

DOLE FOR PRESIDENT DISABILITY COALITION KICK-OFF RECEPTION

NOVEMBER 3, 1987

SHERATON GRAND HOTEL

- IN 1984, MANY OF YOU HERE IN THIS ROOM, AS WELL AS MANY OTHERS NOT IN ATTENDANCE, JOINED WITH ME AND MY COLLEAGUES IN SECURING PASSAGE OF THE VOTING ACCESSIBILITY FOR THE ELDERLY AND HANDICAPPED ACT. THIS LEGISLATION BROUGHT WITH IT THE PROMISE THAT AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES WOULD BE ABLE TO EXERCISE THEIR FRANCHISE TO VOTE.

- THERE WAS, OF COURSE, NEVER ANY QUESTION AS TO THE CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT OF THIS POPULATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE ELECTION PROCESS; HOWEVER, BOTH PHYSICAL AND ATTITUDINAL BARRIERS EXISTED, AND I MIGHT ADD, CONTINUE TO EXIST, WHICH DISABLE OUR HANDICAPPED AND ELDERLY CITIZENS.

- DURING THE OCTOBER 6, 1987 HEARINGS RECENTLY HELD BEFORE THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES SUBCOMMITTEE ON ELECTIONS, IT WAS REVEALED THAT THERE HAS BEEN A TREMENDOUS DIVERSITY IN IMPLEMENTING THE INTENT OF THIS LAW. WHILE THERE HAS BEEN SOME PROGRESS IN ACCOMMODATING ELDERLY AND DISABLED VOTERS AT REGISTRATION AND POLLING SITES, IMPEDIMENTS STILL EXIST WHICH CAUSE SOME PERSONS NOT TO VOTE, AND WHICH CAUSE OTHERS TO BE EMBARRASSED, HUMILIATED OR SEGREGATED FROM THE MAINSTREAM WHEN THEY DO.

• CLEARLY WE WOULD NOT BE WHERE WE ARE TODAY WERE IT NOT FOR THE DEDICATED EFFORTS OF PRIVATE SECTOR ORGANIZATIONS WHO HAVE EXPENDED UNTOLD ENERGY IN EDUCATING ELECTION OFFICIALS, ELDERLY AND DISABLED CITIZENS, AND THE PUBLIC-AT-LARGE. THE NATIONAL EASTER SEAL SOCIETY, DISABLED BUT ABLE TO VOTE, THE NATIONAL ORGANIZATION ON DISABILITY, THE COALITION FOR VOTER ACCESS, TO NAME BUT A FEW, HAVE LED THE WAY TOWARD FULL COMPLIANCE. YOU HAVE MY GRATITUDE AS WELL AS MY FULL SUPPORT.

• TODAY, ELECTION DAY, WE JOIN TOGETHER NOT TO EXAMINE THOSE WHO CANNOT, OR DO NOT, PARTICIPATE IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS, BUT TO HONOR VOTERS WITH DISABILITIES. IN A NATION WHERE LESS THAN HALF THE VOTING-AGE POPULATION CAST A BALLOT IN THE LAST ELECTION, LET ME COMMEND VOTERS WITH DISABILITIES WHO BELIEVE, AS I DO, THAT EACH OF US HAS A RIGHT AND A RESPONSIBILITY TO EXERCISE HIS OR HER VOTE.

• I HAVE ALSO CHOSEN TODAY TO ANNOUNCE THE FORMATION OF THE DOLE FOR PRESIDENT DISABILITY COALITION. I AM COMMITTED TO AN ACCESSIBLE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN, AND HOPE THAT OTHER PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES WILL JOIN ME IN THIS EFFORT. THIS WEEK, WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF PHIL CAULKINS OF DISABLED BUT ABLE TO VOTE, I LED THE REPUBLICAN INITIATIVE TO DEMAND THAT ALL SCHEDULED DEBATES BE ACCESSIBLE.

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WITH THE HELP OF THE DISABILITY COALITION, AS WELL AS ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE CONTINUED TO PROVIDE ME AND MY STAFF WITH COUNSEL OVER THE LAST TWO DECADES, PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES AND THEIR CONCERNS WILL BE FULLY INTEGRATED INTO CAMPAIGN INITIATIVES.

• I REGRET THAT ALL FOUR OF THE COALITION'S NATIONAL CHAIRMEN COULD NOT BE HERE TODAY, BUT WANT TO THANK MARIANNA BEACH AND DON PIRON FOR TAKING THE TIME FROM THEIR BUSY SCHEDULES TO BE WITH US. AND TO MY STATE CHAIRPERSONS, I AM EQUALLY GRATEFUL.