

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

July 25, 2011

ANNIVERSARY OF THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT, 2011

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BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

A PROCLAMATION

Generations of Americans with disabilities have improved our country in countless ways. Refusing to accept the world as it was, they have torn down the barriers that prohibited them from fully realizing the American dream. Their tireless efforts led to the enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), one of the most comprehensive pieces of civil rights legislation in our Nation's history. On this day, we celebrate the 21st anniversary of the ADA and the progress we have made, and we reaffirm our commitment to ensure equal opportunity for all Americans.

Each day, people living with disabilities make immeasurable contributions to the diversity and vitality of our communities. Nearly one in five Americans lives with a disability. They are our family members and friends, neighbors and colleagues, and business and civic leaders. Since the passing of the ADA, persons with disabilities are leading fuller lives in neighborhoods that are more accessible and have greater access to new technologies. In our classrooms, young people with disabilities now enjoy the same educational opportunities as their peers and are gaining the tools necessary to reach their greatest potential.

Despite these advancements, there is more work to be done, and my Administration remains committed to ending all forms of discrimination and upholding the rights of Americans with disabilities. The Department of Justice continues to strengthen enforcement of the ADA by ensuring that persons with disabilities have access to community-based services that allow them to lead independent lives in the communities of their choosing. Under provisions of the Affordable Care Act, insurers will no longer be able to engage in the discriminatory practice of denying coverage based on pre-existing conditions, and Americans with disabilities will have greater control over their health care choices. And last year, I signed an Executive Order establishing the Federal Government as a model employer for individuals with disabilities, placing a special focus on recruitment and retention of public servants with disabilities across Federal agencies.

Through the ADA, America was the first country in the world to comprehensively declare equality for citizens with disabilities. To continue promoting these principles, we have joined in signing the Convention on the Rights of Persons with

Disabilities. At its core, this Convention promotes equality. It seeks to ensure that persons with disabilities enjoy the same rights and opportunities as all people, and are able to lead their lives as do other individuals.

Eventual ratification of this Convention would represent another important step in our forty-plus years of protecting disability rights. It would offer us a platform to encourage other countries to join and implement the Convention. Broad implementation would mean greater protections and benefits abroad for millions of Americans with disabilities, including our veterans, who travel, conduct business, study, reside, or retire overseas. In encouraging other countries to join and implement the Convention, we also could help level the playing field to the benefit of American companies, who already meet high standards under United States domestic law. Improved disabilities standards abroad would also afford American businesses increased opportunities to export innovative products and technologies, stimulating job creation at home.

Equal access, equal opportunity, and the freedom to make of our lives what we will are principles upon which our Nation was founded, and they continue to guide our efforts to perfect our Union. Together, we can ensure our country is not deprived of the full talents and contributions of the approximately 54 million Americans living with disabilities, and we will move forward with the work of providing pathways to opportunity to all of our people.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, BARACK OBAMA, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim Tuesday, July 26, 2011, the Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. I encourage Americans across our Nation to celebrate the 21st anniversary of this civil rights law and the many contributions of individuals with disabilities.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-fifth day of July, in the year of our Lord two thousand eleven, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-sixth.

BARACK OBAMA

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