

Statement of Senator Robert J. Dole
on the
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Treaty Doc. 112-7)
before the
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Thursday, July 12, 2012

Chairman Kerry, Ranking Member Lugar, and members of this Committee ---

When I delivered my maiden speech on the Senate Floor on April 14, 1969, the anniversary of the day I was wounded in World War II, it was customary to speak about something in which you had a deep interest, and something about which you could offer some leadership. I chose to speak about a minority group, as I said then, the existence of which affects every person in our society, and the very fiber of our nation.

It was an exceptional group I joined during World War II, which no one joins by personal choice. It is a group that neither respects nor discriminates by age, sex, wealth, education, skin color, religious beliefs, political party, power, or prestige. That group, Americans with disabilities, has grown in size ever since. So, therefore, has the importance of maintaining access for people with disabilities to mainstream American life, whether it's access to a job, an education, or registering to vote.

When we passed the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990, it was not only one of the proudest moments of my career, it was a remarkable bipartisan achievement that made an impact on millions of Americans. The simple goal was to foster independence and dignity, and its reasonable accommodations enabled Americans with disabilities to contribute more readily to this great country.

Americans led the world in developing disability public policy and equality and, while there are places that still have no rights for people with disabilities, many countries have followed our lead. In 1994, I wrote to the Secretary of State to ask that the United States include the status of people with disabilities in its annual report on human rights. To its credit, the State Department acted, and, since then, has included a profile on the rights of people with disabilities in each country in the world. Some of the news is good, but, in too many countries, people with disabilities remain subject to discrimination.

The United States supported approval of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in December 2006. On the anniversary of the ADA in 2009, the U.S. signed the CRPD. This landmark treaty requires countries around the world to affirm what are essentially core American values of equality, justice, and dignity. Now the package has been submitted to the Senate for your advice and consent. I want to express my personal support for U.S. ratification of the CRPD and to ask that you continue the proud American tradition of supporting the rights and inclusion of people with disabilities.

U.S. ratification of the CRPD will improve physical, technological and communication access outside the U.S., thereby helping to ensure that Americans -- particularly, many thousands of disabled American veterans -- have equal opportunities to live, work, and travel abroad. The treaty comes at no cost to the

United States. In fact, it will create a new global market for accessibility goods. An active U.S. presence in implementation of global disability rights will promote the market for devices such as wheelchairs, smart phones, and other new technologies engineered, made, and sold by U.S. corporations.

With the traditional reservations, understandings, and declarations that the Senate has adopted in the past, current U.S. law satisfies the requirements of the CRPD. The CRPD works to extend protections pioneered in the U.S. to the more than one billion people with disabilities throughout the world. This is an opportunity for the U.S. to join its allies -- including Australia, Canada, France, Mexico, South Korea, the United Kingdom and Germany -- in continuing our historical leadership on disability rights.

Passage of the ADA constituted a proud moment in U.S. history, when we joined together as a nation to stand up for a worthy cause. Now is the time to reaffirm the common goals of equality, access, and inclusion for Americans with disabilities – both when those affected are in the United States and outside of our country’s borders. I urge you to support U.S. ratification of this important treaty.

Thank you.