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June 27, 2007

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Sen. Roberts and Sen. Kennedy Introduce Legislation To Create More Jobs for People with Severe Disabilities

WASHINGTON, D.C. (June 27, 2007) — Approaching the Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, U.S. Senators Pat Roberts (R-KS) and Edward Kennedy (D-MA) today introduced legislation aimed at reducing the high unemployment rate for people with severe disabilities.

"The experiences of the Cerebral Palsy Research Foundation of Kansas show that severely disabled people can be an asset to their employers and help their companies to remain competitive in their industry," said Senator Roberts. "Yet despite the tremendous progress disabled people have made in the last fifteen years, nearly 78 percent of all severely disabled people in the U.S. today are unemployed."

"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," said Senator Kennedy. "This legislation encourages companies that do business with the federal government to truly open their doors and employ these individuals."

The "Employer Work Incentive Act for Individuals with Severe Disabilities" will offer eligible businesses that competitively employ people with severe disabilities the opportunity to participate in the performance of federal contracts and receive a procurement advantage. as

More than 9.4 million Americans have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits their life activities (e.g., mobility, communication, self-care, self-direction, work tolerance or work skills). The legislation will expand competitive employment opportunities for those individuals by offering businesses an incentive to employ severely disabled individuals and offer them a both competitive salary and good health care benefits.

"Senator Kennedy and I introduced this legislation because we are deeply committed to doing what we can to help severely disabled Americans seek and maintain competitive employment.

"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 the severely disabled in the national workforce, not just in government-operated programs."

"This legislation can help our disabled citizens become full and participating members of their community, while creating the employment opportunities needed to fulfill that dream", Kennedy added. "I urge my colleagues to pass this important initiative."

In addition to providing greater employment opportunities to the severely disabled, the legislation will also save taxpayer dollars. If just 94,000—or one percent—of severely disabled people now receiving federal Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments and related health benefits were to become gainfully and competitively employed, the projected ten-year cost savings to the federal treasury would be more than \$45 billion.

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