

**Statement of Senator Robert J. Dole
on the
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
before the
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
November 5, 2013**

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Corker, and members of this Committee ---

I urge you to give your support and consent to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). While I cannot stand before you in person today, I approach you in the strong hope that, on your second examination of this important treaty, you will again do the right thing and advance the rights of disabled individuals from the United States and throughout the world. In so doing, I am privileged to join with over twenty veterans' organizations, forty religious groups, more than seven hundred disability and allied groups, dozens of you on both sides of the Senate aisles, and many other prominent Americans who recognize the imperative of U.S. leadership on this issue – a leadership that will be imperiled without U.S. ratification of the CRPD.

When this treaty came before the Senate last year, it fell just five votes short of passage. In debating the treaty's merits, treaty opponents expressed concern that the CRPD would diminish American sovereignty – that, through U.S. ratification, the United Nations would somehow be able to supersede U.S. law, even by interfering with American parents' right to home-school their children.

Along with Senator John McCain, Secretary John Kerry and others, I could not disagree more strongly with this view. This treaty contains reservations, understandings and declarations (RUDs) that explicitly describe how the treaty will and will not apply to the U.S. At the same time, I respect this institution, its provision for debate, and its tolerance of the opinions and conclusions of its one hundred members. Today, I urge all of you to keep an open mind and recognize another important characteristic of this august body: the opportunity it presents for policies to evolve and be strengthened as members work together in a bipartisan fashion for a greater good. This treaty, in a way that is both telling and unique, enjoys the support of diverse groups serving a variety of interests: Republicans and Democrats, veterans organizations and disability groups, businesses and religious organizations. Given the broad support, I hope those of you with reservations about any aspect of the treaty, will work with your colleagues, whom I know are ready to work with you, to address your concerns. If improvements to the RUDs are needed, then I urge members from both parties to work together on that.

This treaty is important for America because of who we are as a nation. It is particularly important, though, for a distinguished group of which I am a member. As I recalled in my statement to this committee last year, I left World War II having joined an exceptional group – one which no one joins by personal choice. It is a group that neither respects nor discriminates by age, gender, 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 be part of mainstream American life, whether through access to a job, an education, or

registering to vote. To me, this is not about extending a privilege to a special category of people; it is instead about civil rights.

When Congress 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.

If not before the ADA, then certainly after its passage, our nation led the world in developing disability public policy and equality. In recent years, many countries – including our allies in Australia, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Israel, Mexico, and South Korea -- have followed our lead. In 2006, President George W. Bush took U.S. leadership on this issue to a new level by negotiating and supporting approval of the CRPD. On the anniversary of the ADA in 2009, President Barack Obama signed the treaty – a landmark document that commits countries around the world to affirm what are essentially core American values of equality, justice, and dignity.

U.S. ratification of the CRPD will increase the ability of the United States to improve physical, technological and communication access in other countries, thereby helping to ensure that Americans -- particularly, many thousands of disabled American veterans -- have equal opportunities to live, work, and travel abroad. In addition, the treaty comes at no net 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. Indeed, as President George H.W. Bush informed this committee last year, the treaty “would not require any changes to U.S. law.” It would extend protections pioneered in the United States to the more than one billion people with disabilities throughout the world.

President Obama has again submitted the treaty to you for your advice and consent. I urge you to seize this critical opportunity to continue the proud American tradition of supporting the rights and inclusion of people with disabilities.

Years ago, in dedicating the National World War II Memorial, I tried to capture what makes America worth fighting for, indeed, dying for. “This is the golden thread that runs throughout the tapestry of our nationhood,” I said, “the dignity of every life, the possibility of every mind, the divinity of every soul.” I know many of you share this sentiment and hope you will consider this treaty through that lens. In ratifying this treaty, we can affirm these goals for Americans with disabilities.

I urge you to support U.S. ratification of this important treaty and I thank you for the courtesy of your consideration. God Bless America.