE GOVERNMENT OF THAT COUNTRY DOES PUNISH SUCH ACTS UNDER CRIMINAL LAW.

BUT OTHERS ARE MORE ENCOURAGING. EVEN IN SOME LOW-INCOME COUNTRIES, THERE ARE REAL EFFORTS AT ADVOCACY AND OPPORTUNITY.

I ENCOUNTERED SEVERAL OBJECTIONS IN DRAFTING MY BILL. FIRST, SOME WONDERED IF IT WERE EVEN POSSIBLE TO REPORT ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES. THE STATE DEPARTMENT HAS PROVEN IT IS.

OTHERS POINTED OUT THAT ATTITUDES OR TREATMENT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, THEIR EXCLUSION FROM SOCIAL LIFE, IS REALLY OFTEN A MATTER OF CULTURAL PRACTICES, AND NOT A HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE. I DISAGREE, AND HOPE THAT ARGUMENT HAS BEEN DISCREDITED.

IT WAS ALSO IMPLIED THAT ATTENTION TO PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IS A LUXURY FOR LOW-INCOME COUNTRIES. FRANKLY, I BELIEVE THE NEED IS PROBABLY GREATEST IN SUCH COUNTRIES, WHO CAN ILL AFFORD POTENTIALLY PRODUCTIVE MEMBERS OF SOCIETY FORCED INTO IDLENESS.

IN THIS REGARD, I AM REMINDED OF A CONVERSATION A MEMBER OF MY STAFF HAD WITH A TAXICAB DRIVER HERE IN WASHINGTON. THE DRIVER ASKED WHAT THE STAFF MEMBER DID, AND HE EXPLAINED HE WORKED ON



DISABILITY MATTERS. THE DRIVER THEN SAID THAT WHEN HE FIRST ARRIVED IN THE U.S. HE DID NOT UNDERSTAND CURB CUTS AND OTHER ACCOMMODATIONS FOR THE DISABLED, AND THOUGHT THEY WERE ANOTHER FOOLISH WHIM OF AMERICANS. BUT NOW HE FEELS QUITE DIFFERENT. HE WAS FROM SOMALIA, AND AS A RESULT OF THEIR CIVIL WAR THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE HAVE ACQUIRED DISABILITIES. HE SAID THE ARCHITECTURE OF SOMALIA IS ALMOST WHOLLY INACCESSIBLE, AND THIS WAS A GREAT PROBLEM AND WOULD NEED TO BE FIXED.

INDEED, THE COUNTRY REPORTS ARE ALSO A POWERFUL REMINDER THAT THE MANUFACTURE OF DISABILITY, THROUGH WAR AND CIVIL STRIFE, IS SADLY ONE OF THE WORLD'S GROWTH INDUSTRIES.

LET ME ALSO ADD I THINK THE REPORTS COULD BE IMPROVED. FIRST, WE NEED A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT WE MEAN BY THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES. WE ALSO NEED MORE INFORMATION. FOR EXAMPLE, MANY REPORTS SEEM TO LOOK ONLY TO A COUNTRY'S LAWS -- WHETHER CREATING BARRIERS OR ACCOMMODATIONS. CERTAINLY THAT IS IMPORTANT, BUT MORE ABOUT THE ACTUAL SITUATION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES WOULD BE HELPFUL.

NONETHELESS, THESE REPORTS ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE, AND I THANK YOU.

IT HAS BEEN AN HONOR TO BE HERE TODAY. GOD BLESS YOU AND GOD BLESS AMERICA.

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