



President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities

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On Employment of People with Disabilities
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Additional comments or messages: FYI - per our conversation. I spoke with Steve today. He says Rich Sedman is very interested in doing this. They are working on schedule.

OPA 4/93

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Good Morning. I'm honored to join this distinguished group of Americans who are working together to ensure Civil Rights in the workplace for people with disabilities.

Together we are making significant strides to shift disability policy in America away from exclusion, towards inclusion; away from dependence, towards independence; away from paternalism, and towards empowerment.

A major avenue of empowerment for the nation's 49 million Americans with Disabilities is employment. Work organizes life, and gives meaning and self-esteem to the individual. America won't work if Americans can't work and believe in the promise of tomorrow.

7 (Yet, despite the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, barriers to employment remain. Recently, some 2,000 disability leaders across the United States identified a number of these major barriers.

At the top of the list were health care and ADA implementation and enforcement.

My Administration has been working hard to address both of these issues. Both have great impact on an individual's well-being and implications for our country's economic well-being.

Reform of the nation's health care system was cited as a major concern by America's disability community leaders in a series of (more than 60) national teleconferences. As you know, I share that concern.

For real empowerment to occur, we must have a health care system that guarantees universal coverage and coverage that can never be

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taken away. We need a health care system that provides affordable delivery of services and meets the needs of consumers.

For people with disabilities, health insurance must not exclude pre-existing conditions. It must include personal assistance services and adequate mental health coverage.

Let me cite just one example of the enormous problem of pre-existing conditions in our current health insurance system. A woman with multiple sclerosis, who lives in Virginia, was denied insurance coverage on being diagnosed. She wrote: "After 10 years of battling the insurance companies, I'm not sure which is worse -- having multiple sclerosis or a health care insurance system that doesn't work."

The second major concern -- implementation of the ADA. Disability leaders urged that a vigorous implementation and enforcement program be pursued to ensure that the goals of ADA are met.

Again, I agree. I have instructed the enforcement agencies to do just that, and have made clear my strong personal support. The complaints that have been settled so far have sent a message that we are serious about including and keeping our citizens with disabilities in the workplace.

The fact is, every day the ADA proves that it's good legislation -- not just for people with disabilities, but for businesses as well. Many business people tell us that they have discovered a previously overlooked source of workers who have brought to the workplace skills and talents that are valuable in today's diverse, competitive work environment.

According to Dick Marriott, Chairman of Host Marriott

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Corporation, companies can profit by including people with disabilities in their work forces and in their marketing plans. "We currently employ over 6,000 workers with disabilities," he says. "These days in any meeting group, there is likely to be a person with a disability. If your facilities cannot accommodate that person, you don't get the business."

It's good business to hire people with disabilities.

Putting people first is my commitment to America, and that includes all people -- people with and without disabilities. In this global economy, we need all the skills, talents and diversity that America has. We do not have a single person to waste.

Civil rights and free enterprise are not in conflict. I commend the nation's disability leaders and business leaders who have joined together in mutual benefit for all.

And, I especially commend two individuals who have led the battle to bring opportunity and hope to millions of Americans with disabilities -- Justin Dart, former Chairman of the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, and Tony Coelho, the new Chairman. Both have been long-time and vocal advocates for full inclusion, empowerment and independence.

Our work is far from finished. America needs the continued leadership of everyone in this room to fulfill the promise of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Together, we can build a bigger and brighter future for every generation to come.

Justin Dart