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NOTES BY THE HONORABLE HUBERT H. HUMPHREY
VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES
AT THE
ANNUAL MEETING OF THE
PRESIDENT'S COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT OF THE HANDICAPPED
WASHINGTON HILTON HOTEL - INTERNATIONAL BALLROOM CENTER
April 28, 1966

This is a happy occasion, because it symbolizes victory over countless disabilities.

↳ It is an exciting occasion, because this Annual Meeting opens wider -- many new doors for the nation's handicapped -- doors of training, of opportunity, of jobs.

What a wonderful and inspiring scene this is -- so many brave Americans who have triumphed over disability, so many concerned Americans who are "their brother's keeper."

I bring you the warm personal greetings of the President of the United States.

Your Committee is genuinely the President's Committee; your mission is truly the nation's mission; your activity in Washington, D. C., in State Capitals and in the grass-roots represents Federal, State and local leadership in action.

You are a catalyst. You are movers. You are doers. And for all this, I salute you, and I bid you onward.

For many years, you have been playing an essential role in this nation's efforts to expand opportunities for our handicapped citizens. You have been the creators of a new climate of acceptance, and

yes, of welcome. Through your dedication and plain hard work, the road back for the handicapped has become lots easier, lots smoother.

Your role in America has been essential, and you have well earned the gratitude of all.

But now you move into another phase. The word "essential" is not strong enough. A new mood, a new pace is developing in your many-sided activities. The word has now become "urgent." Your role in this nation not only is essential; it is urgent.

Time is of the essence because a "revolution of expectations" is sweeping among our own citizens and throughout the world. We Americans are not afraid of this revolution. It can be completely beneficial. We welcome it. We are its champions.

America has an honorable, revolutionary past. In 1776, we revolted against oppression and indignity. Today, the revolution takes new forms -- but still it is for human dignity, for equality of opportunity.

This revolution is occurring in civil rights, in the war on poverty, in education and overseas, in the Emerging World.

One theme is its keynote:

Every man and woman, every child has a precious birthright; that birthright cannot -- must not -- be denied.

This birthright must include those who because of birth defects or sickness or injury in later years have been disabled.

As in the case of other struggles, the revolution for the handicapped has happened partly through evolution and partly because of pent-up need.

Like the others, this revolution has inspired to action an army of dedicated, highly motivated volunteers. They are determined to bring about better times for the handicapped.

And, like the others, this revolution is unfinished. It has a beginning, but it has no end.

~~The writing of the next act of this great drama of revolution is in your hands, my friends. So very much depends on you. No wonder your role in America has become not just essential, but urgent.~~

Now, what has been the nature of the changes that have gone into this revolution in the field of the handicapped?

There have been great changes in rehabilitation, climaxed by the recent Vocational Rehabilitation Amendments. I refer to a new day dawning in terms of

the quality of rehabilitation; in terms of new services now available to the mentally retarded; in terms of expanded sheltered workshops. A new day dawning, and the rising sun brings hope.

There have been great changes in training programs for the handicapped. Manpower development programs have been branching out in bold new directions.

In one example, the mentally retarded are learning to etch beautiful patterns in glass. In another, an entire national industry has committed itself to train a thousand handicapped persons a year. In still other projects, hundreds of veterans so seriously handicapped they cannot leave their homes, are being trained to conduct independent businesses right in their living rooms.

There have been great changes -- improvements -- in the nation's War on Poverty. And let me remind you that the attack on poverty is of particular benefit to the handicapped, since the ranks of the poverty-stricken contain a sadly disproportionate share of physically and mentally handicapped people. For the first time in history, deep-seated, decades-old poverty is being met not by weak skirmishes, but by head-on battle.

It will not be a short war; it will be long and arduous. But we are headed in the right direction; we are accelerating; and we shall succeed.

There have been great changes in medicine -- in probing for the causes and cures of disease; in combatting mental illness; in discovering some of the causes of mental retardation; in restoring at least some degree of independence to thousands and thousands of permanently handicapped; in prolonging life; in instilling hope.

There have been great changes in all segments of our society. In education, with growing emphasis on making school facilities available to handicapped students. In science, with the mobilization of scientific knowledge to bring new independence to the handicapped -- electronic artificial limbs, reading machines for the blind, hearing devices for the deaf, so much more. In the arts, with upgrading of the artistic quality of products crafted by the seriously handicapped, under the leadership of "Project Earning Power" -- PEP -- of the President's Committee. In labor, with the establishment of modern rehabilitation centers for men and women handicapped on the job. In business, with a growing number of firms establishing special programs of training the handicapped for a wide variety of jobs and a growing number of seminars for management on the handicapped.

↳ These are the components of the revolution of our time -- the revolution epitomized so dramatically by the young man whom we honor today, Bob Smithdas. ↳ He cannot see me nor directly hear my words -- but he knows exactly what I am saying and, I am sure, what is in my heart and yours. ↳ This really is Bob Smithdas' revolution -- a disabled young man able to lead a full life, to work, to play, to learn, to teach, thanks to his own talent and drive and to the many fine things occurring in America in behalf of the handicapped.

↳ It is a revolution of preparation -- of mobilizing the entire vast resources of America so as to bring the handicapped to the threshold of independence.

↳ But it is only Act One of the revolution, not the complete play. It is the revolution of new beginnings, not endings.

↳ The future Acts and Scenes of this peaceful revolution are up to you.

↳ In greater numbers than ever before, the handicapped are being brought to the doorway of a new life. ↳ But only you workers for the handicapped, professionals and volunteers, can hold open the door and welcome them in.

↳ In greater numbers, the handicapped are being prepared for employment and for lives of independence.

↳ But only you can maintain and further improve the kind

of climate in which they can find substantial opportunities for meaningful work.

The revolution can kindle flames of hope -- but hope alone cannot feed a family nor pay the rent.

Hope must become more than a future promise; it must become a present reality. The fulfillment of hope is your mission.

The goals in these times of urgency are simple. Every man and every woman who possesses the necessary skills and training for work, and who wants to work, should have an opportunity to work.

This includes the seriously handicapped as well as the mildly handicapped; those with physical disabilities and well as those with mental disabilities. Opportunity must be for all and not for some. If a handicap deprives any one man of his rightful opportunity to work, the entire country is the poorer for it.

America rejects the concept of any "second class citizens", either because of race, creed, color or disability. Every citizen must have the same rights, the same equality, as all of God's children.

This goal is not easy to reach. Innumerable obstacles still block the path. Some of these obstacles are psychological, others legal or economic or social. There are still age-old prejudices against certain disability groups -- epilepsy, mental illness and others.

These prejudices must come tumbling down.

Some employment concepts must be changed so as to concentrate on a worker's abilities, not his disabilities.

We will have to extend ourselves, to stretch outward to reach these goals. Yet they must be reached, or else the revolution of our Century will be only half fulfilled.

Let us pay special heed to the problems of equality of the seriously handicapped who have not yet shared the fruits of victory, who have not yet experienced the better way of life slowly spreading its warmth over the land.

Let us not rest until the revolution has been completed for all the citizens of this nation -- regardless of the severity or degree or type of handicap.

In our hands, our hearts, and our minds is the power to complete the revolution. Do our fellow citizens realize the light that has begun to gleam in the eyes of the handicapped? Do they realize that hope is contagious, that the long neglected, the long forgotten are no longer resigned to what was their so-called "fate." The times have caught up with them and with us. The unfinished revolution has brought the handicapped to the doorway. Their eyes are upon

us. We must meet their eyes with friendship. We must stretch out our hands with the means to enable them to "stand tall."

The challenge is great, but we thrive on challenge.

Right is on our side -- for it is right that every man and woman have full opportunity to work, to dream, to aspire, to achieve -- every man and woman regardless of disability.

May God continue to bless us with the will to push forward. So many depend on us for so much.

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