

FOR RELEASE UPON DELIVERY

AUGUST 5, 1975

Office of the Vice President
Washington, D. C.

REMARKS OF THE VICE PRESIDENT
AT THE
VIITH WORLD CONFERENCE ON THE DEAF
GALLAUDET COLLEGE
WASHINGTON, D. C.
AUGUST 5, 1975

To all of you who have journeyed from 60 different countries, I want to say, on behalf of President Ford and the American people -- welcome to the United States.

This is an inspiring occasion. Your presence here establishes your leadership both in your professions and in your nations. Your presence here is convincing testimony that what counts most is one's ability -- rather than one's disability; what matters is not so much what people can't do -- but what they can do when they have the courage and determination to do it, and when society has the wisdom to help them fulfill their fullest human potential.

I was especially gratified by Dr. Williams' warm introduction. He is a world renowned statesman in his field. And I am happy to note that at one point, Dr. Williams and I were colleagues at the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, where I served as Under-Secretary.

One of my responsibilities while at H.E.W. was to oversee the Federal program for Gallaudet College. And, in a lifetime of satisfactions in public service, I have never found any service more satisfying than the opportunity to help develop some of the programs which have made Gallaudet the finest institution of its kind in the world.

The theme of this VIIth World Congress is "Full Citizenship For All Deaf People." This is a powerful theme. It speaks of the universal desire of the person with a handicapping condition to achieve his or her maximum capacities and fulfillments. It speaks of what you prize most -- what we all prize most -- our individuality. You expect to be accepted as individuals, with your own special talents, interests and ambitions, and only incidentally as individuals with a handicap.

Rightfully, you want equal access to the services which will allow you to improve yourselves, to acquire better jobs and to make a useful contribution to society. Rightfully, you want greater awareness of the everyday obstacles that frustrate the lives of those with hearing problems. And rightfully, you want something done about these conditions. For example, I think there ought to be more sign language and closed caption newscasts on television, and more visual aids for the deaf traveler at airline, rail or bus terminals.

In brief what you rightfully want is not to have everything done for you -- but the opportunity to do for yourselves in shaping the society in which you live. That feeling was forcefully expressed by some of the students here at Gallaudet who have been wearing shirts that say "Deaf Power." You want your views heard -- and I say more power to you.

I think that message is getting through to the policy makers and decision makers in government. Today, the efforts of government are increasingly designed to open doors of opportunity for you. For example, in this country, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 required Federal contractors, for the first time, to carry out an affirmative action for the handicapped. In other words, employers with Federal contracts are required to actively recruit employees from among qualified applicants who have handicaps. This Act says that a qualified person with a handicap must not be discriminated against on the basis of that handicap.

This is simple justice. In the United States, we believe that the basic human rights of people are to be respected without regard to race, religion or color. I think that concept should be enlarged. I believe the basic human rights of people must be protected without regard to race, religion, color or handicapping condition.

In another area, Federal action is also encouraging. Federal budget authority for state and local aid to educate the handicapped doubled between 1974 and 1975 from \$50 million to \$100 million. And outlays for all of the various Federal programs for educating the handicapped are expected to rise from \$125 million in 1975 to \$138 million for 1976. More Federal grants for rehabilitation are being provided to state and local governments with less and less Federal strings attached.

This gives you greater influence on how these funds are invested in your home areas.

A wise society will give its people every opportunity to help themselves. This is particularly true of people striving to overcome handicaps. At the same time, there is something you owe your society -- to your governments. Those of us in government need the benefit of your opinions, ideas, knowledge, energies and imagination -- not only on the common problems which bring you together here -- but on all issues from which we can benefit from your thinking as responsible, concerned members of society.

If I might make just one final observation it is this. When society helps its handicapped members to realize their fullest potential, it is society that benefits most. We can unlock hidden skills; release untapped energies; minimize disabilities and accentuate ability. Human talent which we cannot afford to waste -- will be recovered and invested in society's service.

The proof of this approach is obvious in the people you are honoring tonight -- beginning with Dr. Boyce Williams and also including several leading educators, a distinguished clergyman, an outstanding publisher, all of whom are, first and foremost, achievers -- achievers who happen to have a handicap. Obviously, there is nothing handicapped about their performance.

I congratulate you all.

You are living testaments to something Helen Keller once said: "We can do anything we want to do if we stick to it long enough." You prove to us that a courageous human being can face the heaviest odds, conquer them and make an important contribution to his or her world.