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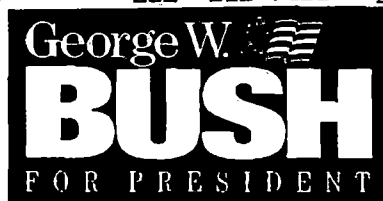
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A Reformer with Results

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, June 15, 2000

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GOVERNOR BUSH PROPOSES "NEW FREEDOM INITIATIVE" FOR AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES

Proposals Will Help Eliminate Barriers

PORTLAND, ME—Saying that "ending discrimination is just the beginning of full participation," Texas Governor George W. Bush today proposed the New Freedom Initiative to help enable Americans with disabilities to lead healthy, productive and independent lives.

"I am today proposing the New Freedom Initiative to ensure that Americans with disabilities, whether young or old, have every chance to pursue the American dream. Disabilities should not be a barrier to the pursuit of happiness," Governor Bush said. "Our society, and our government, must make every effort to enable people with disabilities to lead independent and productive lives."

The \$880 million, five-year Bush plan will help Americans with disabilities in three ways:

To increase access to technology for Americans with disabilities and to expand opportunities for them to function, learn, and live independently, Governor Bush will:

- Triple the Rehabilitative Engineering Research Centers' budget for assistive technologies, and increase tenfold the funding for low-interest loan programs to purchase assistive technologies.
- Support the goal of full funding for special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.
- Focus Title I funds on earlier grades to identify children with disabilities, and invest \$5 billion over five years to establish the "Reading First" program.
- Reform HUD's Section 8 rental voucher program for people with disabilities to permit recipients to use up to a year's worth of vouchers to finance the down payment on a home.

www.GeorgeWBush.com

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Paid for by Bush for President, Inc.

To further integrate Americans with disabilities into the workforce, as President, Governor Bush will:

- Provide \$20 million in federal matching funds to states to guarantee low-interest loans for individuals with disabilities to purchase computers and other equipment necessary to telework from home.
- Support legislation to make a company's contribution of computer and Internet access for home use a tax-free fringe benefit.
- Sign an Executive Order to support effective and swift implementation of the "Ticket-to-Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act" that gives Americans with disabilities the ability to choose their own support services and maintain their health benefits when they return to work.
- Support full enforcement of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and provide new resources for technical assistance, to help small businesses comply with the Act, serve customers, and hire more people with disabilities.

To increase access for Americans with disabilities into community life, Governor Bush will:

- Sign an Executive Order to work with states to fully implement the Supreme Court decision in *Olmstead*, to provide services in the most integrated community setting.
- Create a National Commission to recommend reforms for the mental health service delivery system.
- Support legislation to improve access to the polls and ballot secrecy for people with disabilities.
- Provide \$10 million annually to increase the accessibility of 2,000 organizations that are currently exempt from Title III of the ADA, such as churches, mosques, synagogues, and civic organizations.

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New Freedom Initiative
Thursday, June 15, 2000
Draft #4—6/14/2000

Thank you. It's good to be here, and I want to thank Alpha One for hosting me today. Your work has made a difference for so many people.

The last several decades have brought great changes in the lives of Americans with disabilities. And all of us have gained a clearer understanding of the whole range of disabilities. Old misconceptions are being discredited. Old attitudes are slowly passing away, old barriers falling away. Our goal now is clear: to speed up the day when our country has removed the last barrier to full, independent, productive lives for every person, with or without disability.

This goal follows very naturally from the most basic American ideals: Equal treatment under law. Opportunity for all. Respect for the dignity and rights of every person. That is more than our creed as a nation. It is, to paraphrase Lincoln, our responsibility as citizens — our duty as brothers and sisters of a common country. America today is blessed with so many opportunities to strive and serve and succeed. All that citizens with disabilities ask is a chance to use their own gifts, and to make their own contribution.

Many doors were opened ten years ago, when Congress passed the Americans with Disabilities Act. I support the ADA, and I am very proud that my father's signature made it the law of the land.

Because of the ADA, discrimination against a person with a disability is not just unkind or cruel or wrong: It is an infringement of federal law, and a violation of civil rights.

Because of the ADA, millions of Americans can now compete for jobs once denied them; enter buildings once closed to them; travel in buses and trains once unequipped for them. For those who are blind or deaf, for those who use walkers or wheelchairs, or have mental retardation or mental illness, we have become a more hospitable society. Ten years after the ADA became law, we are a better country for it.

But the banning of discrimination is just the beginning of full participation. Barriers remain. There are steps we can and should take to remove these barriers.

In that spirit, I am proposing today a New Freedom Initiative to ensure that all Americans with disabilities, whether young or old, have every chance to pursue the American dream — to use more of their own skills, and make more of their own choices. We must do everything we can to ensure that more Americans with disabilities can live independently, hold jobs, and

take part in the life of their communities. My administration will act in three specific areas.

First, we will promote independent living.

As you know, the wonders of technology are nowhere more gratefully received than among those who have disabilities. In millions of lives, assistive technology is helping to defeat dependence and frustration and isolation: Text telephones for the deaf. Computer monitors with braille display for the blind. Infared pointers for people who can't use their hands -- allowing them to use a computer by pointing at functions on the monitor or keyboard. Special software to help people with mental retardation learn how to read and write. Lighter wheelchairs and artificial limbs.

My administration will be a champion of assistive technology and universal design principles. Through Rehabilitation Engineering Research Centers, the federal government is a leader on assistive technology research. We will make this research a higher priority, and we will triple the current funding.

In addition, there are several thousand small businesses that have innovative ideas for assistive technology, but lack the means to bring them to market. So we will form a technology transfer fund to enable these firms to bring promising technology to the people who need it.

Thousands of people who require assistive technology cannot afford it. Alpha One was among the first to address this challenge, by working with banks and the state of Maine to arrange affordable financing for those in need. Congress has also recognized this problem by creating a low-interest loan program for those in need. My administration will increase by tenfold the resources available for this program.

Education is another key to independent living. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act guarantees children with disabilities a free and appropriate public education that meets their needs. I support the I.D.E.A. and its goals. And in meeting those goals, the federal government must pay its fair share.

Independent living should also include greater opportunities for homeownership. To provide such opportunities, we'll reform the section eight rental program. For the first time, a section eight recipient who has a disability will be able to use up to a year's worth of rental vouchers to finance the down payment on a home of their own, and continue using vouchers to pay the mortgage.

Second, we will help citizens with disabilities to claim their rightful place in the workforce.

Under the ADA, workplaces are less forbidding than they once were. Every day, millions of Americans with disabilities travel miles from home to work at full-time jobs. For others, this is impossible – and until recently, few alternatives were available to them.

All this is changing. Today more than 40 million Americans work out of their homes during all or most of the week, plugged into the company network by telephone, fax, and computer. For families across America, this change has brought great convenience and flexibility. But for those with disabilities, it's nothing less than a revolution – opening a world of new opportunities and potential.

As with assistive technology, sometimes the last limitation is simple affordability. To overcome it, my administration will create an Access to Telecommuting Fund. We will spend 20 million dollars in federal matching funds to enable Americans with disabilities to buy computers and other equipment necessary to telecommute.

I will ask Congress to change the tax treatment of computers and Internet access supplied by employers for use in the home. Making these a tax-free benefit will supply an added incentive to hire employees with disabilities who telecommute.

To create even more work opportunities, I will issue an executive order to fully and swiftly implement the recently-passed "Ticket-to-Work" law. As it is, many people with disabilities are reluctant to take a job, even a telecommuting job, for fear of losing their disability benefits and health coverage. This is a choice they should not be forced to make.

Third, we will help Americans with disabilities to gain fuller access to community life.

Every law depends on good faith in observance, and consistency in enforcement. The fact is that some requirements of ADA have yet to be fulfilled. This is especially true for people who face mental illness and mental retardation.

In the *Olmstead* case last year, the Supreme Court ruled that, wherever possible, persons with mental illness are entitled to live in the "most integrated" community settings rather than in institutions. This ruling, however, has not been completely carried out. As president, as I have as Governor, I will sign an executive order committing my administration to the implementation of the *Olmstead* decision.

I am committed to fully enforcing the ADA. And to extend compliance even further, we will devote an additional five million dollars

per year for technical assistance to small businesses to meet all requirements of the law.

We must remember that many activities of civic life are still difficult for people with disabilities. Even voting can be a hardship for them, as also for the elderly. I will work with Congress to make polling places and the voting process easier for seniors and those with disabilities.

We can also assist organizations that, while exempt from the ADA, are trying to observe it anyway. Most notable are churches, synagogues, and mosques, which want nothing more than to open their doors to all. Often, they just don't have the money. This has left many Americans with disabilities unable to worship alongside their families and neighbors. Also left out are those who would like to be active in clubs and community groups. How can they feel welcome if they can't even enter the building?

My administration will seek \$10 million each year to aid religious and civic groups in making their facilities more accessible. Over time, this will help make ramps and elevators even more common – a sign not only of more accessible buildings, but of a more welcoming society.

Next month, we mark Independence Day. A few weeks later, on July 26th, comes the tenth anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. For many across America, that day in 1990 is remembered as a personal independence day – the day the law recognized their rights and full standing as citizens of the United States.

People with disabilities confront hardship every day of their lives. To me, that leaves our society with a simple choice – whether to add to that hardship, or to try to lessen it. Whether to answer that challenge with indifference, or with generosity of spirit.

With ADA, we gave our answer. We set for ourselves a permanent standard to live by, and to govern by. I make this pledge today: in my administration we will honor that standard. We will not tolerate unfair barriers or unfair treatment for Americans with physical or mental disabilities. We will press on, until everyone has a chance to contribute – until every citizen shares in the full promise of American life.

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June 15, 2000

Governor George W. Bush
"New Freedom Initiative"

"I am proposing today the New Freedom Initiative to ensure that all Americans with disabilities, whether young or old, have every chance to pursue the American dream – to use more of their own skills and make more of their own choices. We must do everything we can to ensure that more Americans with disabilities can live independently, hold jobs, and take part in the life of their communities."

-- Governor George W. Bush

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Governor Bush believes that all Americans should have the opportunity to learn and develop skills, engage in productive work, choose where to live, and participate in community life. Too often, however, people with disabilities are trapped in bureaucracies of dependence and are denied the tools and access necessary for success. The result has been that too many Americans are shut out from the American dream.

In Texas, Governor Bush has increased opportunities for individuals with disabilities, ranging from committing additional resources for community-based services and encouraging employment, to increasing access to public facilities and making appointments to state boards, commissions, and the Texas Supreme Court. As a presidential candidate, Governor Bush has worked to make his campaign accessible to people with disabilities. To continue these efforts to expand opportunities for Americans with disabilities, Governor Bush proposes the following reforms, including a package of new initiatives totaling \$880 million over five years:

To increase access to technology for Americans with disabilities and to expand opportunities to function, learn, and live independently, as President, Governor Bush will:

- Triple the Rehabilitative Engineering Research Centers' budget for assistive technologies, create a new fund to help bring assistive technologies to market, and increase tenfold the funding for low-interest loan programs to purchase assistive technologies.
- Work with Congress to increase funding for special education with the goal of meeting the federal obligation under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.
- Focus Title I funds on earlier grades to identify children with disabilities, and invest \$5 billion over five years to establish the "Reading First" program.
- Reform HUD's Section 8 rental voucher program for people with disabilities to permit recipients to use up to a year's worth of vouchers to finance the down payment on a home.

To further integrate Americans with disabilities into the workforce, as President, Governor Bush will:

- Provide \$20 million in federal matching funds to states to guarantee low-interest loans for individuals with disabilities to purchase computers and other equipment necessary to telework from home.
- Support legislation to make a company's contribution of computer and Internet access for home use by employees with disabilities a tax-free benefit.
- Sign an Executive Order to support effective and swift implementation of the "Ticket-to-Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act" that gives Americans with disabilities the ability to choose their own support services and maintain their health benefits when they return to work.
- Support full enforcement of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and provide new resources for technical assistance, to help small businesses comply with the Act.

To increase access for Americans with disabilities into community life, Governor Bush will:

- Sign an Executive Order supporting the most integrated community-based settings for individuals with disabilities, pursuant to the Supreme Court decision in *Olmstead*.
- Create a National Commission to recommend reforms of the mental health service delivery system.
- Support improving access to the polls and ballot secrecy for people with disabilities.
- Provide \$10 million in matching funds annually to increase the accessibility of organizations that are currently exempt from Title III of the ADA, such as churches, mosques, synagogues, and civic organizations.

Challenge and Opportunity

Today, there are over 54 million Americans with disabilities, a full 20 percent of the U.S. population. Almost half of these individuals have a severe disability, affecting their ability to see, hear, have speech understood, walk, or perform other basic functions of life. In addition, there are over 25 million family caregivers and millions more who provide aid and assistance to people with disabilities.

Beyond the numbers, disabilities can affect a person's ability to engage in major life activities. For a child, this may mean a more difficult process of learning or playing with friends. For young people and adults, disabilities may affect attending school, working, keeping house, and caring for oneself.

Recent data show that Americans with disabilities continue to face obstacles in education, employment, income, political participation, and participation in community life:

- One out of five adults with disabilities has not graduated from high school, compared to less than one of ten adults without disabilities.
- Among adults with disabilities age 18 to 64, only 29 percent work full- or part-time, compared to 79 percent of those without disabilities.
- In 1997, over one-third of adults with disabilities lived in a household with an annual income of less than \$15,000, compared to only 12 percent of those without disabilities.
- Only 69% of adults with disabilities socialize with close friends, relatives or neighbors at least once a week, while 84% of adults without disabilities do, and approximately one-third of adults with disabilities go out to a restaurant once a week, while 60 percent of those without disabilities do so.
- Six out of ten adults with disabilities were registered to vote in the 1996 presidential election, compared with almost eight out of ten adults without disabilities. Voter registration services from government or community agencies have been offered to only a small percentage of adults with disabilities.

Although progress has been made over the last two decades – most prominently with the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 – to improve access to employment, public accommodations, commercial facilities, telecommunications services, housing, schools, and polling places, much more needs to be done to provide choices and opportunities to Americans with disabilities.

A. Promoting Independence

Assistive and Universally Designed Technologies

The National Council on Disability (NCD) has stated, “for Americans without disabilities, technology makes things easier. For Americans with disabilities, technology makes things possible.” Assistive and universally designed technology can significantly enhance the quality of life for many of America's 54 million Americans with disabilities. As examples, over 7.4

million Americans use assistive technology for mobility impairments, 4.6 million for back braces and artificial limbs, 4.5 million for hearing impairments, and 500,000 for vision impairments. New technologies are opening opportunities for even those with the most severe disabilities: for example, individuals with quadriplegia can now operate computers by the glance of an eye.

Currently, over a dozen federal programs and many of the 700 federal laboratories are involved in assistive technology research and development. The NCD, however, has found that federal policies often act as a barrier to the development and dissemination of assistive technology. As the NCD recently reported, "these barriers translate into poor quality of life for people who need the assistive technology they cannot get...[federal assistive technology policies] are a maze of conflicting definitions, eligibility criteria, philosophical models, and requirements for access to assistive technology."

Factors that limit access to assistive technology include:

- Inadequate funding for research;
- Lack of effective coordination among federal agencies and between the private and public sectors; and
- Insufficient incentives to help Americans with disabilities acquire assistive technology.

As President, Governor Bush will work to remove these barriers to assistive technology so that every American has the opportunity to fully participate in society. In the new economy, America must draw on the talents and creativity of every American, particularly since America is currently facing a 1.6 million worker shortage in information technology, reducing the U.S. economy by an estimated \$105 billion annually.

Increase Investment in Assistive Technology R&D

The National Institute on Disability Rehabilitative Research (NIDRR) is the most important agency dealing with assistive technology research and development in the federal government, accounting for 50 percent of appropriated funds for such purposes. Located within the U.S. Department of Education, NIDRR works to generate, disseminate and promote new knowledge to improve the options available to people with disabilities.

Rehabilitative Engineering Research Centers (RERCs) funded through NIDRR are recognized as conducting some of the most innovative and high impact assistive technology research in the federal government. Each RERC focuses on a specific area of research, such as information technology access, prosthetics and orthotics, and technology for children with orthopedic disabilities. The 15 RERCs are housed in the following universities and other non-profit institutions around the country and perform the following research:

<u>Institutions</u>	<u>Research</u>
Los Amigos Research and Education Institute <i>Downey, CA</i>	Children with Orthopedic Disabilities
Smith-Kettlewell Eye Research Institute <i>San Francisco, CA</i>	Vision Impairments
Catholic University of America <i>Washington, DC</i>	Telerehabilitation
Northwestern University <i>Chicago, IL</i>	Prosthetics and Orthotics
Physicians Against Land Mines <i>Chicago, IL</i>	Technology for Land Mine Survivors
University of Michigan <i>Ann Arbor, MI</i>	Ergonomic Solutions for Employment
State University of New York (SUNY) <i>Buffalo, NY</i>	Assistive Technology for the Elderly
State University of New York (SUNY) <i>Buffalo, NY</i>	Technology Transfer
State University of New York (SUNY) <i>Buffalo, NY</i>	Universal Design & Built Environment
Lexington School for the Deaf/Center for the Deaf <i>Jackson Heights, NY</i>	Hearing Enhancement & Assistive Devices
Duke University <i>Durham, NC</i>	Communication Enhancement
North Carolina State University <i>Raleigh, NC</i>	Universal Design & Built Environment
University of Pittsburgh <i>Pittsburgh, PA</i>	Wheeled Mobility
University of Wisconsin/Madison <i>Madison, WI</i>	Information Technology Access
University of Wisconsin College of Engineering <i>Madison, WI</i>	Telecommunication Access

Increased funding would widen and deepen areas of research specifically targeted to the disabled community. Therefore, as President, Governor Bush will increase the investment in these high impact programs. Specifically, he will:

Triple the Research Budget of the Rehabilitative Engineering Research Centers (RERC): As President, Governor Bush will triple the funding from \$11 million to \$33 million per year for advanced research in the development and application of assistive technology.

Improve Federal Collaboration and Private-Public Partnerships

In addition, NIDRR has failed to serve as an effective coordinating body because the Interagency Committee on Disabilities Research (ICDR) housed within NIDRR has no real authority. As part of Title II of the Technology Assistance Act of 1998, Congress authorized, but did not appropriate, funds for ICDR to coordinate the federal efforts to promote assistive technology.

In addition, there are barriers to bringing new assistive technologies to market. There are nearly 2,500 companies working to bring assistive technologies to millions of disabled Americans. Many companies, however, cannot make the necessary capital investments until they have information concerning the market for a particular assistive technology. According to the Chief of the Commercial Technology Office at NASA, "the end result is that while the necessary technology may exist in many cases, the private sector is often not able to apply it to serve the needs of many disabled Americans."

To improve the coordination of federal research in and commercial development of assistive technology, as President, Governor Bush will:

Fund the Interagency Committee on Disability Research (ICDR): As President, Governor Bush will provide \$3 million in new funding annually to the ICDR to increase its ability to coordinate the federal effort. These improvements will be achieved by hiring staff who will prioritize immediate assistive and universally designed technology needs in the disability community, as well as by fostering information transfer and collaborative projects between the federal laboratories and the private sector.

Establish a new "Assistive Technology Development Fund": Housed under the ICDR, this newly-created \$5 million annual fund will help underwrite technology demonstration, testing, validation and market assessment to meet specific needs of small businesses, with minimal paperwork and turnaround times.

Increase Access to Assistive Technology

Assistive technology is often prohibitively expensive. Personal computers configured with assistive technology can cost anywhere from \$2,000 to \$20,000. Micro-loan programs for interest rate buy-downs or loan guarantees are powerful tools to enable people with disabilities to buy the technology they need to be independent and productive. In a recent national survey, 61% of respondents who participated in such programs said they could not have otherwise afforded the product.

Congress has recognized the value of low-interest loans, authorizing \$25 million for such programs in Title III of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998. Only \$4 million was appropriated in FY2000, however. According to the National Council on Disability, "the availability of low-interest or even no-interest loans to people with disabilities through Title III would significantly increase the availability of a whole host of [assistive technology] devices, equipment, and services to people who currently have little or no access to [assistive technology]." Such incentives and loans lead to more productive lives for people with disabilities, while lessening the financial burdens on society.

Therefore, as President, Governor Bush will:

Increase Funding for Low-Interest Loan Programs to Purchase Assistive Technology: Funding for the federal low-interest loan program to purchase Assistive Technology will be increased from \$4 million to \$40 million annually. These grants must go to a state agency in collaboration with a bank or non-profit groups to guarantee loans and lower interest rates.

Education for Children with Disabilities

Originally passed by Congress in 1975, the *Individuals with Disabilities Act*, or IDEA, ensures that children with disabilities would have a free public education that would meet their unique needs. The IDEA defines “children with disabilities” as having any of the following types of disabilities: autism, deaf-blindness, hearing impairments, mental retardation, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairments, other health impairments, serious emotional disturbance, specific learning disabilities, speech or language impairments, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairments.

The federal government has not been providing sufficient funding for the IDEA. By not providing the necessary federal IDEA funds, the program has become a large unfunded mandate on state and local governments and is failing to meet the needs of disabled children.

Governor Bush believes that no child can be left behind, including those with disabilities. Therefore as President, Governor Bush will:

Work with Congress to Increase Funding for Special Education with the Goal of Meeting the Federal Obligation under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: Governor Bush would set the goal of increasing funding for the IDEA to reduce the unfunded mandate on the states and increase educational assistance to disabled students.

Governor Bush also believes it is equally important to emphasize preventative efforts to identify children with special needs. Early detection of needs will greatly benefit children by giving students the necessary help early, while reducing costs to local, state and the federal government as fewer children are diagnosed as needing IDEA services.

To further these efforts, as President, Governor Bush will:

Focus Title I Funds on Earlier Grades: Students in K-12 will still be eligible for Title I, but Title I funds will focus on students in the elementary grades, where math and reading difficulties can be corrected before children are diagnosed as needing special education services.

Establish the “Reading First” Program to Invest \$5 Billion over Five Years: Governor Bush will increase federal funding to students, including those with disabilities, by creating a \$5 billion incentive fund for states to teach every child to read by third grade. States that choose to draw from this fund will be required to initiate, among other requirements: a reading diagnostic test for students in K-2 to determine where students need help, a research-based reading curriculum, training for K-2 teachers in reading preparation, and intervention for students who are not reading at grade level in K-2.

Homeownership for People with Disabilities

Rental assistance for Americans with disabilities is provided by a program known as Section 8 of the Housing Act of 1937, administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Residents are provided Section 8 vouchers so they can afford rental payments for public housing. Nearly one-quarter of all Section 8 vouchers are given to individuals with disabilities under the age of 62.

Homeownership has always been at the heart of the American dream. Individuals with disabilities should not be bound to a government program that only allows them to rent. Instead, individuals with disabilities who are recipients of Section 8 vouchers for rental payments should be given the opportunity to buy a home.

In addition to increasing independence, homeownership also promotes savings. Mortgage payments, unlike rental payments, help build net worth because a portion of the payment goes toward building equity. In turn, as one's home equity increases, it becomes easier to finance larger purchases such as a computer or further education.

To empower individuals with disabilities who receive Section 8 vouchers with more tools for independence, as President, Governor Bush will:

<u>Reform Section 8 to Allow Recipients who are Disabled to Apply Their Rental Vouchers to Homeownership</u>: Governor Bush will support legislation allowing local Public Housing Authorities to provide recipients of Section 8 vouchers who are disabled with up to a year's worth of vouchers in a lump-sum payment to finance the down payment and closing costs on a home. Section 8 recipients who are disabled will also be permitted to use vouchers to subsidize their monthly mortgage payments. Individuals and families that receive down payment assistance will be required to complete a homeownership/financial management program, such as that offered by Habitat for Humanity and other non-profit groups.

B. Integrating Americans with Disabilities into the Workforce

Promoting Telework

Computer technology and the Internet have tremendous potential to broaden the lives and increase the independence of people with disabilities. Nearly half of people with disabilities say the Internet has significantly improved their quality of life, compared to 27 percent of people without disabilities. With the advent of widespread Internet access and innovative computing and web-based technologies, it is possible for significant numbers of workers with disabilities to do their jobs seamlessly from home.

The computer and Internet revolution has not reached as many people with disabilities as the population without disabilities. Only 25% of people with disabilities own a computer, compared with 66% of U.S. adults. And only 10% of people with disabilities have access to the Internet, compared to over 40% of U.S. adults. The primary barrier to wider access is cost. Computers with adaptive technology can cost as much as \$20,000, which is prohibitively expensive for many individuals. The median income of Americans with disabilities is far below the national average.

Many companies have decided to give new computers and Internet access to their employees for home use. Many more are looking to do so. The value of the computer and the Internet provided, however, are treated under the tax code as a taxable fringe benefit, forcing companies to withhold income tax to reflect the tax value of the donation. Employees are also concerned about the loss of pay.

An additional potential barrier is federal regulation. This past January, the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) issued a 5-page advisory asserting that it had the power to regulate home office standards and hold employers responsible if those standards were not met. This proposal would have had a chilling effect on teleworking, as employers would seek to avoid potential liabilities. Although OSHA has since withdrawn the advisory, it has not foreclosed future action.

To help Americans with disabilities purchase teleworking tools, encourage companies to contribute these items, and ensure that federal regulations promote, rather than impede, the growth of telework, as President, Governor Bush will:

Create the "Access to Telework" Fund: Governor Bush will provide \$20 million in federal matching funds annually to states to guarantee low-income loans for people with disabilities to purchase equipment to telecommute from home.

Make a Company's Contribution of Computer and Internet Access for Home Use by Employees with Disabilities a Tax-Free Benefit: The value of a computer, software and peripheral equipment provided to employees with disabilities would be excludable from income. This proposal is estimated to cost \$75 million annually.

Pass Legislation that Would Prevent OSHA from Regulating "Home Office" Standards: The Federal Government would amend the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 to prohibit OSHA from being applied to employees who work at home through the use of "telephone, computer or electronic device."

Ticket-to-Work

Throughout his campaign, Governor Bush has supported the "Ticket-to-Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999," which will give Americans with disabilities both the incentive and the means to seek employment. Now that the bill has been signed into law, Governor Bush is calling for its swift implementation.

Today, there are more than 7.5 million Americans with disabilities receiving benefits under federal disability programs. According to a recent Harris Survey, 72 percent of the disabled want to work. However, because of perverse disincentives in federal law, less than 1 percent of those receiving disability benefits enter the workforce.

The principle programs that provide disability benefits are the Social Security Disability Insurance program (SSDI) and the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program. Additionally, disabled Americans receive health benefits from Medicare, and in some cases, Medicaid as well. Both SSDI and SSI include work incentives and offer rehabilitation.

Prior to the "Ticket to Work" law, a recipient's impairment made him or her unable to engage in any substantial work activity, thereby creating a disincentive to seek employment. In order to continue to receive disability payments and health coverage, the prior law required that a recipient could not engage in any substantial work. Obviously, this created an enormous disincentive to seek employment.

Governor Bush encourages swift implementation of the new law that:

- Provides disabled Americans with a voucher-like "ticket" that allows them to choose their own support services, including vocational education programs and rehabilitation services.
- Extends Medicare coverage for SSDI beneficiaries so they can return to work without the fear of losing health benefits.
- Expands Medicaid eligibility categories for SSI recipients so that they can continue to receive benefits even after their income, resources, or medical condition improves.

To increase opportunities for individuals with disabilities to enter the workforce, as President, Governor Bush will:

Sign an Executive Order to Support Effective and Swift Implementation of "Ticket to Work":

The Executive Order will direct federal agencies to swiftly implement the law giving Americans with disabilities the ability to choose their own support services and to maintain their health benefits when they return to work.

Compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act

When the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law on July 26, 1990, it was the most far reaching law advancing disabled individuals' access, workforce integration, and independence. The law, signed by President George Bush, gives civil rights protections to individuals with disabilities that are like those provided to individuals on the basis of race, sex, national origin, and religion.

In the ten years since it was signed, the ADA has worked to guarantee equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities in employment, public accommodations, transportation, State and local government services, and telecommunications. The law has been especially helpful in providing physical access for commerce and access to jobs, especially in the small business sector of the United States, which has created two-thirds of all net new jobs since the early 1970s.

To encourage small businesses to comply with the ADA, legislation was signed into law in 1990 to provide a credit for 50 percent of eligible expenses up to \$5,000 a year. Such eligible expenses include assistive technologies. Unfortunately, many small businesses are not aware of this credit.

Governor Bush believes that the Americans with Disabilities Act has been an integral component of the movement toward full integration of individuals with disabilities, but recognizes that there

is still much more to be done. He also recognizes that to further integrate individuals with disabilities into the workforce, more needs to be done to promote ADA compliance and financial incentives among small businesses. That is why as President, Governor Bush will:

Support ADA and Provide Technical Assistance to help Small Businesses Comply: Governor Bush will support full enforcement of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and provide \$5 million annually for technical assistance to help small businesses comply with the Act, serve customers, and hire more people with disabilities.

Promote the Awareness and Utilization of Disabled Access Credit (DAC): The DAC, created in 1990, is an incentive program to assist small businesses in complying with the ADA. DAC provides a credit for 50 percent of eligible expenses up to \$5,000 a year, including expenses associated with making their facilities accessible and with purchasing assistive technologies. Utilization of the credit has been limited because small businesses are often not aware of it.

C. Increasing Access

Commitment to Community-Based Care

On June 22, 1999, the Supreme Court decided *Olmstead v. L.C.*, holding that the ADA requires the placement of persons with mental disabilities in a community setting wherever possible. The Court concluded that "unjustified isolation," i.e., institutionalization when a doctor deems community treatment equally beneficial, "is properly regarded as discrimination based on disability."

Olmstead has yet to be implemented. Governor Bush supports community-based services, and, under his administration, funding for such programs in the State of Texas has increased by more than \$1.7 billion, a 72 percent increase. In response to the *Olmstead* decision, on September 29, 1999, Governor Bush signed Executive Order GWB 99-2, calling for compliance with *Olmstead* through an immediate review of all services and support systems for Texans with disabilities and removal of barriers to community placement.

Governor Bush believes that community-based care is critically important to promoting maximum independence and to integrating individuals with disabilities into community life.

That is why, as President, Governor Bush will:

Sign an Executive Order Supporting Swift Implementation of the *Olmstead* Decision: Governor Bush will enter an Executive Order supporting the most integrated community-based settings for individuals with disabilities, pursuant to the *Olmstead* decision, and call for the identification and removal of barriers to community placement.

Direct the National Institute of Mental Health and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to Coordinate New Research Initiatives and Innovative Pilot Programs to Support Such Reforms: To ensure that the states come into compliance with *Olmstead* by instituting mental health reforms, Governor Bush will direct the National Institute of Mental Health and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to coordinate research initiatives and innovative pilot projects to further support such reforms. Reform will include promoting effective, innovative treatments, such as the nationally-recognized "Assertive Community Treatment Program." Reform will also include making the mental health system more accountable through outcome measures.

Better Coordination of Federal Resources to Address Mental Health Problems

Currently, there are over 13 federal agencies that oversee mental health policies, funding, laws and programs including: the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Office of Personnel and Management, Social Security Administration, National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, Department of Housing and Urban Development, Department of Justice, and Department of Labor.

These disparate agencies are doing valuable work, but they could be much more effective, efficient, and less duplicative if they were better coordinated. For instance, the Stanley Foundation Research Programs recently reported that the National Institute for Mental Health (NIMH) dedicates only 36 percent of its research funds to support basic and clinical research on severe mental illness.

With coordination, the competitive advantage of each agency could be leveraged so that the agency would provide the most needed and suitable service in the framework of federal efforts to address mental health. That is why Governor Bush, as President will:

Create a National Commission on Mental Health Services : The National Commission would study and make recommendations for improving America's mental health service delivery system, including making recommendations on the availability and delivery of new treatments and technologies for individuals with severe mental illness.

Access to the Political Process

There are over 35 million voting-age persons with disabilities, but currently people with disabilities register to vote at a rate that is 16 percentage points less than the rest of the population and vote at a rate 20 percent below non-disabled voters. If people with disabilities voted at the same rate as those without disabilities, five million more votes would have been cast in the last presidential election.

According to the National Organization on Disability, low voter turnout among people that are disabled is due to both accessibility problems at voting locations and the lack of secrecy and independence when voting. The most recent Federal Election Commission (FEC) report states that at least 20,000 of the nation's more than 120,000 polling places are inaccessible to people with disabilities.

To assess the scope of the problem nationwide, a Government Accounting Office study has been requested and is expected to be completed by the end of the year. Senators John McCain and John Kerry have sponsored important legislation to increase access to voting locations.

Governor Bush recognizes that full integration into society must include access to and participation in the political process. That is why, as President, Governor Bush will:

Support Improving Accessibility to Voting for Americans with Disabilities: Governor Bush will support improved access to polling places and ballot secrecy. He will work with Congress to address the barriers to voting for Americans with Disabilities.

Access to ADA-Exempt Organizations

Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, opened countless businesses and public accommodations to people with disabilities by mandating that they be made accessible. For constitutional and other concerns, however, Title III exempts many civic organizations (such as Rotary and Lions Clubs) and religious organizations from its requirements of full access.

Americans with disabilities should be able to be fully integrated into their communities, and civic and religious organizations are vital parts of those communities. Too many private clubs, churches, synagogues and mosques are inaccessible or unwelcoming to people with disabilities. As a result, people with disabilities are often unable to participate as fully in community or religious events as are people without disabilities.

The National Organization on Disabilities has led a national effort to make places of worship accessible and welcoming to all Americans. Many organizations and congregations want to be open to all, but have limited resources to ensure accessibility.

Governor Bush believes that we should make every effort to ensure that Americans with disabilities have every opportunity to be integrated into their communities. Therefore, as President, Governor Bush will:

Establish a National Fund to Provide \$10 Million in Matching Grants for Accessibility Renovations for ADA-Exempt Organizations: To assist private clubs and religious organizations in making sure their facilities are fully accessible and to expand access for all, Governor Bush will propose legislation to provide \$10 million in annual federal matching grants to ADA-exempt organizations making renovations or accommodations to improve accessibility. Because the grants would go to all ADA-exempt organizations, irrespective of whether they are religious or secular, they would comport with the Supreme Court's test for constitutional neutrality.

SUMMARY OF GOVERNOR GEORGE W. BUSH'S RECORD OF INCREASING ACCESS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN TEXAS

Increased Access to Services

- Worked with the Legislature to increase funding for community-based services by more than \$1.7 billion, a 72 percent increase since taking office
- In September 1999, Directed the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to conduct a comprehensive review of all services and support systems available to people with disabilities in Texas and make recommendations on how Texas can improve its programs for people with disabilities
- Signed legislation creating a pilot voucher program for personal assistance services
- Promoted and signed legislation that created the Children's Health Insurance Program providing access to health care for every child up to 200% of the poverty level, including children with disabilities
- Signed legislation that requires that at least one member of the board of the Texas Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation be a consumer of MHMR services, or a family member of a consumer of those services

Increased Access to Employment

- Released first-ever Texas data about state employees with disabilities showing that professional level employment of persons with disabilities in state government is increasing
- Encouraged state agency directors to increase employment of persons with disabilities and to use the Job Accommodation Network to make reasonable accommodations
- Employed college students with disabilities in the "Governor's Fellowship Program"

- Signed legislation that strengthened non-discrimination based on genetic testing

Increased Access through Appointments

- Appointed an accomplished attorney with a disability to the Texas Supreme Court
- Appointed many Texans with disabilities to serve on state boards and commissions such as the Science and Technology Council, the Board of Architectural Examiners, the Board for Nursing Facility Administrators, as well as many disability-related boards

Increased Education Access

- Promoted and signed legislation that provided for increased local control of education, including increased district and campus accountability for performance of students with disabilities
- Signed revisions to the Texas Education Code allowing assistive technology devices to follow students to new school districts or to adult service providers
- Required the Texas Education Agency to provide parents of special education students a comprehensive, easily understood document setting forth their legal rights and responsibilities.
- Signed legislation that increased the use of Spanish in the development of individualized special education plans as necessary.

Increased Technology Access

- Created a Governor's Office website that includes disability information
- Signed legislation that requires state agency websites to be accessible to persons with disabilities
- Signed legislation that ensured accessible telecommunications services to Texans with disabilities

- Signed legislation creating and expanding a specialized telecommunications device assistance program for people with disabilities

Increased Access to Communities, Public Facilities and Homes

- Signed legislation that improved accessible parking for persons with disabilities, including increased fines for violators
- Signed legislation that strengthened the state architectural barriers act which includes a system of building plan reviews and inspections
- Promoted and signed legislation creating funding for preservation of historic Texas county courthouses, that can include ADA renovations
- One of fewer than five states, whose accessibility standards have been certified by the U.S. Department of Justice as equivalent to the ADA accessibility guidelines
- Signed legislation that requires "visitability," basic access, in publicly funded, single family homes
- Signed legislation that defined assistance dogs to include guide and support dogs and increased penalties for the denial of admittance to public facilities by persons using such dogs
- Signed legislation that requires reasonable accommodations for jurors who are deaf or hard of hearing
- Provided training for Governor's Office employees on the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act
- Completed renovation of the Governor's Mansion and office building to increase accessibility for people with disabilities

George W. Bush Campaign – Accessible to People with Disabilities

- Campaign office is accessible to individuals using wheelchairs.
- Campaign events are translated into sign language.
- Campaign phones are accessible to hearing impaired individuals through a Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD).
- Campaign Website is moving toward full accessibility. By next month, the website will be fully accessible to individuals with disabilities.
- Campaign materials are accessible for individuals whose sight is impaired. Materials for the sight impaired are available in Braille and large print from the campaign.

JUSTIN DART, JR.
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WASHINGTON, DC 20024
202-488-7684

June 21, 2000

Positive Bush Statement on Disability

Dear Colleagues:

On Thursday, June 15th presidential candidate, George W. Bush made the following statement on disability at Alpha One independent living center in Portland, Maine (a more extensive writing on disability policy is available from the Bush campaign website).

I congratulate Governor Bush on a message which is night and day more positive than his April 11th statement that people with severe disabilities "can't help themselves" and would be the subjects of "care" and "charities."

The Governor pledged complete support for the ADA and said **"We will press on, until everyone has a chance to contribute – until every citizen shares in the full promise of American life."** He set out several specific initiatives, including increased funding for assistive technology.

He promised full implementation of the Olmstead Supreme Court decision, which Texas, under his governorship, opposed. He did not state a position on the Garrett case, which threatens to destroy a substantial part of the ADA. Certain important policy areas were focused on lightly or not at all.

In the spirit of his positive statement, I assume that Governor Bush and his staff will hold in-depth consultations with national and local leaders of the disability community to flesh out his disability policy.

I congratulate Steve Tremblay and all at Alpha One on their leadership participation in the democratic process. Steve and two colleagues were able to meet with the Governor for a few minutes after his speech. Steve reported a positive impression of the candidate: **"I believe he is sincere in his pledges."**

Colleagues, while **I have not changed my well-known support for Vice President Gore** – I give more weight to candidates' records than to their campaign statements – I consider the Governor's message to constitute progress for the recognition of disability rights. **And I congratulate you, the soldiers of justice.** Your advocacy made this progress possible.

I love you. Lead on.


Justin Dart

Governor George W. Bush
New Freedom Initiative
Thursday, June 15, 2000

Thank you. It's good to be here, and I want to thank Alpha One for hosting me today. Your work has made a difference for so many people.

The last several decades have brought great changes in the lives of Americans with disabilities. And all of us have gained a clearer understanding of the whole range of disabilities. Old misconceptions are being discredited. Old attitudes are slowly passing away, old barriers falling away. Our goal now is clear: to speed up the day when our country has removed the last barrier to full, independent, productive lives for every person, with or without disability.

This goal follows very naturally from the most basic American ideals: Equal treatment under law. Opportunity for all. Respect for the dignity and rights of every person. That is more than our creed as a nation. It is, to paraphrase Lincoln, our responsibility as citizens – our duty as brothers and sisters of a common country. America today is blessed with so many opportunities to strive and serve and succeed. All that citizens with disabilities ask is a chance to use their own gifts, and to make their own contribution.

Many doors were opened ten years ago, when Congress passed the Americans with Disabilities Act. I support the ADA, and I am very proud that my father's signature made it the law of the land.

Because of the ADA, discrimination against a person with a disability is not just unkind or cruel or wrong: It is an infringement of federal law, and a violation of civil rights.

Because of the ADA, millions of Americans can now compete for jobs once denied them; enter buildings once closed to them; travel in buses and trains once unequipped for them. For those who are blind or deaf, for those who use walkers or wheelchairs, or have mental retardation or mental illness, we have become a more hospitable society. Ten years after the ADA became law, we are a better country for it.

But the banning of discrimination is just the beginning of full participation. Barriers remain. There are steps we can and should take to remove these barriers.

In that spirit, I am proposing today a New Freedom Initiative to ensure that all Americans with disabilities, whether young or old, have every chance to pursue the American dream – to use more of their own skills, and make more of their own choices. We must do everything we can to ensure that more Americans with disabilities can live independently, hold jobs, and take part in the life of their communities. My administration will act in three specific areas.

First, we will promote independent living.

As you know, the wonders of technology are nowhere more gratefully received than among those who have disabilities. In millions of lives, assistive technology is helping to defeat dependence and frustration and isolation: Text telephones for the deaf. Computer monitors with braille display for the blind. Infrared pointers for people who can't use their hands – allowing them to use a computer by pointing at functions on the monitor or keyboard. Special software to help people with mental retardation learn how to read and write. Lighter wheelchairs and artificial limbs.

My administration will be a champion of assistive technology and universal design principles. Through Rehabilitation Engineering Research Centers, the federal government is a leader on assistive technology research. We will make this research a higher priority, and we will triple the current funding.

In addition, there are several thousand small businesses that have innovative ideas for assistive technology, but lack the means to bring them to market. So we will form a technology transfer fund to enable these firms to bring promising technology to the people who need it.

Thousands of people who require assistive technology cannot afford it. Alpha One was among the first to address this challenge, by working with banks and the state of Maine to arrange affordable financing for those in need. Congress has also recognized this problem by creating a low-interest loan program for those in need. My administration will increase by tenfold the resources available for this program.

Education is another key to independent living. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act guarantees children with disabilities a free and appropriate public education that meets their needs. I support the I.D.E.A. and its goals. And in meeting those goals, the federal government must pay its fair share.

Independent living should also include greater opportunities for homeownership. To provide such opportunities, we'll reform the section eight rental program. For the first time, a section eight recipient who has a disability will be able to use up to a year's worth of rental vouchers to finance the down payment on a home of their own, and continue using vouchers to pay the mortgage.

Second, we will help citizens with disabilities to claim their rightful place in the workforce.

Under the ADA, workplaces are less forbidding than they once were. Every day, millions of Americans with disabilities travel miles from home to work at full-time jobs. For others, this is impossible – and until recently, few alternatives were available to them.

All this is changing. Today more than 40 million Americans work out of their homes during all or most of the week, plugged into the company network by telephone, fax, and computer. For families across America, this change has brought great convenience and flexibility. But for those with disabilities, it's nothing less than a revolution – opening a world of new opportunities and potential.

As with assistive technology, sometimes the last limitation is simple affordability. To overcome it, my administration will create an Access to Telecommuting Fund. We will spend 20 million dollars in federal matching funds to enable Americans with disabilities to buy computers and other equipment necessary to telecommute.

I will ask Congress to change the tax treatment of computers and Internet access supplied by employers for use in the home. Making these a tax-free benefit will supply an added incentive to hire employees with disabilities who telecommute.

To create even more work opportunities, I will issue an executive order to fully and swiftly implement the recently-passed "Ticket-to-Work" law. As it is, many people with disabilities are reluctant to take a job, even a telecommuting job, for fear of losing their disability benefits and health coverage. This is a choice they should not be forced to make.

Third, we will help Americans with disabilities to gain fuller access to community life.

Every law depends on good faith in observance, and consistency in enforcement. The fact is that some requirements of ADA have yet to be fulfilled. This is especially true for people who face mental illness and mental retardation.

In the *Olmstead* case last year, the Supreme Court ruled that, wherever possible, persons with mental illness are entitled to live in the "most integrated" community settings rather than in institutions. This ruling, however, has not been completely carried out. As president, as I have as Governor, I will sign an executive order committing my administration to the implementation of the *Olmstead* decision.

I am committed to fully enforcing the ADA. And to extend compliance even further, we will devote an additional five million dollars per year for technical assistance to small businesses to meet all requirements of the law.

We must remember that many activities of civic life are still difficult for people with disabilities. Even voting can be a hardship for them, as also for the elderly. I will work with Congress to make polling places and the voting process easier for seniors and those with disabilities.

We can also assist organizations that, while exempt from the ADA, are trying to observe it anyway. Most notable are churches, synagogues, and mosques, which want nothing more than to open their doors to all. Often, they just don't have the money. This has left many Americans with disabilities unable to worship alongside their families and neighbors. Also left out are those who would like to be active in clubs and community groups. How can they feel welcome if they can't even enter the building?

My administration will seek \$10 million each year to aid religious and civic groups in making their facilities more accessible. Over time, this will help make ramps and elevators even more common – a sign not only of more accessible buildings, but of a more welcoming society.

Next month, we mark Independence Day. A few weeks later, on July 26th, comes the tenth anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. For many across America, that day in 1990 is remembered as a personal independence day – the day the law recognized their rights and full standing as citizens of the United States.

People with disabilities confront hardship every day of their lives. To me, that leaves our society with a simple choice – whether to add to that hardship, or to try to lessen it. Whether to answer that challenge with indifference, or with generosity of spirit.

With ADA, we gave our answer. We set for ourselves a permanent standard to live by, and to govern by. I make this pledge today: in my administration we will honor that standard. We will not tolerate unfair barriers or unfair treatment for Americans with physical or mental disabilities. We will press on, until everyone has a chance to contribute – until every citizen shares in the full promise of American life.

June 15, 2000

**Governor George W. Bush
"New Freedom Initiative"**

"I am proposing today the New Freedom Initiative to ensure that all Americans with disabilities, whether young or old, have every chance to pursue the American dream - to use more of their own skills and make more of their own choices. We must do everything we can to ensure that more Americans with disabilities can live independently, hold jobs, and take part in the life of their communities."

-- Governor George W. Bush

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Governor Bush believes that all Americans should have the opportunity to learn and develop skills, engage in productive work, choose where to live, and participate in community life. Too often, however, people with disabilities are trapped in bureaucracies of dependence and are denied the tools and access necessary for success. The result has been that too many Americans are shut out from the American dream.

In Texas, Governor Bush has increased opportunities for individuals with disabilities, ranging from committing additional resources for community-based services and encouraging employment, to increasing access to public facilities and making appointments to state boards, commissions, and the Texas Supreme Court. As a presidential candidate, Governor Bush has worked to make his campaign accessible to people with disabilities. To continue these efforts to expand opportunities for Americans with disabilities, Governor Bush proposes the following reforms, including a package of new initiatives totaling \$880 million over five years:

To increase access to technology for Americans with disabilities and to expand opportunities to function, learn, and live independently, as President, Governor Bush will:

- Triple the Rehabilitative Engineering Research Centers' budget for assistive technologies, create a new fund to help bring assistive technologies to market, and increase tenfold the funding for low-interest loan programs to purchase assistive technologies.
- Work with Congress to increase funding for special education with the goal of meeting the federal obligation under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.
- Focus Title I funds on earlier grades to identify children with disabilities, and invest \$5 billion over five years to establish the "Reading First" program.
- Reform HUD's Section 8 rental voucher program for people with disabilities to permit recipients to use up to a year's worth of vouchers to finance the down payment on a home.

To further integrate Americans with disabilities into the workforce, as President, Governor Bush will:

- Provide \$20 million in federal matching funds to states to guarantee low-interest loans for individuals with disabilities to purchase computers and other equipment necessary to telework from home.
- Support legislation to make a company's contribution of computer and Internet access for home use by employees with disabilities a tax-free benefit.
- Sign an Executive Order to support effective and swift implementation of the "Ticket-to-Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act" that gives Americans with disabilities the ability to choose their own support services and maintain their health benefits when they return to work.
- Support full enforcement of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and provide new resources for technical assistance, to help small businesses comply with the Act.

To increase access for Americans with disabilities into community life, Governor Bush will:

- Sign an Executive Order supporting the most integrated community-based settings for individuals with disabilities, pursuant to the Supreme Court decision in *Olmstead*.
- Create a National Commission to recommend reforms of the mental health service delivery system.
- Support improving access to the polls and ballot secrecy for people with disabilities.
- Provide \$10 million in matching funds annually to increase the accessibility of organizations that are currently exempt from Title III of the ADA, such as churches, mosques, synagogues, and civic organizations.

Challenge and Opportunity

Today, there are over 54 million Americans with disabilities, a full 20 percent of the U.S. population. Almost half of these individuals have a severe disability, affecting their ability to see, hear, have speech understood, walk, or perform other basic functions of life. In addition, there are over 25 million family caregivers and millions more who provide aid and assistance to people with disabilities.

Beyond the numbers, disabilities can affect a person's ability to engage in major life activities. For a child, this may mean a more difficult process of learning or playing with friends. For young people and adults, disabilities may affect attending school, working, keeping house, and caring for oneself.

Recent data show that Americans with disabilities continue to face obstacles in education, employment, income, political participation, and participation in community life:

- One out of five adults with disabilities has not graduated from high school, compared to less than one of ten adults without disabilities.
- Among adults with disabilities age 18 to 64, only 29 percent work full- or part-time, compared to 79 percent of those without disabilities.
- In 1997, over one-third of adults with disabilities lived in a household with an annual income of less than \$15,000, compared to only 12 percent of those without disabilities.
- Only 69% of adults with disabilities socialize with close friends, relatives or neighbors at least once a week, while 84% of adults without disabilities do, and approximately one-third of adults with disabilities go out to a restaurant once a week, while 60 percent of those without disabilities do so.
- Six out of ten adults with disabilities were registered to vote in the 1996 presidential election, compared with almost eight out of ten adults without disabilities. Voter registration services from government or community agencies have been offered to only a small percentage of adults with disabilities.

Although progress has been made over the last two decades – most prominently with the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 – to improve access to employment, public accommodations, commercial facilities, telecommunications services, housing, schools, and polling places, much more needs to be done to provide choices and opportunities to Americans with disabilities.