

FOIA MARKER

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Collection/Record Group: Clinton Presidential Records

Subgroup/Office of Origin: Chief of Staff

Series/Staff Member: Maria Echaveste

Subseries:

OA/ID Number: 16432

FolderID:

Folder Title:
Disabilities Work Initiative

Stack:
S

Row:
23

Section:
6

Shelf:
1

Position:
2

*Disabilities/
Work Incentive*

 John Podesta
01/29/2000 03:53:41 PM

Record Type: Record

To: Mark F. Lindsay/WHO/EOP@EOP
cc: Maria Echaveste/WHO/EOP@EOP
Subject: White House Accessibility

Call me about this. I think Jonathan makes some valid points and we should do something about it.

----- Forwarded by John Podesta/WHO/EOP on 01/29/2000 03:52 PM -----

 Jonathan M. Young
01/28/2000 12:32:53 AM

Record Type: Record

To: John Podesta/WHO/EOP@EOP
cc:
Subject: White House Accessibility

Congratulations on a great SOTU Address. I was particularly pleased that the President added a reference to our historic achievement in the Work Incentives Improvement Act for people with disabilities.

I caught your eye when I went to use the elevator to return to my office after the SOTU, and was turned away because of an "out of service" sign. So I thought I would be avoiding my own responsibility if I did not speak to the problem that poses for people who use wheelchairs. Ordinarily, I travel back and forth between OEOB and the WW by going up/down the south driveway of OEOB and use the WW elevator. Unable to use the elevator tonight, I had to go out the front door of the WW. For most people with wheelchairs, the only way to get back to the OEOB would have been to exit out the NW gate, and then, at this hour, travel all the way around OEOB to get to the SW gate. Because I am able to walk and use my wheelchair to manage distances and standing, I was able to take a short cut: by getting up and carrying my wheelchair down the short flight of steps to West Executive Drive, and then rolling back up the driveway to my office. The situation is analogous to a person of color being turned away by a "Whites only" sign.

The juxtaposition was all the more stark in the afterglow of a stellar SOTU Address about diversity and inclusion. In fact, when I got back to my office I was greeted by one voice mail from a disability advocate: "Congratulations and accolades to the President for putting it [the Work Incentives bill] in. At least we're part of the victory of the past even though we have no future in this next year." We talk about making the Federal government a model of accessibility and inclusion for the private sector. I wonder: could the White House provide an alternative route in the event of elevator failure or to escort a group of people too big for the elevator? One might do this by building a ramp from the WW front entrance to West Executive drive.

For your own frame reference, I'd like to mention two other situations I deal with regularly. First, I am reminded of one day when I was heading to a meeting in the RR. I was on my way down the driveway from OEOb, when Chuck Ruff was beginning to make his way up it. He couldn't do it on his own, and had to be pushed by someone with him. I made a comment about the hill not being to a regulation grade. He added that when he came to the White House he thought that there was an underground (flat) route between the OEOb and WW. I am fortunate that I have great upper body strength to manage the incline. But for many people, the route from the WW to OEOb (more than the opposite, downhill direction) is anything but accessible.

The second situation concerns parking. I am pleased to have a parking space in the NEOb garage. For many months, I used to roll down the driveway to get to my car because there is no accessible ramp up from the main elevators. On the first floor, the existing steps are ramped so that I can go down on two wheels, but it is physically impossible to go up this ramp (it feels like a 45 degree angle). I made no complaint about this situation. But then the Secret Service began to prohibit me from going down the driveway. I tried to explain that there was no other way to get to my car. But they persisted, and prevailed. Larry Handeland of GSA said he would try to work out an alternative. In the meantime, I parked on 17th street. The alternative adopted was to reactivate an elevator that had an accessible route. By the books, freight elevators are not acceptable options, unless it is a public elevator. I understood that the elevator would be a public one. As it turns out, it is the main freight elevator for the building, and it can only be operated with a key. I went along with this setup. But over time it has begun to wear on me. When I go home in the evening, cleaning staff often leave their trash in the elevator as they go about their duties. So I have to ride to the parking level with the trash. Again I wonder: could the White House provide a way for an individual to ride the public elevators and still have an accessible route to the cars?

Thanks for reading. Part of me would rather not draw attention to these matters. But I felt that not doing so would be letting down thousands of people with disabilities that would never get the chance. I'm writing you directly because I felt you shared in the situation at the elevator, and I didn't want to publicize the issue beyond your immediate attention.

Jonathan Young