

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

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REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
AT 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

FDR Memorial
Washington, D.C.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much. And thank you, Justin, for all you said, all you've done; how you've been a conscience to me and to Hillary and to the Vice President and our entire administration, and to the country.

I want to thank all the members of Congress who are here, especially, obviously, Senator Harkin and Senator Hatch. But, thank you, Senator Kennedy, Senator Specter, Senator Jeffords; Senator Metzenbaum, it's good to see you back. I'd like to thank Representative Morella and former Representative Bartlett; and Secretary Mineta, former Representative Mineta, thank you for what you did on this; and recognize that Tony Coehlo, I'm not sure that he's here, but for all he did, along with -- and I thank all the members of the administration who are here: Secretary Herman, Secretary Guber and Commissioner Apfel, Director LaChance, the EEO Chairwoman, Ida Castro and many others over there.

But I'd like to especially thank the people that Justin Dart recognized, the Americans with disabilities who have made our administration the most diverse in America, and I think the best, because of their contributions in terms of reflecting America's values. Thank you, Paul Miller, Bob Williams, Marca Bristo, Judy Heumann. Thank you, Becky Ogle, and all the others who are here for what you did for our administration. (Applause.)

I finally think I've carried this too far -- there is an article in the Washington Post this morning on Becky Ogle, if you haven't seen it, you ought to. I've been here eight years and I have never gotten that good of press in the Washington Post. (Laughter.) It was amazing, so we're really making progress.

I'd also like to thank young Beth Gray, from my home state in Arkansas, for singing the National Anthem. Didn't she do a wonderful job? I thought she was really terrific. (Applause.) And all the other young people that are here.

One of the things that Tom Harkin didn't tell you about his brother, Frank, is that when we celebrated the first anniversary of the ADA, that I had a chance to celebrate as

President in 1993, we made the first – Tom and I did -- made the first and ever phone call from the White House to the nationwide relay service which allows people who are deaf to use the phone. We called Frank at home in Cumming, Iowa. And guess what? Here we were, the whole national press, we're in the Oval Office, Tom and I -- the line was busy. (Laughter.) Frank couldn't wait for us; he was already calling his friends to say hello, because he was so excited to be on the phone for the first time.

Eventually, Frank found time to take our call, and we had a wonderful visit. I say that to make this point: a lot of what the Americans With Disabilities Act is all about is making sure people can live like people, can do things that other folks take for granted. The Americans with Disabilities Act -- and I thank all these members of Congress from both parties who are here, and those who couldn't be here today -- is basically a statement by human beings that they want sympathy, no; self-determination, yes. (Applause.) That they don't want excuses; instead, they want opportunity in terms of jobs and careers.

The FDR Memorial is a pretty good place for us to be having this because, as all of you know, it is more than a monument to one of our nation's leaders. It's a symbol of who we are as a nation and what we can overcome.

Tom told me before I came up here, Senator Harkin said, you know, my father used to say that Roosevelt became President at the darkest time of our country's history; it took a disabled man to lead a disabled nation. They both forgot they had a disability by making it go away in their common endeavors. (Applause.) If we could just remember a few basic things: that everybody counts, everybody deserves a chance, everybody has a role to play, we all do better when we help each other. That's what this Memorial represents, that's what the ADA represents, that's America at its best.

You know, the ADA has changed America in ways we have, I think, forgotten to be conscious of: curb cuts, braille signs, closed captioning -- these things are part of everyday life now. It's also changing the way, I think, many Americans see one another, and dropping a lot of those invisible barriers to progress.

I was proud last year to come here to sign the Jeffords-Kennedy Work Incentive Improvement Act, last December. It was the last bill signing of the 20th century. (Applause.)

But on this 10th Anniversary, as others have said, I want us to look ahead. In the midst of the longest economic expansion in history, more Americans with disabilities are working than ever before. But far too many who want to work are still not working. So on this anniversary, we're looking forward. Yesterday, Vice President Gore announced a number of new steps we're taking to promote real choices in home and community-based services and supports, especially with technology.

Today, I thank Hillary for what she said and for her commitment. I'm the first person that ever heard that story about her going from door to door finding out why kids weren't in school 27 years ago. I've heard it several times over the last 27 years, and I

never get tired of it. Because the things that happen to us along life's way -- sometimes something simple and unexpected, that make a searing impression -- are the things that really enable us, sometimes many years later, to make a real difference.

Here's what we want to do today to help more Americans lead productive, self-sufficient lives. First, we must do more to remove barriers to work. Last year, we raised the limits people can earn while still keeping Social Security disability benefits. From now on, the earnings limit will be automatically adjusted every year, based on the national average wage index. (Applause.) Now, this will reward work and help as many as 400,000 Americans with disabilities.

Second, the federal government must lead by example. Our federal work force is the smallest in 40 years. But as we make new hires, we need to ensure that we're tapping the deepest pool of talent. Today, I will sign an executive order calling on the federal government to hire 100,000 people with disabilities by the 15th anniversary of the ADA. (Applause.) Now, one of the people on stage today is **Marque Moore**. He's a law student who helped to draft that executive order. I want to thank him, all of the people at the Office of Personnel Management. Give **Marque Moore** a big hand. Thank you. (Applause.)

Third, members of the Senate and the House have introduced the first bipartisan Family Opportunity Act, to ensure that children with disabilities can keep their Medicaid coverage even when their parents return to work. I plan to work with Congress to enact legislation to achieve those goals this year. We can do it this year. I thank the members who are here who have done that. (Applause.)

Fourth, we're going to have a new web site to be a one-stop electronic resource link for people with disabilities to log-on and get the latest information on tax credits and deductions, the nearest employment and training center, to learn more about civil rights and protections guaranteed by the ADA. It's called Access America, www.disability.gov.

And, finally, I ask Congress again to act on important pending legislation to improve the lives of people with disabilities. We must be vigilant in defending the rights we have already secured, and our budget increases funds for ADA enforcement. I also asked Congress to pass our \$1,000 tax credit to help workers with disabilities pay for support services and technologies needed to stay on the job, and our \$3,000 tax credit for Americans of all ages with long-term care needs. (Applause.)

I also say the disability community in America needs a strong hate crimes bill that protects people with disabilities and a real patients' bill of rights that covers Americans, all of them, in all health plans. (Applause.)

More than 60 years ago, President Roosevelt marked the anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. He said it was an occasion for recalling great progress, and a time for remembering that in the truest sense, freedom cannot be bestowed, it must be achieved. Because of all you have done, America has achieved greater freedom.

We have liberated not only Americans with disabilities, but as Martin Luther King said of the civil rights movement so long ago, when people find their own freedom, those who have denied it to them for too long are, themselves, made more free. We are all a freer, better country because of the ADA and what you have done. (Applause.)

When you look at the young people on this stage, you know that you have given them a better today. When we leave here, we should leave committed to giving them a much better tomorrow.

Thank you, and God bless you. (Applause.)

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11:45 A.M. EDT