

STATEMENT OF MAJORITY LEADER ROBERT DOLE

FAIR HOUSING

S.J. RES 79

MR. PRESIDENT. LAST WEEK, MY DISTINGUISHED COLLEAGUE FROM MARYLAND, SENATOR MATHIAS, INTRODUCED S.J. RES. 79, A RESOLUTION PROCLAIMING APRIL AS FAIR HOUSING MONTH. THE PURPOSE OF THE RESOLUTION IS TO PROVIDE FOR A TIME TO COMMEMORATE THE ENACTMENT OF THE LANDMARK FAIR HOUSING ACT OF 1968 AND TO RENEW OUR COMMITMENT TO ERADICATING DISCRIMINATION FROM THE HOUSING MARKET. I AM PLEASED TO JOIN SENATOR MATHIAS AND A LARGE, BIPARTISAN GROUP OF SENATORS IN COSPONSORING THIS RESOLUTION.

PASSED IN THE WAKE OF MARTIN LUTHER KING'S TRAGIC DEATH, THE FAIR HOUSING ACT REPRESENTED THE FINAL, MAJOR BUILDING BLOCK OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS LEGISLATION PASSED IN THE 1960'S. IT'S PROMISE WAS TO PROVIDE FOR FAIR HOUSING THROUGHOUT THE NATION. THOUGH SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE AS A RESULT OF THE LAW, ITS ENFORCEMENT MECHANISM HAS PROVEN TO BE INEFFECTIVE AND UNWORKABLE IN THE CASE OF INDIVIDUAL COMPLAINTS OF DISCRIMINATION.

ANOTHER DEFICIENCY IN THE 1968 LAW IS ITS FAILURE TO INCLUDE CIVIL RIGHTS PROTECTIONS FOR THE DISABLED. FOR MANY YEARS, IT HAS BEEN THE WELL-ESTABLISHED POLICY OF THIS COUNTRY TO BRING OUR DISABLED CITIZENS INTO THE MAINSTREAM OF AMERICAN LIFE. OPENING THE HOUSING MARKETS TO THESE CITIZENS IS CRUCIAL TO CARRYING OUT THAT POLICY.

PUTTING TEETH INTO THE FAIR HOUSING ACT IS A CAUSE WHICH TRANSCENDS PARTY AFFILIATION OR POLITICAL IDEOLOGY. INDEED, EVERY ADMINISTRATION ASSUMING OFFICE SINCE THE LAW'S ENACTMENT HAS SUPPORTED STRENGTHENING THE ENFORCEMENT MECHANISM. SENATOR MATHIAS AND MANY OTHERS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE AISLE HAVE SPOKEN FORCEFULLY FOR CORRECTING THE LAW'S GLARING DEFICIENCIES. IN RECENT YEARS, THE ISSUE HAS BEEN PUSHED TO THE BACKBURNER IN LIEU OF OTHER CIVIL RIGHTS ISSUES PERCEIVED TO BE OF MORE PRESSING CONCERN. AS ONE WHO HAS ALSO SPOKEN TO THE NEED TO STRENGTHEN THE LAW, I HOPE THAT AT SOME POINT WE WILL FIND THE TIME TO CONFRONT AND ACT UPON THIS IMPORTANT ISSUE.

UNTIL THAT TIME COMES, WE CAN DEMONSTRATE OUR COMMITMENT TO NONDISCRIMINATION IN HOUSING BY PASSING S.J. RES. 79 AND WORKING TO MAKE FAIR HOUSING MONTH THIS YEAR A BIG SUCCESS.