

51

REMARKS OF ALAN S. BOYD, SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION, PREPARED FOR DELIVERY AT THE ANNUAL BANQUET, WOMEN'S COMMITTEE OF THE PRESIDENT'S COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT OF THE HANDICAPPED, WASHINGTON HILTON HOTEL, WASHINGTON, D. C., 7:30 P.M., APRIL 26, 1967

This word that expresses our deep concern, this word "handicap", has a very long and revealing history.

Three hundred years ago, they say, it was a kind of lottery. You put your hand in a cap, and won or lost depending on what you drew out.

Then handicap became a term used in horse racing. You had an umpire who attempted to equalize the competition by making the faster animals carry an extra weight.

And that led to the meaning of handicap which occupies the attention of this Committee. It has no connection at all with gambling or racing, though it may indeed affect winning or losing.

It is the idea of a human handicap, a disability that weighs upon a person's efforts, making success in life much more difficult.

We are concerned with the physical and psychic handicaps which literally tens of millions of Americans temporarily or permanently endure.

We are deeply distressed by the fact that a widespread indifference, or thoughtlessness, in our society has made such handicaps even more of a personal burden than they need be.

You leaders of the Women's Committee of the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped are attending this 20th anniversary meeting to review the progress that has been made--the progress that your own organizations are helping to make--in overcoming society's indifference to this problem.

For though we cannot add or subtract weights to equalize all of life's competition, it is in our power to remove irrational and arbitrary barriers at the starting gate.

I speak without any pretense of expert knowledge on the employment problem, as such. Your Committee and its consultants have outstanding competence in that area.

My personal interest is in the contribution that government can make towards solving what is perhaps the greatest of the ancillary problems. I refer, of course, to existing restraints on the mobility of handicapped persons.

In the words of Dr. Stratton, we must pay "closer attention to the needs of those individuals who are deprived of many normal activities because it is virtually impossible for them to reach their destinations--be it for employment, business or pleasure--because of physical barriers."

I want you to know that the new Department of Transportation arrived on the scene, less than a month ago, with a public statement of our concern for the transportation needs of physically handicapped people.

We are pleased at the prospect of working with your own Ad Hoc Committee on Transportation. We share your determination that these efforts be not only concerted but intelligently directed.

In that regard, I am reminded of the story of the second-grade teacher who was straining to help a pupil put on his galoshes. After five minutes of exertion, the little boy announced: "They were hard to get on because they're not mine."

In despair, the teacher struggled to get them off again. Just as soon as they were off, the youngster spoke again: "They're my brother's, but I wear them because I don't have any."

For heaven's sake, let us begin our work with precise definitions.

Who are the handicapped?

They are people who have lost some of their ability to get around and do things. People in wheelchairs, in braces, on crutches. People with broken legs and slipped discs. People with arthritis, asthma, emphysema, heart disease. Old people who are not so nimble. Pregnant women--yes, and mothers with small children.

How many are there? How numerous are these handicapped people?

There are two ways of answering that question, and both answers are fantastically high. When you count the number of temporarily handicapped--people handicapped at one time or another in their lives--that means the great majority of our citizens.

For example, every year, about 4 million American women experience the last months of pregnancy. And 80 million people suffered some incapacity between 1961-63. And around 20 million of our citizens are 65 and over.

Estimates of the present number of handicapped people range from 10 to 15 percent of our total population. Dr. Howard Rusk suggests that by 1980, half the American population will be permanently handicapped, suffering from a chronic disease, or past 65.

Next question: What are the transportation implications?

Please permit me to answer that question with another question: Would you have been able to come to this meeting in a wheelchair?

Without a lot of special assistance, I think you would have found the obstacles almost insuperable.

Design, building design as well as transportation design, conspires to rob the handicapped person of his mobility.

Stairs without ramps or elevators. Door jambs and aisles that are too narrow. Turnstiles and revolving doors. Ticket counters that are too high and telephones that are unreachable. And on and on.

In a society that prides itself on its compassion, on its fundamental concern for the human values, we have, it seems to me, omitted consideration for that which is most characteristically human--our weakness, our frailty, our imperfection.

Our buildings and our vehicles are designed to meet a wide range of environmental conditions, but for only a narrow range of personal conditions.

I know of great railroads serving this nation who are actively seeking passenger business but neglect provisions for the handicapped.

I know of great bus lines serving this nation who depend on passenger business but have no special program to facilitate use of buses by the handicapped.

There are no subway systems in existence at present which are readily accessible to the handicapped.

Such attitudes are an indictment of our civilization. They are also a sign of financial shortsightedness, since handicapped people represent a sizable percent of potential transit users.

Fortunately, this indifference is not characteristic of the entire transportation industry.

The principal airlines, and aircraft manufacturers, have a historic interest in human factors and a generally enlightened approach to handicapped-passenger service.

The great automobile manufacturers have shown themselves responsive to the new safety standards, which suggests a broadened interest in the application of Detroit's engineering genius to improvement of the human environment.

Two major rent-a-car firms now offer hand-controlled automobiles at no extra cost in our largest cities.

Taxi companies in several cities provide cabs with ramps that lower to the sidewalk.

Some motel chains are erecting motel units that are said to be free of architectural barriers.

And a great rapid transit system now under construction on the West Coast is incorporating some partial provisions for handicapped users in its station plans.

Welcome signs of progress, of course. But I hardly need add that only a pitifully small fraction of our handicapped population are, or will be, benefitted. A prominent

Philadelphia builder estimates that 30 million handicapped people are still "forced to remain outside looking in."

In short, the contribution by private industry is only in its beginning stages. So, logically, the next question is, What has the Federal Government been doing to improve the situation?

This problem of providing the handicapped with greater mobility is one that is being worked on by several Departments and agencies. President Johnson has stimulated this effort with repeated reminders that ours must be a compassionate society if it is to be a great society.

I should mention first the work of the Veterans Administration. The VA has done [and is still doing] an inspiring job of helping our handicapped veterans return to as full a possession of personal mobility as possible. This agency has no power to change present conditions in public transportation. But the VA has developed, among its other contributions, a car that can be driven by a person with four paralyzed limbs. Previously, the VA had evolved car controls for veterans with paralyzed legs.

One result of that, incidentally, is that we found out paraplegics are safer drivers than the average motorist.

You should be aware of comparable research for the handicapped civilian done by the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration of the Department of Health, Education and

Welfare. One of their many studies concerned the feasibility of outside elevators. Another assessed the state-of-the-art of vehicles for the disabled. Another, in cooperation with research people at NASA, is looking into the possible adaptability of the moon-walker to fit the needs of severely handicapped people on earth. And I think we can give the VRA's past work with the Civil Aeronautics Board much credit for the present laudable policy of the airlines.

There is commendable work being done by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. HUD is sponsoring a study by the National Academy of Sciences to develop criteria for nonrail urban mass transit vehicles. And one of the important considerations of this project is "...special service to particular segments of the population, such as the aged and the physically and economically handicapped."

I should also describe current activities in this field by agencies of the Department of Transportation.

The National Highway Safety Bureau is developing safety standards for the special controls on cars for the handicapped.

The Federal Highway Administration, in its urban design policy statement, recommends ramps for pedestrian overpasses in cities. Unfortunately, it does not have the power to insist on them.

Similarly, this agency has been urging the States to provide ramps, for example, at safety rest areas on highways.



Boyd/9

But the decision to do so rests with the State highway planners.

Many State highway construction codes do indeed specify such ramps. Where they do not, some persuasion by local citizens might be appropriate.

Perhaps the major contribution by the Department of Transportation, at this time, is our High Speed Ground Transportation project in the Northeast corridor. In the plan to connect Boston, New York and Washington by rapid rail, a very great emphasis has been placed on human engineering. In other words, we want people to feel so good about this mode of transportation, when the demonstration trains start running, later this year, that a great new demand for rapid rail service will be created.

Here are some of the features that one does not have to be handicapped in order to appreciate:

The station platforms will be level with the trains. There will be ramps to the station platforms. Fresh air will be constantly circulated in the cars and kept at a comfortable temperature. There will be smoother starts and stops. There will be carts, not unlike those at the supermarket, to pile one's luggage onto.

Such design features, developed for the convenience of all patrons, are of special benefit to the handicapped customers.

These examples of dedicated effort in various Federal agencies are not mentioned to elicit a pat on the back. Far from it. We all agree that not nearly enough has been done.

While there exists no lack of interest and sympathetic understanding, there is, at present, an "accomplishment gap."

To narrow that gap, I have asked the Assistant Secretary for Policy Development, in the Department of Transportation, to plan and to support long-range research offering hope of greater mobility for America's handicapped citizens.

In my opinion, however, the best immediate hope lies in the persevering efforts of your Committee and its parent organization. Obviously, the work of the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped is unduplicated at the national level. No other group in our society--not in government, not in industry, not in private institutions--can attack this problem on as broad a front.

On the question of transportation for disabled people, there are conspicuous targets for education and persuasion: transportation firms themselves, transportation unions, local political institutions, communications media, civic groups, et cetera. That is all familiar ground to members of this group, and I would not presume to suggest your priorities.

However, I am going to state what I regard as our major problem in this work. It is the difficulty we encounter in the key professions of engineering and architecture. There

are too few advocates of humane design within the professions. In fact, a recent study of design engineers (admittedly, done on a small scale) came to the conclusion that

"Design engineers have little or no interest in human factors, human factors information, or in the application of human factors criteria to design."

With a number of honorable exceptions, engineers and architects are still constructing for users who are statistical abstractions: average men, median men, percentile men.

In a strangely idealistic way--in a loving way, almost--they design for men and women who will never weaken, never get old, never be deformed, never break down, never change.

How can we get our message across to these other-worldly gentlemen, so deeply immersed in their stress calculations, so nuts-and-bolts practical, so confident in their definition of efficiency?

Can they be persuaded to factor in compassion?

Or should we, perhaps, repeat the ancient words of the Roman philosopher, Seneca, who said:

"God divided man into men, that they might help each other."

On this and other serious questions, America looks to the leadership of this Committee.