

**Statement of
Reverend Jesse Jackson
President
National Rainbow Coalition**

before the

**Committee on Education and Labor
Subcommittee on Select Education**

July 18, 1989

Statement of Reverend Jesse Jackson

The eyes and hearts and hopes of Americans have, over the past several months, been focussed on Chinese students, and their struggle for dignity and democracy. As I watched their struggle, heard their eloquence, and understood their place on the right side of history, I was reminded of another group of students who fought for what they believed in, another group of students who led in the fight for justice.

I thought of the students at Gallaudet College here in Washington D.C..

I am told that the hearing impaired refer to the struggle at Gallaudet as "our Selma."

I support the Americans with Disabilities Act, the ADA bill, because I believe in civil rights, because I believe in human dignity. From Selma to Gallaudet is a straight line -- the line of justice.

Statement of Reverend Jackson

I have devoted much of my life to fighting for civil rights; it is that devotion that brings me before this subcommittee today. Mr. Chairman, members of Congress, we all know that the fight for the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was long and hard. The triumph was great. But the struggle is not over.

There is more work to be done, and the ADA represents an important step.

There are now tens of millions of Americans who lack basic civil rights protections. Men and women who can be turned away from a lunch counter, who can be refused a hotel room, who can be cast out for no reason other than ignorance and fear.

Americans with disabilities do not receive the protection of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the ADA would right that wrong.

Statement of Reverend Jackson

Workplaces will become accessible, opening the opportunity of participation and accomplishment to millions of Americans. We spend \$170 billion a year on disabled adults -- too much of it is spent maintaining dependency and activity.

Public accommodations, transportation, and telecommunications would no longer be unfairly and unjustly denied to disabled Americans.

When we open workplaces, we empower men and women -- we also save money.

Fewer dollars will be spent maintaining dependency-- more dollars will come in from taxpaying workers.

And that is one of the key lessons -- empowerment and participation for minorities benefit all Americans.

We know that integrating our society increases our moral integrity as a nation -- we must also remember it strengthens us in practical terms.

When the deaf can communicate more freely, through TDD devices, we all benefit from what they have to say.

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When a woman in a wheel chair can work instead of remain locked into a second class existence, we all win.

When people with AIDS are guaranteed basic civil rights, we all benefit. That is what the AIDS Commission understood when it called the ADA "model" legislation-- civil rights literally protect the public health.

The support for this bill is widespread -- the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights leads the list.

They understand that as long as any civil right is abridged, no civil right is secure.

We have seen many try to turn back the clock on civil rights. The Supreme Court has now thrown obstacles in the way of decades of progress.

This bill offers us a chance to just say no to injustice.

This bill offers us a chance to make our country stronger.

Statement of Reverend Jackson

Romanticized versions of the pre-civil rights past have made this country weaker -- too many young Americans have grown up knowing too little of the struggle and triumphs of the civil rights movement.

We have a chance to turn away from this "nightmare recast as dream" approach to history. We have a chance to continue to open up our nation, a chance to continue to "form a more perfect union."

We have a chance to pay real tribute to our flag. How does the Pledge of Allegiance conclude?

"And to the nation, for which it stands -- one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

For all. Not just for white male landowners. Not just for the conventionally abled. Not just for the HIV negative. Not just for the English speaking. "Liberty and justice for all."

Statement of Reverend Jackson

Doctor King made it clear to Rosa Parks that it was better to walk in dignity than ride in shame.

History has since given us a glimpse of how much better still it is to ride in dignity.

The Americans with Disability Act will fulfill this dream for millions more Americans -- we should all be proud to work for this landmark legislation.

Thank you.

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