

of our society—our schools, our businesses, and our communities. At its core, the ADA was about empowerment—giving people the tools they need to pave their own way to success. For Americans with disabilities this can mean many things, from providing information and resources, to making public transportation and housing more accessible, to improving the healthcare system.

As a result of the ADA, Americans with disabilities have made significant progress in terms of inclusion since 1990. Students with disabilities no longer have to make choices about their education based on the number of ramps on a campus or the school's willingness to put Braille signs in their dorms. Many individuals with disabilities have achieved greater participation in their communities through increased access to public buildings, improved accommodations in the workplace and a heightened awareness of their needs and talents.

My own experiences and successes are, in many ways, a direct result of the ADA's intention. When I was first elected to Congress in 2000, infrastructure changes were necessary. For example, a chair was removed from the House floor to make space for my wheelchair, and an adjustable podium was built so that I could address my colleagues on the floor. The flexibility my colleagues have shown illustrates the tremendous advances America has made in accommodating disabled employees and it demonstrates how institutions, even those steeped in tradition, can adapt to assist people in special circumstances.

Not only does society look different to people with disabilities since the ADA, it looks differently at people with disabilities. It is no longer considered charity for businesses to install support beams in their restrooms or curb cuts in their parking lots. By declaring these legal responsibilities, Congress has significantly empowered Americans with disabilities. And in the course of living up to requirements of the ADA, many business owners have discovered loyal customers and employees who might otherwise have been unable to enter their doors. The most effective businesses are active participants in their communities, and in order to be an active part of the community, a business must reach out to all of its members.

Unfortunately, in many cases my success is still the exception rather than the rule. Barriers still exist. Although a major focus of the ADA was to improve employment opportunities, there has been little change in the employment rate of people with disabilities. Only 32 percent of people of working age who have a disability are employed. And today, people with disabilities are still three times more likely to live in poverty.

In many cases, we can make change by bringing the spirit of the ADA to other government-funded programs. For example, Medicare does not sufficiently cover certain mobility devices, such as power wheelchairs, and can even work against people, by refusing to cover wheelchairs for those who are able to leave their homes. Furthermore, many forms of public transportation still aren't accessible to people with disabilities, and accessible housing is often scarce and unaffordable. Too many Americans, all of whom have gifts and talents to contribute to our country, continue to be imprisoned by their disability.

Our work, as a nation, is far from finished. We have not yet met the goal of the ADA: "to

provide a clear and comprehensive national mandate for the elimination of discrimination against individuals with disabilities." We must continue to strive for the day in our country when if you are qualified and you can do the job, you get that job—without regard to disability.

We must recommit to renewing our efforts to realize the promise of the ADA and working to restore its full protections. With thousands of severely injured soldiers returning home from Afghanistan and Iraq, we have a special responsibility to assure them that they will receive the fair treatment they deserve as they attempt to return to work and live in their communities.

We must bring our nation closer to the ideals of equality and opportunity that are both our heritage and our hope. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues in the House to continue to lead the way in our national effort to make those ideals a reality for all Americans and to support H. Res. 378.

15TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

HON. CURT WELDON

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 28, 2005

Mr. WELDON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, fifteen years ago, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law by President George H.W. Bush. As the first declaration of its kind, it was a significant moment in the battle for equality among the disabled. It is essential that on the anniversary of the ADA, we take some time to seriously reflect on the impact it has had on the lives of the 14 percent of Americans who live with at least one disability.

As a result of this act, those with disabilities are now able to travel more freely, enjoy a greater range of recreational and employment opportunities, and ultimately enjoy a higher overall standard of living. Otherwise productive Americans are no longer ostracized from their social surroundings or forced to live their lives in nursing homes or similarly confining facilities.

While more work remains to be done to ensure full integration of the disabled population into American life, I would like to acknowledge the continued success of the ADA in reinforcing the American ideals of compassion and equality for all.

THE DOMINICAN AMERICAN NATIONAL ROUNDTABLE LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE: INSPIRATION AND LESSONS

HON. CHARLES B. RANGEL

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 28, 2005

Mr. RANGEL. Mr. Speaker, I rise to share with my colleagues a wonderful meeting I had this morning with a group of bright, engaged, and active young Dominican Americans from the Dominican American National Roundtable, an organization which is becoming increas-

ingly recognized for its advocacy on behalf of the Dominican American community. Today, the inaugural group of its Dominican Leadership Institute—all young men and women attending some of the best colleges in this Nation—visited my office to discuss their views on a variety of important issues facing this country today. From immigration to education, we had a lively thoughtful exchange about the future and direction of this Nation and ways that they can get involved and make an impact on this country.

In 2005, the Dominican American National Roundtable joined with the Coca-Cola Bottling Company and the Bert Corona Leadership Institute to host the Dominican Leadership Institute. The program is designed to expose college students to the range of opportunities and skills needed for the next generation of Dominican American leaders. The Leadership Institute trains, empowers, and motivates these future leaders in the research, command and advocacy of important issues facing the Nation and, specifically, Dominican Americans.

This inaugural class of the Dominican Leadership Institute includes Edwin Zambrano, Nassar Fand Mufdi Ruiz, Pablo Rodriguez, Ysaira C. Paulino F., Bethsaida George John A. Meche, Amaris Guzman, Evelyn Ng Duran, Suhaly Bautista, Natalie C. Archibald, Karla Acevedo, and Arlenis Almonte. These students and future leaders have been exposed to the challenges of leadership, the need for innovation and creativity, and the importance of civil engagement in the political system.

During their visit to my office, we spoke about the need for a more humane and effective immigration policy, the challenges in integrating new citizens into the country, the problems of the modern family in major urban communities, and the need for a really fair trade policy. They were thoroughly knowledgeable of the topics and presented ideas and suggestions that would be quite useful to this chamber.

I was impressed by the civility, awareness and thoughtfulness of this group. They approach each issue with a determination for justice and an ear for understanding. They were articulate about their views and thoughts and shared with me their life experiences and their reasons for wanting change. While we seldom disagreed on the policy implications of the concerns they raised, I was also impressed by their willingness to hear and sympathetically comprehend all sides on each issue. This group clearly represents a promising future for the leadership of the Dominican American community and our Nation.

However, I was a bit disappointed to hear about a disturbing experience of these bright champions of change in the offices of the House. As intelligent young Americans of Dominican origin concerned about the welfare of their families and other citizens of the Dominican Republic, they rightfully were opposed to CAFTA and met another group of people who supported the bill in the Longworth Cafeteria where they were having lunch yesterday. When they initially asked the supporters about their support, they received information about the background of CAFTA. When they expressed their awareness of the trade bill and opposition to it, the supporters became rude and hostile to them and would no longer explain their rationale. This was a grand opportunity for an exchange of ideas, a meeting of the minds, but it failed, and it failed shamefully.