

News from Senator

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DISABILITIES ACT

I RISE TODAY IN SUPPORT OF FINAL PASSAGE OF THE CONFERENCE REPORT ON THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT.

I HAVE SUPPORTED THE ADA BECAUSE I BELIEVE IT IS A JUST AND FAIR BILL WHICH WILL BRING EQUALITY TO THE LIVES OF ALL AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES. OUR MESSAGE TO AMERICA TODAY IS THAT INEQUALITY AND PREDJUDICE WILL NO LONGER BE TOLERATED. OUR MESSAGE TO PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IS THAT "YOUR TIME HAS COME."

THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT WILL EMPOWER 43 MILLION AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES TO EXERCISE THEIR RIGHTS AND PARTICIPATE IN THE MAINSTREAM OF AMERICAN LIFE. THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT WILL ENRICH OUR NATION BY SUPPORTING THE TALENTS, SKILLS AND ABILITIES OF A MINORITY GROUP WHICH HAS UP UNTIL NOW BEEN ON THE SIDELINES. UNDER THE ADA, WE ARE ALL WINNERS.

I AM OPTIMISTIC THAT THIS LEGISLATION WILL SET AN IMPORTANT TONE AS WE ENTER A NEW DECADE. JUST AS WE HAVE SEEN THE WALLS GO DOWN IN EASTERN EUROPE, WE ARE NOW WITNESSING SOME OF OUR OWN WALLS CRUMBLING--THE WALLS OF PREJUDICE, ISOLATION, DISCRIMINATION AND SEGREGATION. WE HAVE PAID DEARLY FOR OUR POLICIES OF THE PAST -- DISCRIMINATION COSTS BOTH IN HUMAN TERMS AND FINANCIAL TERMS. KEEPING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES OUT OF THE WORKFORCE AND DEPENDENT ON GOVERNMENT SUBSIDIES IS A POLICY OF THE PAST.

LET'S CONSIDER WHAT THIS LEGISLATION WILL YIELD IN TERMS OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES. IN TERMS OF EMPLOYMENT -- IT WILL OFFER ACCESSIBLE ENVIRONMENTS AND REASONABLE ACCOMODATIONS TO EMPOWER PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES TO UTILIZE THEIR FULL POTENTIAL IN STRENGTHENING THE WORKFORCE.

TRANSPORTATION IS THE CRITICAL LINK TO EMPLOYMENT. THIS BILL WILL RESULT IN ACCESSIBLE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION TO AND FROM THE WORK SITE.

LIVING INDEPENDENTLY AND WITH DIGNITY MEANS OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE FULLY IN EVERY ACTIVITY OF DAILY LIFE, BE IT GOING TO THE MOVIES, DINING IN A RESTAURANT, CHEERING AT A BASEBALL GAME, COMMUNICATING BY PHONE OR GOING TO THE DOCTOR. THE ADA OFFERS SUCH OPPORTUNITY TO PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES.

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THE TOUGH BUT FAIR ENFORCEMENT REMEDIES OF ADA, WHICH PARALLEL THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964, ARE TIME-TESTED INCENTIVES FOR COMPLIANCE AND DISINCENTIVES FOR DISCRIMINATION. THE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE EFFORTS MANDATED IN ADA WILL SUPPORT TWO EFFORTS CRITICAL TO THE MISSION OF ADA: 1) THEY WILL INFORM PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES ABOUT THEIR RIGHTS UNDER THE LAW AND 2) PROVIDE THE NECESSARY SUPPORT TO BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY AS THEY UNDERTAKE THE IMPORTANT JOB OF IMPLEMENTING THE LAW.

WE HAVE INCLUDED IN THIS LEGISLATION ALL PEOPLE WITH ALL DISABILITIES, NO MATTER HOW MISUNDERSTOOD BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT THIS BILL IS ABOUT -- REPLACING MISUNDERSTANDING WITH UNDERSTANDING. WE HAVE NOT SAID THAT YOU HAVE TO EMPLOY A PERSON IN A JOB THEY REALLY CANNOT DO, OR IN A SETTING WHERE THEY WILL POSE A DANGER TO THE HEALTH OR SAFETY OF OTHER PEOPLE. WHAT WE HAVE SAID IS THAT THESE DECISIONS MUST BE MADE ABOUT INDIVIDUALS, NOT GROUPS AND MUST BE BASED ON FACTS, NOT FEARS.

WE HAVE HAD A PATCH WORK QUILT UP UNTIL NOW -- AN INCONSISTENT AND PIECEMEAL APPROACH TO DISABILITY POLICY. TODAY WE MOVE TO EMBRACE THE MOST COMPREHENSIVE CIVIL RIGHTS LEGISLATION OUR NATION HAS EVER SEEN. TODAY WE MOVE TO PUT OLD STEREOTYPES AND ATTITUDES BEHIND US -- WHERE THEY BELONG.

NO INDIVIDUAL IN AMERICA IS MORE COMMITTED TO EQUAL OPPORTUNITY THAN PRESIDENT BUSH. HIS UNFLAGGING SUPPORT OF THE ADA AND HIS CONTINUED EAGERNESS TO SIGN THIS LEGISLATION INTO LAW ARE EVIDENCE OF UNPARALLELED LEADERSHIP IN THE WHITE HOUSE ON BEHALF OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES. WE ARE PROUD THAT WE HAVE REACHED THIS JUNCTURE, AND CONFIDENTLY SEND THIS LEGISLATION TO THE PRESIDENT'S DESK.

IN 1964 THIS BODY DECLARED DISCRIMINATION ILLEGAL AND LAID A SOLID CIVIL RIGHTS FOUNDATION FOR OUR NATION. TODAY WE BUILD UPON THAT FOUNDATION WITH THIS LANDMARK LEGISLATION PROVIDING CIVIL RIGHTS PROTECTIONS FOR THE 43 MILLION AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES. I AM PROUD OF THIS BILL, AND I LOOK FORWARD TO IT BECOMING THE LAW OF THE LAND.

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