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**SENATORS KENNEDY AND ROBERTS KICKOFF LEGISLATION TO GAINFULLY
EMPLOY THE DISABLED**

Washington, D.C.- Today, Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA) and Senator Pat Roberts (R-KS) joined Senator Bob Dole (R-KS) and national disability advocates to kickoff the Employer Work Incentive Act, a bill that seeks to reduce the high unemployment rate among severely disabled Americans.

“This legislation can help our citizens with disabilities become full and participating members of their community, while creating the employment opportunities needed to fulfill that dream,” said Senator Kennedy. “Government and the private sector must work together to provide all Americans with the opportunity to achieve personal and economic self-sufficiency. Individuals with disabilities deserve the dignity and satisfaction that comes from earning a living wage.”

“It is time for a change in the way we think about employing individuals with severe disabilities,” said Senator Pat Roberts. “We must create job opportunities for people with severe disabilities in the national workforce, not just in government-operated programs.”

As Senator Kennedy stated at today’s press conference, this legislation encourages companies that do business with the federal government to truly open their doors and employ the disabled. Under the new legislation, businesses that employ the severely disabled will be offered incentives, such as the opportunity to participate in the performance of federal contracts and subcontracts. The bill will also require that United States government agencies adopt policies ensuring such businesses are offered a procurement advantage.

There are currently over 9.4 million Americans living with severe mental and physical disabilities. This bill will offer them an equal opportunity to find competitive work. If passed, this bill will also save American tax dollars. In fact, the government could save over \$45 billion dollars over the next ten years, by gainfully employing those who currently live off of Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI).

This event was just the first step in what Senators Kennedy and Roberts’s long term goal of improving the disabled employment rate.

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KENNEDY STATEMENT ON EMPLOYER WORKER INCENTIVE ACT
(As prepared for delivery)

Today we take a vital step to widen opportunities in the workplace for people with disabilities. The legislation that Senator Roberts and I are proposing has the support both of businesses and disability groups, and we're optimistic that it will be enacted into law.

I commend Senator Roberts for his leadership on the issue, and I'm grateful to Bob Dole for continuing to be so involved and so vigilant on behalf of opportunities for people with disabilities across the nation. He's certainly the 101st Senator on the issue.

Most importantly, I commend Patricia Patterson and Taylor Price. They are daily proof of the importance of enabling people with disabilities to bring their abilities and talents to the marketplace.

Disabled Americans want to work and contribute to their communities. They have dreams just like everyone else. For far too long, we have been denied the talents and contributions of thousands of our fellow citizens, just because they are disabled.

We know that over the past 15 years since enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act, real progress has taken place. ADA created a revolution in the way society views disabilities, and that revolution is continuing.

Children graduating from special education expect to move to a productive life of independence. In the winter of 1999, President Clinton signed the "Ticket to Work Act" into law, and he went to the FDR Memorial to do it. Hundreds of persons with disabilities managed to get through the snow to the memorial that day to show their support, because they wanted to be full participants in the nation's economy.

That law has made a major difference by allowing disabled workers to work and still purchase their health insurance through Medicaid. Otherwise, if they worked, they would lose the health care they need to survive.

But it wasn't the whole answer, because actually finding a job was a much more difficult challenge.

This bill continues that march by helping disabled workers get jobs. It opens the doors of opportunity even wider by providing common sense help to employers who hire workers with disabilities and who are willing to do the right thing by paying disabled workers a decent salary, by providing and contributing to the cost of their health insurance, by placing workers in an environment where they can work along side their colleagues.

If you believe in equality of opportunity, you will support this bill.

If you believe that everyone has something to contribute, you will support this bill.

If you believe in the dignity of work, you will support this bill.

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