

STATEMENT OF U.S. SENATOR ROBERT J. DOLE

I have always been inspired by the state motto of Kansas -- "To the stars through Difficulties." Well, last year, our nation devoted itself to ensuring that people with disabilities have the opportunity to reach for the stars, to develop to their fullest potential, and to enter the mainstream of society. When Congress passed the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), we not only outlawed discrimination against people with disabilities, but also ensured that we all have the opportunity to live lives of dignity and independence.

The ADA is an important beginning, giving us not only a framework from which to work, but also a mandate from which to proceed. However, to reinforce the goals of ADA and to move disability policy forward into the next century, it is critical to maintain a united and solid partnership between the disability communities as well as the public and private sectors. Working together, we can ensure that every American citizen will be provided the access and opportunity to be a part of all that society offers.

The 102nd Congress has a very busy agenda. We will be considering a variety of disability programs that must be updated to meet the reality of an ADA world. The list is comprehensive and includes many critical issues such as the reauthorization of early intervention services for children with disabilities, the Protection & Advocacy for Mentally Ill Persons Act, and the Education of the Deaf Act. Furthermore, Congress will be exploring personal assistance services and other new disability initiatives. Although these issues and many others are very important, we must not forget to monitor compliance with ADA. Since the regulations are being published on time, it is critical to enforce the guidelines being promulgated.

These issues, and many others, need systematic examination and Congressional consideration if we are to fulfill ADA's promise. Clearly, if we are going to make our dream of equal opportunity for people with disabilities a reality, it is imperative that disability initiatives are "cut from the same cloth" as ADA.

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