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REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY
SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION ELIZABETH HANFORD DOLE
TO THE PRESIDENT'S COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT OF THE HANDICAPPED
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Earlier in my career, while working at what then was the Department of Health, Education and Welfare and for the Assistant Secretary of Education, I had the privilege of planning the first conference in the U.S. on education of the deaf. Little did I know that many years later I would meet and marry a man with whom I would share a strong interest and commitment to the disabled.

The distinguished President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped is one of the oldest Presidential committees in the country and for decades has dedicated its valuable resources to promoting -- very successfully, I might add -- full opportunities for all disabled citizens. And in the process, the Committee has recognized that these achievements are truly the result of the combined efforts of people such as those in this audience today -- representatives of business, voluntary organizations, industry, labor, education, veterans' groups and many, many others. And while the President's Committee may not have done it alone, you have provided outstanding leadership, and for this we salute you.

Those we honor today are very special people: Dr. Paul Corcoran, whom we thank for his work in handicapped rehabilitation and employment; Dr. Robert Tranquada and Nancy Hunter, being recognized for their outstanding efforts in hiring, training and promoting people with physical and mental disabilities; and Chad Colley, the Handicapped American of the Year, whom we honor for his leadership and inspiration to all his fellow citizens.

We join each of these honorees in reaffirming the rights of all disabled Americans. At the Department of Transportation, we too can help

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make a difference --particularly in the area of mass transit. In this city, as in so many other communities, transit is taking its rightful place as an integral part not only of urban transportation, but in the life of the city itself.

As an essential part of the community, transit must serve all of the people. That responsibility extends both to the elderly and the young; to the disabled as well as the able-bodied. I have a deep concern for the rights of handicapped persons, and great admiration for those who seem to be self-reliant in a society structured for the non-handicapped. The independence and dignity of Americans with disabilities are goals toward which we should all strive, and these goals are at the heart of our transit policy.

I am happy to report that, within the next few weeks, the Department expects to publish a new rule to improve transit service for persons with disabilities. This rule will establish specific criteria for transit service for handicapped persons, and will ensure that the users of that service have a voice in its planning and operation.

Another area of increasing concern to us is the availability of airline service to disabled persons on a nondiscriminatory basis. I have heard from some disabled persons that airlines sometimes act unfairly or inconsistently toward them. We are listening, and we expect to spend an increasing amount of effort and time working with the airlines and with disabled persons to find ways to improve airline service for persons with disabilities.

Coming from North Carolina, I hope you'll forgive me for quoting my home state's most famous man of letters, Thomas Wolfe. "If a man has a talent," he wrote, "and learns somehow to use the whole of it, he has gloriously succeeded, and won a satisfaction and a triumph that a few men ever know."

Change that to read "a man or woman" and you have the heart of what it is that sets this country apart. Whatever else may divide us, we Americans believe in talent as the yardstick by which one should be judged. That talent has nothing to do with the color of one's skin, or the color of one's collar. It is irrelevant to the blood in our veins, or the sum in our bank account. We have learned that it is also irrelevant to one's physical mobility, body structure, accident of birth or accident of later life.

In short, there should be no barriers placed in the way of those with physical handicaps. This is something which we in government must enforce, not only in the laws we write or the regulations we promulgate, but in the ideas we conceive and the daily actions we take toward one another.

We hold to the conviction that we can -- and will -- make a positive difference in the lives of others.

Handicaps come in many forms. To my way of thinking, the worst handicap of all is the inability to put yourself in someone else's shoes -- to see the world through their eyes -- to share their suffering and rejoice in their triumphs. The worst handicaps are spiritual and not physical -- a hard heart, a callous mind, a short memory and a narrow field of vision. By challenging these handicaps wherever they exist, we can do much to further the cause of those who campaign for dignity and a life of meaningful contribution. Their work must be our own.

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