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PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 83^d CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Rehabilitation and Employment of Physically Handicapped Citizens

EXTENSION OF REMARKS
OF

HON. LISTER HILL

OF ALABAMA

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

Wednesday, April 21, 1954

Mr. HILL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the Appendix of the RECORD a statement on the subject of the rehabilitation and employment of physically handicapped citizens, delivered by Paul A. Strachan, president of the American Federation of the Physically Handicapped, before the Senate Subcommittee on Labor and Public Welfare on Wednesday, April 7, 1954.

There being no objection, the statement was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

STATEMENT OF PAUL A. STRACHAN, PRESIDENT, AMERICAN FEDERATION OF THE PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE SENATE ON LABOR AND PUBLIC WELFARE, WEDNESDAY, APRIL 7, 1954

Mr. Chairman, the most important problem before the Nation today is safeguarding and improving the health and economic conditions of our own citizenry.

Rehabilitation and employment of our 38 million handicapped citizens, including the blind, partially sighted, deaf, hard of hearing, amputees, arthritics, cardiacs, cerebral palsied, diabetics, epileptics, victims of muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, poliomyelitis, rheumatism, tuberculosis, and other crippers, as well as those having congenital defects and deformities, is, of necessity, of prime concern to you, and to all Members of Congress, generally.

After more than 40 years of study and practice in this field, and in the light of the multitude of needs of our handicapped people, we have developed and there is now pending before you, the bill, S. 2570, to establish a Federal agency for handicapped.

This bill does what no other bill now pending proposals: It provides a practical blueprint of a program—not just an excuse for a program—to show you, and all others, a clearly defined plan. It is not vague, nor does it evade meeting issues that have been ignored, largely, by existing Federal agencies. In short, it shows exactly what is proposed to be done for the handicapped; what agency would be best qualified to do it; how the job would be done; to whom it would be done; the cost, and the results. Today, there is no coordination of 35 agencies now existing, each having a piece of the program.

We respectfully point out the necessity of establishing this agency, not only for the advancement of welfare of handicapped, themselves, but for the benefit of the whole Nation, and, briefly, the bill would—

1. Establish an independent agency, based for housekeeping purposes in the Department of Labor.

2. Establish in said agency, an advisory council on affairs of the handicapped, consisting of three representing employers; three representing labor; three representing physically handicapped, themselves (who, after all, are the chief persons concerned, and who, therefore, should and must be so represented); three to represent farmers and stockraisers, and three experienced in public affairs.

3. Establishes an office of services for blind in the agency and brings into it all farflung agencies for blind now in Federal service, thus consolidating and making more efficient such services.

4. Establishes cooperative enterprises for handicapped revolving fund, with \$10 million as initial appropriation, to take the first step toward providing handicapped a practical means to be trained in business and job conditions, so they may stand on their own feet, and gradually get away from the pitifully inadequate and uneconomic so-called public-assistance programs, which, at best, are only stopgaps, and in addition to being a continual drain upon the finances of the

people, solve nothing and provide no permanent remedies.

5. Establishes a Federal interagency committee on rehabilitation and employment of handicapped to coordinate activities of the present 35 Federal agencies each of which, now, has a piece of the program. We respectfully point out the necessity for establishing such committee. Previous testimony before this committee has concentrated upon the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation with one or two corollary agencies in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, and have completely ignored the fact that a multitude of activities, costing hundreds of millions of dollars annually, which are within the orbit of an overall handicapped program, are very much in the picture. Such agencies, surely, as good business policy, should have one focal point, the proposed interagency committee, through which the results of their efforts could and would be evaluated. This would not only prevent useless duplication of effort and expense, but would facilitate continual improvement in the overall program.

6. Provides a \$60 monthly Federal grant to totally disabled persons, who are unfeasible for rehabilitation. It is pointed out that this grant provides a Federal base, to which States may add additional sums, as it is clear that no person, totally disabled and unable to support himself or herself, could be medically treated, fed, clothed, and housed, to say nothing of necessary incidental living expenses, on \$60 per month.

Further, the \$60 would not be given, unless competent medical examinations, once yearly, prove such person to be totally disabled and unfeasible for rehabilitation. In short, the initial placement of a person on such grant does not mean such person is so supported eternally, as is often now the case, but, they would have to prove, by annual examinations, that they are still unfeasible in every way for rehabilitation.

7. Provides \$5 million initial, and \$2 million annual continuing appropriation, for grants for training of homebound persons.

This is very important, since, particularly in rural areas, today, there is little or no means for providing this essential service at all, and, given such training, many such homebound, could support themselves wholly or in part.

8. Provides \$10 million revolving loan fund, from which States which have exhausted their appropriations for rehabilitation may borrow, between sessions of their own legislatures.

It may surprise the committee to know that, despite under present laws, wherein the Federal contribution takes care of administrative expenses of the State setups, on an annual basis, yet, because of exhaustion of appropriations, prevent States from rendering any actual services to handicapped for more than half the time.

9. Establishes a division for handicapped in the United States Civil Service Commission. As we are dealing with millions of handicapped, including disabled veterans, facilitating their examinations, tests for physical capacities, and ultimate appointment, make such division imperative.

10. Provides for promotion of public-safety programs designed to safeguard life and limb on Federal property. This, no doubt, would save the Government millions of dollars in present cost of accidents and disease.

11. Provides for reports from Federal agencies having parts of the handicapped program, so that there would be a continual and continuing check on overall activities, and improvements designed and applied, in the light of experience.

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12. Provides special programs for the severely handicapped (those from 60 to 100 percent disabled), of whom it is estimated, on basis of composite reports from all reliable public and private agencies, that there are now from 7 million to 9 million in such categories.

13. Provides for rehabilitation centers throughout the Nation. This is a vital necessity to development of the program.

14. Establishes a Federal second injury tax and fund, something which has been vitally needed for the past 50 years, and which, when functioning, will enable hundreds of thousands of severely handicapped, with multiple disabilities, to secure and hold remunerative employment, and thus be enabled to support themselves, their families, and make their contribution to the Nation, as a whole, by paying Federal, State, county, and municipal taxes.

15. Provides legal definitions of a physically handicapped person, and, persons who are totally disabled and unfeasible for rehabilitation. Lack of clear definitions, today, is not only confusing, but often seriously obstructs the application of benefits needed by the individual.

The foregoing, Mr. Chairman, is more definitely outlined in the statement which I made, in July 1953, to the House Committee on Education and Labor, and I am attaching and sending a copy of this statement to each member of the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, with respectful request that members give it careful study, as it outlines each section of S. 2570, so that you will know exactly what is intended, and

what, when established, the Federal agency for handicapped will be prepared to do.

Such a program, Mr. Chairman—and I emphasize "program"—rather than "bill," is essential today, both as a means of providing vitally important manpower for our national defense, and to develop continuing means of medical, educational, guidance, and placement services for all handicapped who require such services.

We are today at that point where, as a matter of national policy, we must determine whether or not we shall continue the expensive fallacy of so-called public assistance, which produces nothing, and provides no remedies other than meager, temporary aid, or, that we shall make a capital investment in the individual handicapped citizens and get them onto their feet so they may make their own contribution to our economic and social life, and be taxpayers, instead of tax-eaters.

Our federation, with associated organizations supporting this necessary program, brings to you the pleas of more than 15 million American citizens to support this bill 100 percent. Enactment of this bill would not disturb the basic principles of the present Federal-State setup.

For the betterment of our people, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, and for the preservation of our Nation, itself, we respectfully urge that you substitute S. 2570 for all other pending measures, which are totally inadequate, unrealistic, and will do nothing more than continue the miserably ineffective, inefficient, and unbusinesslike present programs.