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National Council on Disability Leadership Conference on Civil Rights



Event Partners (In Formation)

U.S. Senate

Hon. Tom Harkin
Hon. James M. Jeffords
Hon. Edward M. Kennedy

U.S. House of Representatives

Hon. John Conyers
Hon. Steny H. Hoyer
Hon. John Lewis
Hon. Matthew G. Martinez
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Hon. Patry T. Mink
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AFL-CIO

American Association of People with Disabilities
Black Leadership Forum
Center for Law and Education
Children's Defense Fund
Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights
Civil Rights Forum for Telecommunications Policy
Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities
Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund
Justice For All
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
Mexican American Legal Defense & Education Fund
NAACP
NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund
Native American Rights Fund
National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium
National Association of Protection and Advocacy Systems
National Catholic Office for Persons with Disabilities
National Congress of American Indians
National Council of Churches
National Council of La Raza
National Council of Negro Women
National Council on Independent Living
National Family for the Advancement of Minorities with Disabilities
National Organization on Disability
National Partnership for Women and Families
National Urban League
National Women's Law Center
Organization of Chinese Americans
Union of American Hebrew Congregations
United States Students Association

July 20, 1999

Dear Colleague:

By now, you should have received an invitation from the White House to attend a ninth anniversary celebration of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and to participate in a discussion with Administration officials and members of Congress on improving education, employment, and civil rights enforcement outcomes for minorities with disabilities.

The National Council on Disability (NCD) and the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights (LCCR) are proud to support the White House on this historic event. We are delighted to be partners. At this event NCD will release its report, *Lift Every Voice: Modernizing Disability Policies and Programs to Serve a Diverse Nation*, and LCCR will announce the creation of a new ADA anniversary Web site.

The event will take place on Monday, July 26, 1999, from 3:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m., at the White House, Indian Treaty Room, Old Executive Office Building, 17th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC. The accessible entrance is on 17th Street, NW. Sign language interpreters will be provided. If other accommodations are needed, please call Mr. Stacey Brown at NCD at 202-272-2004; 202-272-2074 (TTY) by noon on Friday, July 23.

If you have not received your invitation or you have not yet responded, please contact Jonathan Young at 202-456-7032.

We look forward to seeing you at the White House.

Sincerely,

Marca Bristo
NCD Chairperson

Dr. Dorothy I. Height
LCCR Chairperson

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COMMENTARY

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Monday, June 28, 1999

The Disabled Are Bound by Chain of Unemployment

Laws: A bill allowing many to keep insurance coverage is a tiny fix for a larger problem.

By BILL BOLT

ADVERTISEMENT



The increasing unemployment of Americans with disabilities during what we are told is a booming employment era is not so puzzling if we look a little closer. Legislation passed earlier this month by the Senate seeks to attack one perceived cause. By retaining coverage of Medicare and Medicaid--the latter known as MediCal in California--for those who take jobs, the law is aimed at getting more people with disabilities to seek employment and move off Supplemental Security Income, or SSI, and Supplemental Security Disability Insurance, or SSDI.

The fear of losing full medical coverage is important. But this law only fixes one link in the chain of unemployment for disabled people. There are still many broken links. There has been a 70% increase of those on SSI and SSDI in the last four years.

Since the highly touted Americans with Disabilities Act passed nearly a decade ago, supposedly offering new protections for the disabled, things have worsened significantly.

Sure there are more curb cuts at street corners and more buildings and toilets are accessible, but in places like California, the disabled are more penniless than when this so-called civil rights law for the disabled was enacted. During the Clinton administration, unemployment of working-age people with disabilities has soared from a horrendous 66% to a disastrous 75%. For those with severe disabilities, for example those who cannot walk, the unemployment rate, once 87%, is rising.

For the vast majority of the disabled, their income comes from SSI, essentially federal welfare payments for those who never worked, or SSDI, based on past employment. In California, these payments have been reduced 20% over the past decade by Republican administrations in Sacramento and the failure of the new Democrat-dominated Legislature and administration to breathe a word about making up for the cuts in this flush (for others) economy.

At the same time, over the last two decades, federal commitment to housing subsidies has drastically withered. Without subsidy programs such as Section 8, for which there is now a 16-year waiting list in Los Angeles and no preference

for disabled people, most disabled people have the choice of eating or having a roof over their heads.

A look at the state Department of Rehabilitation is equally depressing. Having cut to shreds its higher education program for the disabled--the only kind of education that will allow access to an adequate income for those with costly disabilities--it directs its academically capable applicants to underpaid jobs or low-cost community colleges. There, they find the hands-on training facilities that these two-year colleges specialize in to be woefully inaccessible to those with physical disabilities.

To add to the barriers the disabled face in moving into the mainstream, the living wages and benefits of many jobs have deteriorated, along with their permanence.

The coup de grace has been the gross underenforcement of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Private employers, frightened into thinking they have no recourse, seek ways to avoid the law or just choose to not hire the disabled. The government compounds the problem by failing to actively enforce the law.

Since the Americans with Disabilities Act became law, the media have ignored the material problems of the disabled. Other than attention to whether disabled people should be assisted in suicide, opinion pages have seen no discussion of disabilities issues. Practical issues such as the deterioration of their real position in the economy have been ignored.

After a decade of disregard, President Clinton has now proposed a tax credit of \$1,000 for the disabled or their families to be used for educational expenses. What good is a tax credit for the disabled, who increasingly have no taxable income?

Without a more systemic approach to the worsening state of the disabled, 50 million disabled Americans will continue to sink deeper into poverty, frustration and dependency, and the taxpayer will continue to stagger under billions of dollars of unnecessary support for the disabled.

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Bill Bolt, a Santa Monica Writer, Specializes in Issues Affecting Disabled Persons. E-mail: Billbolt@earthlink.net

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DISABILITY AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

*A White House Forum on How to Improve Outcomes in
Education, Employment, and Civil Rights Enforcement for
People with Disabilities from Diverse Cultural Backgrounds*

July 26, 1999

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Welcome

Mary Beth Cahill

Assistant to the President and Director of the Office of Public Liaison

Opening Remarks

Attorney General Janet Reno

Department of Justice

Chairperson Marca Bristo

National Council on Disability

PANEL ONE: EDUCATION

Introductory Remarks

Secretary Richard Riley
Department of Education

Panelists

Assistant Secretary Judith E. Heumann
Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Department of Education

Assistant Secretary Norma Cantu
Office of Civil Rights, Department of Education

Representative Robert C. Scott
State of Virginia

Representative James E. Clyburn
State of South Carolina

PANEL TWO: EMPLOYMENT

Introductory Remarks

Secretary Alexis Herman
Department of Labor

Panelists

Chairman Tony Coelho
President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities

Chairman William E. Kennard
Federal Communications Commission

Commissioner Kenneth S. Apfel
Social Security Administration

Representative Steny H. Hoyer
State of Maryland

PANEL THREE: CIVIL RIGHTS ENFORCEMENT

Introductory Remarks

Secretary Rodney Slater
Department of Transportation

Panelists

Chairperson Ida L. Castro
Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

Acting Assistant Attorney General Bill Lann Lee
Civil Rights Division, Department of Justice

Senator Tom Harkin
State of Iowa

Representative Patsy T. Mink
State of Hawaii



*On the occasion of
the Ninth Anniversary of the
Americans with Disabilities Act*

Mary Beth Cahill
Assistant to the President and
Director, White House Office of Public Liaison

*in conjunction with
The National Council on Disability*

invites you to participate in a discussion on Disability and Cultural Diversity
on Monday, July 26, 1999 from three until five thirty



Kindly respond by July 21st

*Indian Treaty Room
Old Executive Office Building*

This forum, in honor of the ADA's signing into law on July 26, 1990,
will focus on how to improve outcomes in Education, Employment, and
Civil Rights Enforcement for People with Disabilities from Diverse Cultural Backgrounds.

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Please respond to Jonathan Young by July 21, 1999
giving your Social Security Number and Date of Birth
Fax preferred 202 456-6218 or voice 202 456-7032
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Enter at 17th & G Streets (Accessible) or Pennsylvania Avenue

Photo I.D. Required