

RECOGNIZING THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

**HON. EDOLPHUS TOWNS**

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, July 28, 2005*

Mr. TOWNS. Mr. Speaker, 15 years ago, landmark civil rights legislation—the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)—was enacted to provide a clear and comprehensive national mandate for the elimination of discrimination against individuals with disabilities.

As we celebrate the 15th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, we reaffirm the simple premise—and the law of the land—that every American has the right to live independently and to fully participate in all aspects of our society.

We also celebrate the hard-fought victories that have resulted in social inclusion so that individuals with disabilities will not be isolated and living separate lives. However, we would be remiss to think that all the barriers are behind us or that we are close to meeting the goals of the ADA.

Complete implementation of ADA policies is necessary, so that individuals with disabilities can obtain jobs for which they qualify. Full and equal access for individuals with disabilities in regards to education, governmental services, public accommodations, transportation, housing, and the right to vote must also be secured.

Let us remember, that this 15th commemoration of the ADA is our call to renew our efforts, to realize the promise of the ADA and to continue to work towards the restoration of full protections for disabled Americans.

SOLIDARITY ON 15TH ANNIVERSARY OF AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

**HON. STENY H. HOYER**

OF MARYLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, July 28, 2005*

Mr. HOYER. Mr. Speaker, as we commemorate the fifteenth anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which occurred this week, I would like to share the attached Statement of Solidarity, signed by 170 national organizations and numerous state and local organizations. This Statement of Solidarity demonstrates the strong commitment in our nation for building upon the progress achieved in the first fifteen years after passage of the ADA, and continuing to strive to improve the lives of all Americans with disabilities.

STATEMENT OF SOLIDARITY ON 15TH ANNIVERSARY OF AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT—JULY 26, 2005

Fifteen years ago today, with bipartisan support in Congress and broad endorsements from the civil rights coalition, President George H. W. Bush signed into law the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), calling for the “shameful wall of exclusion” to come tumbling down. As we mark this significant anniversary, we celebrate improvements in access to polling places and the secret ballot, government services and programs, transportation, public places, communication and in-

formation technology. Parents pushing strollers, workers delivering packages, and travelers pulling roller bags have grown accustomed to curb cuts, ramps, and other accessibility features less common in 1990. Our country is more accessible today thanks to the ADA, and all Americans are better off.

Although substantial progress has been made, we are reminded every day of the significant remnants of the “shameful wall of exclusion” that continue to prevent this great country from realizing the full promise of the ADA. The majority of Americans with disabilities continue to live in poverty and unnecessary isolation. Most adults with disabilities are either not working or not working to their full potential, robbing the economy of the contributions of tens of millions of would-be workers. Children and youth in special education continue to drop out of school in alarming numbers before obtaining a regular high school diploma. The promises of higher education, accessible and affordable housing and transportation, quality affordable healthcare, and a living wage continue to elude many adults with disabilities and their families. The ADA is slowly driving policy changes that have enabled more people with significant mental and physical disabilities to live independently in the community, but the ongoing institutional bias in the Medicaid program keeps too many people trapped in nursing homes and other institutions, unable to enjoy the freedoms and personal choices about where and how to live that other Americans take for granted.

New technologies are increasing the independence and productivity of many Americans. Yet, advances in technology alone are not guaranteed to improve the lives of people with disabilities. As we develop applications like Voice-over-Internet-Protocol (VOIP) telephony, wireless telecommunications, widespread broadband internet connectivity, new medical devices, new computer applications, and a plethora of new genetic tests, it is critical that these technologies be designed and used in a way that increases the inclusion, independence, and empowerment of Americans with disabilities as well as America’s growing senior population.

The ADA has begun to change the landscape of our cities and towns, but a civil rights law alone does not create the kind of transformation of attitudes that Americans with disabilities, their families, and allies are fighting to achieve. This kind of change requires widespread discussion, education, and consciousness-raising.

In 2005, how do fears, myths, and stereotypes continue to artificially limit understanding and acceptance of disability as a form of human diversity? What role do the mass media and entertainment industries play in forming public perceptions of disability, and how can decision makers in these important fields be influenced to produce more content that depicts the actual life experience and first person perspectives of people with disabilities? What can be done to further improve accessibility at the design stage of new products and programs? How can disability awareness and disability-friendly practices create more productive places of business and learning? What concrete actions can worship communities and sports and recreation programs take to foster full participation of children, youth, and adults with disabilities in these activities?

Why do so many Americans continue to view disability as a fate worse than death, and how do these views affect surrogate medical decision making and the application of new genetic testing technologies?

These questions form the basis of an American conversation that still needs to take place.

Widespread social change cannot simply be legislated, and it will not

occur without bold leadership from all sectors of American society.

Public and private employers, in particular, must make a serious, concerted effort to recruit and advance qualified workers with disabilities within their labor force.

Election officials must take the necessary actions to ensure that every adult is able to enter his or her polling place and cast a secret and independent vote.

School administrators and university presidents must embrace their responsibility to deliver a worldclass education to all their students.

It is time for leaders across America—business owners, little league coaches, moms and dads, sheriffs and clergy—to reject exclusion, paternalism, and segregation and to take personal responsibility for removing barriers to full participation that still exist in every community in this country.

With the aim of making America work better for everyone, the undersigned organizations pledge to build on the progress of the last 15 years and join together to promote the full participation and self-determination of the more than 50 million U.S. children and adults with disabilities. We believe that disability is a natural part of the human experience that in no way should limit the right of all people to make choices, pursue meaningful careers, live independently, and participate fully in all aspects of society. We encourage every American to join us in this cause, so that our country may continue on the path that leads to liberty and justice for all.

Signed (as of July 25, 2005):

NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

AAPD (American Association of People with Disabilities); AARP; Abilities, Inc.; ABILITY Awareness/ABILITY Magazine; ADA Watch/National Coalition for Disability Rights; ADAPT; AFL-CIO; ALDA, Inc. (Association of Late-Deafened Adults); Alliance for Children and Families; Alliance for Public Technology (APT); Alliance for Retired Americans; American Academy of Audiology; American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation; American Association for Active Lifestyles and Fitness; American Association of Leisure and Recreation; American Association of Mental Retardation; American Association of the Deaf-Blind (AADB); American Association of University Women; American Association on Health and Disability; American Congress of Community Supports and Employment Services; American Council of the Blind; American Counseling Association; American Dance Therapy Association; American Diabetes Association; American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees; American Foundation for the Blind;

American Institute on Domestic Violence; American Medical Student Association; American Medical Women’s Association (AMWA); American Music Therapy Association; American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR); American Occupational Therapy Association; American Psychological Association; American Public Health Association; American Therapeutic Recreation Association; Americans for Democratic Action (ADA); Amputee Coalition of America (ACA); APSE: The Network on Employment; Assistive Technology Industry Association (ATIA); Association of Assistive Technology Act Programs