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President George HW Bush Sr.

In his first address to Congress after becoming President, George H.W. Bush said on February 9, 1989:

"To those 37 million Americans with some form of disability, you belong in the economic mainstream. We need your talents in America's work force. Disabled Americans must become full partners in America's opportunity society."

President Bush Sr. delivered on his promise. On July 26, 1990, President George H.W. Bush signed the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and contrary to the lies circulated by partisan activists in our community, **an overwhelming majority of Republicans voted for the ADA.**

In a statement upon signing the law, President Bush Sr. compared the ADA to the Declaration of Independence, and said *"The Americans with Disabilities Act presents us all with an historic opportunity. It signals the end to the unjustified segregation and exclusion of persons with disabilities from the mainstream of American life."*

President Bush Sr. was so proud of the ADA that he frequently cited the law throughout his Presidency, and in speech after speech after he left office. In Lafayette, Louisiana in 1992, he proudly described the ADA as the "best piece of civil rights legislation in a long time". In one of his last speeches in office, President Bush Sr. explained why he felt the ADA, which freed the disabled to lead independent lives safe from discrimination, made so much sense to him: "When you add together Federal, State, local, and private funds, it's been costing almost \$200 billion annually to support our disabled in artificial isolation." (From remarks at a January 12, 1993, dinner given by disability rights groups). President Bush Sr., was truly ahead of his time, as he wisely saw that a community of working and participating members of society was better for America than sustaining a society of dependents.

There was an immense sense of pride across America, and within our community, that so many people from both parties joined President Bush, Sr., in supporting the ADA. That so many people, both Republicans and Democrats, saw the sense and the justice in protecting the disabled from discrimination was an amazing feeling among us in our community, when we had endured so many years of feeling like second class citizens.

Now there is a profound sense of incredible injustice and shame that the Democrats and partisan activists in our community would begrudge President Bush, Sr., President Reagan, and the Republican party's important contributions to the ADA. What happened to the sense of respect and unity that we felt that day? When we relied upon these partisan activists as our leaders to rise above politics and political allegiances when it came to our basic civil liberties, they chose to be more loyal to their political biases than to our deaf community.

As a noteworthy postscript to this, George W. Bush, soon after becoming President in 2001, carried on his father's proud tradition in his dedication to disabilities. Like his father, President George W. Bush used his very first address to Congress after taking office as an opportunity to address Americans with disabilities, and announced an ambitious far-reaching program: the New Freedom Initiative program.