

— Mo West —

Senator Bob Dole
Americans with Disabilities Act

July 26th, 1990 was a very proud day for me as I joined thousands of fellow Americans with disabilities to participate in the White House ceremony at which President Bush signed into law the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act.

I supported ADA from the beginning because 43 million disabled Americans deserve to be brought into the mainstream of American life -- to enjoy a meal at a restaurant, to see their favorite movie, to travel to a job on public transportation, to communicate by telephone, or to cheer at a ballgame. The ADA's unmistakable message to America is that inequality and prejudice are unacceptable. The ADA's important message to people with disabilities is that your time has come to live independently with dignity, to exercise your rights to participate in all aspects of American life.

The benefits to people with disabilities are great, and long overdue. But we must also recognize that under ADA, all Americans are winners. Our nation has paid dearly for its policies of the past. Discrimination carries a costly burden -- in both human and financial terms -- and keeping people with disabilities out of the workforce and dependent on government subsidies is a misguided policy of days gone by. And there is no doubt that as a nation, we can't afford to ignore the talents of any American. The ADA will enrich America by supporting the talents, skills and abilities of a group which until now has been on the sidelines.

When we drafted ADA, we knew there would be a lot of questions, both from people with disabilities and employers seeking to comply with the law. That's why we included important technical assistance provisions to support two efforts critical to the mission of ADA -- to inform persons with disabilities of their rights under the law, and to provide the necessary support to business and industry to fulfill the important job of implementing the law.

The bottom line for business is that ADA does not require employment of a person in a job for which he or she is not qualified, can not do, or which poses a danger to the health or safety of other people. What we have said in this legislation is that employment decisions must be made about individuals -- based on their abilities, not their disabilities. The tough but fair enforcement remedies in this law, which parallel the Civil Rights Act of 1964, combine time-tested incentives for compliance and disincentives for discrimination.

Providing civil rights protections for the 43 million Americans with disabilities builds on our nation's civil rights foundation, and sets an important tone as we head towards the 21st century. I am proud of the ADA, and I look forward to working with employers and people with disabilities as we implement this historic initiative.

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