

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 29, 1974

Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:

I am today returning, without my approval, H.R. 14225, the Rehabilitation Act and Randolph-Sheppard Act Amendments of 1974, and the White House Conference on Handicapped Individuals Act. I am advised by the Attorney General and I have determined that the absence of my signature from this bill prevents it from becoming law. Without in any way qualifying this determination, I am also returning it without my approval to those designated by Congress to receive messages at this time.

The Vocational Rehabilitation Amendments of 1974 pose some fundamental issues which far transcend this particular bill. No group in our country is more in need of supportive services than the Handicapped. Our handicapped citizens have demonstrated time and again that, given a fair break, they can lead as full and productive lives as other citizens.

Throughout my years in Congress I consistently supported good Federal programs designed to assist the handicapped.

During the last two years spending on the basic grant programs for Vocational Rehabilitation has grown from \$589 million to \$680 million. The key issue posed by this bill is not how much money will be spent. The issue posed is how well the programs will be run.

This bill passed the House of Representatives without any hearings. Had hearings been held we would have explained the disruption that would result from such a massive legislative incursion into the administration of a program.

The Congress has the responsibility to legislate, but I have the responsibility for the successful administration of the programs they enact. This bill is an attempt to administer through legislation. It transfers a program from one part of HEW to another for no good reason - indeed for very bad reasons. It dictates where in HEW minute decisions must be made, it creates independent organizational units at subordinate levels that are wasteful and duplicative and it sets up a monitoring process for the construction and modernization of Federal facilities that would force me to create a new 250-man bureaucracy in HEW to duplicate functions carried out elsewhere in the Executive Branch.

Most importantly, the bill blurs accountability. I cannot be responsible for the good management of all Federal programs if I cannot hold my Cabinet Secretaries accountable. Under this legislation accountability would be diffused. I find myself obliged to return to the Congress unsigned a bill that would disrupt existing Federal programs and ill serve the needs of our Nation's handicapped citizens. The present Vocational Rehabilitation legislation does not expire until mid 1975.

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Plenty of time remains for us to work out a bill which will improve Federal programs for the handicapped rather than create the disruptions that will inevitably result from this hastily drawn piece of legislation. I have requested HEW Secretary Weinberger to meet with congressional leaders immediately upon their return to initiate this process.

GERALD R. FORD

THE WHITE HOUSE,
October 29, 1974

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