

FOIA MARKER

**This is not a textual record. This is used as an
administrative marker by the William J. Clinton
Presidential Library Staff.**

Collection/Record Group: Clinton Presidential Records

Subgroup/Office of Origin: Public Liaison

Series/Staff Member: Jena Roscoe

Subseries:

OA/ID Number: 18258

FolderID:

Folder Title:

Disability

Stack:

S

Row:

31

Section:

5

Shelf:

2

Position:

3

PRESIDENT CLINTON AND VICE PRESIDENT GORE:
Increasing Opportunities for Americans With Disabilities

"Increased access to health care, more assistance at home and in the workplace, remarkable new technologies made more available: This is how we can make sure that all Americans can take their rightful place in our 21st century workplaces."

President Clinton
January 13, 1999

President Clinton and Vice President Gore are committed to expanding opportunities for Americans with disabilities and demonstrating to all Americans that people with disabilities -- given access to the workplace, health care, community services, and technology -- make significant contributions to our society and economy.

EXPANDING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Fighting to Enact the Work Incentives Improvement Act (WIIA) -- The Work Incentives Improvement Act is an historic bill produced through the bipartisan efforts of Senators Jeffords, Kennedy, Roth and Moynihan in collaboration with leaders in the disability community and staff throughout the Administration. On January 13, 1999, the President previewed one of his FY2000 budget initiatives, committing to the full funding of the WIIA. The Administration's budget initiative, which invests \$1.2 billion over five years, will help provide better health care options for people with disabilities who work.

The Work Incentives Improvement Act will improve access to health care by: (1) expanding states' ability to provide a Medicaid buy-in to people with disabilities who return to work; (2) extending Medicare coverage, for the first time, for people with disabilities who return to work; and (3) creating a new Medicaid buy-in demonstration to help people with a specific physical or mental impairment that is not severe enough to qualify for health assistance, but is likely to lead to a severe disability in the absence of medical treatment. In addition, WIIA will modernize the employment services system by creating a "ticket" that will enable Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) beneficiaries to go to any of a number of public or private providers for vocational rehabilitation. If the beneficiary goes to work and achieves substantial earnings, providers would be paid a portion of the benefits saved. And WIIA creates a Work Incentive Grant program to provide benefits planning and assistance, facilitating access to information about work incentives, and better integrate services to people with disabilities working or returning to work.

Providing a \$1,000 Tax Credit for Work-Related Expenses for People with Disabilities -- On January 13, 1999, the President announced a new proposal that will allow workers with significant disabilities to receive an annual \$1,000 tax credit to help cover the formal and informal costs that are associated with employment, such as special transportation and technology. Like the Jeffords-Kennedy-Roth-Moynihan Work Incentive Act, this tax credit, which will assist 200,000 to 300,000 Americans, will help ensure that people with disabilities have the tools they need to return to work.

Establishing the Task Force on Employment of Adults with Disabilities -- On March 13, 1998,

President Clinton signed an Executive Order establishing a National Task Force on Employment of Adults with Disabilities, charged with creating a coordinated and aggressive national policy to bring adults with disabilities into gainful employment at a rate that is as close as possible to that of the general adult population. According to a 1998 Bureau of Labor Statistics report, only 30 percent of persons with severe disabilities were in the labor force in the third quarter of 1994 (latest data available).

Taking Action on All of the Task Force's Formal Recommendations -- In December, the Vice President accepted the report of the President's Task Force on the Employment of Adults with Disabilities. Alexis M. Herman, Secretary of Labor, chairs the Task Force and Tony Coelho, Chairman of the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, serve as Vice-Chair. The Administration has taken action on all the Task Force formal recommendations: work to pass the Work Incentive Improvement Act; work to pass a strong Patients' Bill of Rights; examine tax options to assist with expenses of work; foster interdisciplinary consortia for employment services; accelerate development and adoption of assistive technology; direct Small Business Administration to expand outreach; remove Federal hiring barriers for people with mental illness and direct the Office of Personnel Management to develop model plan for Federal hiring of people with disabilities.

Signing the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, Improving Worker Training and Placement Options for People with Disabilities -- Last year, the President signed the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), which included the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998. The new Act establishes better links between the vocational rehabilitation (VR) system and the general workforce development system. Job seekers with disabilities will have improved options for service through the mainstream worker training and placement system, as well as through the disability-specific VR system. The U.S. Department of Labor, with assistance from the Department of Education, has been providing valuable technical assistance to the network of one-stop career centers on how to provide nondiscriminatory and accessible services to people with disabilities. In addition, the Rehabilitation Act has also been strengthened to give increased options to individuals with disabilities in developing employment plans.

Working on Innovative Strategies to Improve Employment of Adults with Disabilities -- Agencies within the Clinton Administration continue to work on innovative strategies to employ Americans with disabilities. The Social Security Administration, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Labor and the Department of Education are all participating in inter-agency demonstration projects to expand employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. For instance, the Department of Education has awarded six systems-change grants to establish models of improved cooperation and coordination between State Vocational Rehabilitation programs, public employment/employment training programs, and other related programs. The grants will assist in reducing barriers to employment and increasing the capacity of the State's overall employment system to serve individuals with disabilities. The focus of these systems change projects is increasing the employment rate of individuals with disabilities who are currently receiving support through public programs.

Supporting Families -- President Clinton fought for and enacted the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) making workplaces more accommodating for many families that include a child or adult with a disability. In his 1999 State of the Union, the President proposed to extend the benefits of the Family

and Medical Leave Act to ten million more American workers. Currently, only workers who are employed at businesses with 50 or more employees are protected. By covering workers in businesses with 25 or more workers, 10 million more American workers will be covered by the FMLA. The President also called for expanding the law to allow FMLA-eligible workers to take up to 24 hours of additional leave each year to meet specified family obligations, such as accompany one's child to dental or medical appointments.

Helping Move People from Welfare to Work -- Some of those who are having the hardest time moving from welfare to work are people with disabilities. Recognizing the special needs of this and other hard-to-place populations, the 1997 Balanced Budget Act included \$3 billion to assist long-term welfare recipients obtain jobs. In addition, the FY99 budget included a number of measures designed to expand welfare to work activities. The final budget included \$283 million for 50,000 new vouchers exclusively for people who need housing assistance to make the transition from welfare to work and \$75 million to assist states and localities in developing flexible transportation alternatives, such as van services. For FY 2000, the President announced that he will propose an additional \$1 billion for his Welfare-to-Work program to ensure that those remaining on the welfare rolls who face the greatest challenges can succeed in the workforce and to increase the employment of fathers of children on welfare so they can better support their children.

Funding a Disability Research Institute -- The Vice President recently announced that the Social Security Administration will fund a Disability Research Institute to help provide policy-makers with information and research data in the Social Security and Supplemental Security Income disability policy area, including ways to assess work ability and return-to-work strategies.

EXPANDING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Enacting a Stronger Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) -- In 1997, the President signed into law a stronger Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, so that in FY 2000, IDEA will serve 6.2 million children with disabilities. The expanded IDEA reaffirms and strengthens our national commitment to provide a world class education for all our children. It ensures that our nation's schools are safe and conducive to learning for children, while scrupulously protecting the rights of our disabled students. This bill makes it clear once and for all that children with disabilities have a right to be in the classroom and to be included in school activities like work experience, science clubs and field outings. IDEA also helps all classroom teachers get the full range of teaching skills that they need to teach children with disabilities. Teachers are now required to be involved in the development of individual education plans to help disabled children succeed. In addition, President Clinton has proposed requiring that states establish performance goals for special education.

Opposing Amendments to IDEA -- In the 105th Congress, the Majority in the House sought to amend the Individual with Disabilities Education Act to make it easier to expel children with disabilities who were judged by school officials to be potentially violent in school. These broad, subjective judgements could have resulted in inappropriate expulsion of large numbers of students with disabilities. The Administration, working with parents, successfully opposed these amendments.

Enforcing the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act -- The Clinton Administration has supported the rights of children with disabilities under IDEA in the following Federal Court cases: *Cedar Rapids Community School District v. Garrett F.*; *Marie O. v. Edgar*; *Sacramento City Unified School District v. Holland*; *Hartmann v. Loudon County Board of Education*.

EXPANDING THE ROOSEVELT MEMORIAL

Adding a New Statue to the FDR Memorial -- On May 2, 1997, President Clinton dedicated the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial to honor the thirty-second President of the United States. On July 2, 1998, Vice President Gore announced that the FDR Memorial will soon include an additional outdoor room at the main entrance which will depict FDR in the small wheelchair he invented. Thanks to the efforts of the disability community, the Clinton-Gore Administration has selected a specific design that will show how FDR became one of our greatest presidents while he had a disability and used a wheelchair.

INCREASING ENFORCEMENT OF CIVIL RIGHTS LAWS

Vigorously Enforcing the Americans with Disabilities Act -- President Clinton has led the fight for vigorous enforcement of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Fair Housing Act, the IDEA and other critical civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination against people with disabilities in housing, schools, workplaces and public areas across the nation.

Working to Stop Discrimination Against People With AIDS -- President Clinton supports the Supreme Court's decision in *Bragdon v. Abbott*, which reinforces the protections offered by the landmark Americans With Disabilities Act for Americans living with HIV and AIDS. The President directed the Justice Department and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to vigorously prosecute those who discriminate against people with AIDS, leading to actions against health care providers and facilities that violate the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Reducing Backlog and Expanding Alternative Dispute Resolution at Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) -- Thanks to President Clinton, the FY99 budget included \$279 million -- a \$37 million increase over the previous year -- to significantly expand EEOC's alternative dispute resolution program and reduce the backlog of private sector discrimination complaints. The final budget fully funds the President's request -- providing the first real increase for EEOC in several years. This increase, the first since EEOC took responsibility for investigating violations of the ADA, will help give the EEOC the resources it needs to investigate claims of discrimination under the ADA.

Working for Fair Housing -- In response to the increase in reported cases of serious fair housing violations, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has committed to doubling the number of its civil rights enforcement actions by the year 2000. In addition, the President proposed and won a major expansion of HUD's Fair Housing programs. The FY99 budget expands HUD's Fair Housing programs to \$40 million -- a \$10 million increase over FY98 funding. That 33-percent increase includes \$7.5 million for a new audit-based enforcement initiative proposed by the

Administration.

Increasing Outreach -- In July 1998, the President directed key Federal civil rights agencies to increase their outreach efforts to individuals with disabilities, including those in diverse cultural communities, including immigrants, racial and ethnic minorities and rural residents.

SAVING SOCIAL SECURITY NOW

Saving Social Security First -- President Clinton is committed to saving Social Security for the 21st Century. The President will fight to save every penny of any future surplus until a bipartisan plan to save Social Security is enacted to preserve the program for all eligible individuals, including the one-third of beneficiaries who are covered by the disability and survivors insurance programs.

Protecting Supplemental Security Income Benefits -- In 1995, the President vetoed a budget bill that would have significantly cut cash assistance to most families with disabled children on Supplemental Security Income -- families who are struggling to care for a child at home and face extra costs for home modifications, equipment and income lost because a parent is unable to work full-time. In addition, the 1997 Balanced Budget Act ensured that 30,000 disabled children losing SSI because of the new tighter eligibility criteria kept their Medicaid coverage.

HELPING TO ENSURE THAT PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES HAVE ACCESS TO QUALITY HEALTH CARE

Fighting to Pass a Strong, Enforceable Patients' Bill of Rights -- President Clinton has called on the Congress to pass a strong, enforceable patients' bill of rights that assures Americans the quality health care they need. The bill should include important patient protections such as: assuring direct access to specialists; real emergency room protections; continuity of care provisions that protect patients from abrupt changes in treatment; a fair, timely, and independent appeals process for patient grievances; and enforcement provisions to make these rights real.

Proposing New Initiatives to Improve Prevention and Treatment and Fairness for People with Mental Illnesses -- The President and Vice President advocated for and enacted the Mental Health Parity Act of 1996, which took steps to end discrimination based on mental illnesses. On January 14, 1999, Mrs. Gore unveiled three new major initiatives, including: an unprecedented \$70 million increase in the mental health services block grant, a 24 percent increase, totaling \$358 million for FY2000, which will enable states to target particularly-hard-to-reach adults and children with severe mental illnesses; the announcement of a White House Conference on Mental Health to be held this spring; and a Presidential request to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to explore measures to eliminate the stricter standards currently applied to federal hiring practices for adults with psychiatric disabilities.

Increasing Home and Community-Based Programs -- On July 29, 1998, the anniversary of the ADA,

President Clinton announced that the Health Care Financing Administration was directing State Medicaid Directors to provide services to people with disabilities in the most integrated setting appropriate to their needs and in conjunction with the Americans with Disabilities Act. State Medicaid Directors are being urged to conduct self-evaluations to ensure that their practices and procedures encourage rather than inhibit integration into communities. The Clinton Administration's flexibility in granting state waivers has spurred an increase in home and community-based services; since he took office, the President has approved over 300 such waivers. As a result, the number of people with developmental disabilities served in home and community waiver programs has increased significantly.

Increasing Access to Health Care and Supporting Employment for Disabled Americans -- The Balanced Budget Act of 1997 created an optional program whereby States could allow people with disabilities who were earning up to 250 percent of poverty to purchase Medicaid coverage. Oregon is the first state to take advantage of this policy, and they have created a program that will let individuals go to work and get or keep Medicaid. Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala has asked every governor to seriously consider this program.

Passing Meaningful Health Insurance Reform -- President Clinton signed the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 which limits exclusions for pre-existing conditions, makes coverage portable and helps individuals who lose jobs maintain coverage.

Protecting the Medicaid Guarantee for People with Disabilities -- The Clinton Administration refuses to go backwards on health care coverage for Americans with disabilities -- rejecting proposals to end the Medicaid guarantee to meaningful health benefits for people with disabilities. The President vetoed the Republican's proposal in the 104th Congress to block grant the Medicaid program, preserving Medicaid coverage for six million persons with disabilities. Medicaid is often the only form of health care available to people with disabilities and allows many children and adults to receive services at home rather than in institutions. Thanks to President Clinton, the 1997 Balanced Budget Act preserved the Federal guarantee of Medicaid coverage for populations who depend on it.

INCREASING ACCESSIBILITY

Increasing Public Transportation Accessibility -- The Department of Transportation and the Access Board have issued final regulations implementing the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) provisions for over-the-road bus (OTRB) accessibility and provides a definition of what constitutes discriminatory action. The regulation requires large fixed-route operators to achieve 50% of full fleet accessibility by October 2006 and 100% by October 2012. The Department has strengthened the regulations by including provisions making OTRB operators individually and collectively accountable for providing accessible service. Additionally, in 1998, President Clinton signed the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), legislation that provides significantly increased resources to make our Nation's surface transportation systems accessible. The Act included increased funding for the Elderly Individuals and Individuals with Disabilities grant program.

Expanding Accessibility to the Parks and Wilderness -- In October 1997, a memorandum of

understanding was signed by the Federal wilderness management agencies and a nonprofit organization called Wilderness Inquiry, Inc. (WI), to coordinate their policies to “establish a general framework of cooperation between the agencies and WI for increased opportunities for people of all abilities to use and enjoy the programs, facilities, and activities of the agencies.” On November 10, 1998, President Clinton signed legislation (H.R. 4501) that requires the Secretary of Agriculture and the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a comprehensive study to improve the access for persons with disabilities to outdoor recreational opportunities (such as fishing, hunting, trapping, wildlife viewing, hiking, boating, and camping) made available to the public on the Federal lands in the National Forest System, the National Park System, the National Wildlife Refuge System, and the Bureau of Land Management.

Increasing Housing Options -- The Clinton-Gore Administration took a number of significant actions in 1998 that advanced housing policy for people with disabilities. First, HUD issued a statement supporting the view that institutional living does not constitute real housing for people with disabilities. On April 28, 1998, Fannie Mae announced the publication of “A Home of Your Own Guide,” the first manual specifically created to provide step-by-step home buying guidance for people with disabilities. And in February, HUD Secretary Cuomo issued a directive encouraging communities to use community development block grant funds for home modifications for people with disabilities. Also, in HUD’s recent Notices of Funding Availability, the agency included bonus points for developers when they seek to build structures that include “visitability” by people with disabilities.

Increasing Section 8 Funding in HUD Appropriations -- President Clinton supported the inclusion of \$40 million in Section 8 funding for people with disabilities, in part to offset the displacement likely to occur as a result of “elderly-only” designation of public housing formerly occupied by people with disabilities.

Reinventing Government -- Under the leadership of Vice President Gore, the Clinton-Gore Administration is making government smaller, better managed and more efficient, creating a government that works better and costs less. The Administration is dramatically improving customer service to give all Americans the best service they’ve ever experienced with the government.

PROVIDING ACCESSIBLE TECHNOLOGY

Signing the Assistive Technology Act -- Technology is a crucial component in enabling people with disabilities to obtain and keep meaningful employment. President Clinton supported and signed the Assistive Technology Act of 1998, which reauthorized the old “Tech Act” that created State Assistive Technology Centers to provide assistive devices to needy individuals with disabilities. On January 13, 1999, President Clinton announced a new initiative to improve the development, adoption and prevalence of information and communications technologies to help people with disabilities work. This initiative, if enacted, will: (1) help make the Federal government a “model user” of assistive technology; (2) support new and expanded state loan programs to make assistive technology more affordable for Americans with disabilities; and (3) invest in research and development and technology transfer in areas such as “text to speech” for people who are blind, automatic captioning for people who are deaf, and speech recognition and eye tracking for people who can’t use a keyboard. This \$35

million investment in FY 20000 will more than double the Administration's current investment in deploying assistive technology.

Ensuring the Federal Government Provides Accessible Technology and Information -- The Clinton-Gore Administration recommended, and Congress enacted, changes to Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. These changes strengthened the obligations of Federal agencies to provide accessible technology and information to their employees and customers. Section 508 now grants the Access Board authority to issue accessibility regulations. In addition, Federal employees as well as agency constituents now have the right to file a complaint under a procedure similar to that outlined under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. With these changes, the Federal government can use its considerable purchasing power to influence private industry toward developing universally designed technology that is accessible to almost everyone.

Ensuring that the Telecommunications Revolution Benefits All -- In July 1999, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) adopted rules on the portion (Section 225) of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 that requires that telecommunications equipment and services be accessible to individuals with disabilities, if readily achievable. This provision is known as the ADA for the Information Age. These regulations will ensure people with disabilities access to a broad range of products and services – such as telephones, cell phones, pagers, call waiting and operator services – where they previously experienced barriers. Telecommunications carriers may not install network features, functions or capabilities that do not comply with the regulations. The regulations also ensure that information, documentation, and customer service is conducted in accessible ways. There is no standing requirement for filing complaints, and the FCC maintains the full range of penalties for non-compliance.

In addition to the Section 255 rules, the FCC has amended rules to increase the amount of closed captioning required for video programming to ensure access to 27 million Americans with hearing disabilities; proposed standards for closed captioning on digital television; proposed additional closed captioning requirements for emergency situations; proposed improvements on Telecommunications Relay Services (TRS) to ensure that TTY users have access to telecommunications network; proposed a requirement to expand TRS so that persons with speech disabilities have access to telecommunications; proposed to allow for cost recovery of video relay interpreting (VRI) as a form of TRS; proposed that the definition of primary line include access needs for persons with disabilities in order to ensure functionally equivalent access to telephony; and has proposed ways to deploy advanced telecommunications capabilities that will assist persons with disabilities. The FCC has also been working with the disability community, industry, TTY manufacturers and public safety answering points to resolve the incompatibility between TTYs and digital wireless telephones.

CREATING AN ADMINISTRATION THAT LOOKS LIKE ONE AMERICA

Appointed the Most Diverse Administration in History -- President Clinton has appointed a highly talented and the most diverse Administration in history, including the appointment of record numbers of people with disabilities in the White House and throughout the Clinton-Gore Administration. The Federal government now employs more than 100,000 employees with some type of disability.

President Clinton's Administration appointees include: Judith Heumann, Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitation Services; Paul Miller, Commissioner of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission; and Fredric Schroeder, Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Commission. People with disabilities serve in the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Justice, State and Transportation. President Clinton has also appointed people with disabilities to positions in such independent agencies as the National Council on Disability and the Social Security Administration, as U.S. District Court Judges and to various Presidential Committees, Commissions and Task Forces. In the White House, Charles Ruff serves as Counsel to the President. And Jonathan Young, Associate Director of Disability Outreach, is the first person with a disability ever appointed to do disability outreach in the White House Office of Public Liaison.

**PRESIDENT CLINTON:
BOOSTING THE EMPLOYMENT OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES**

December 17, 1999

"Today, we say with a simple, but clear voice, no one should have to choose between taking a job and having health care."

President Bill Clinton
December 17, 1999

Today, at the FDR Memorial in Washington, President Clinton signed into law the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999, landmark legislation that will enable millions of Americans with disabilities to join the workforce without fear of losing their Medicaid and Medicare coverage. The legislation will also modernize the employment services system for people with disabilities, and extend tax provisions for working families, education, the environment, and scientific research. The President praised the strong bipartisan efforts of Senators Jeffords, Kennedy, Roth, and Moynihan, and Congressmen Lazio, Waxman, Bliley and Dingell in passing this historic legislation, and directed his Cabinet to move swiftly to implement the Act.

REMOVING BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES.

Since President Clinton took office, the American economy has added over 20 million new jobs, and unemployment is at a 29-year low. But the unemployment rate among working-age adults with severe disabilities is nearly 75 percent, partly because outdated institutional barriers often limit their opportunities to work. Under current law, people with disabilities can become ineligible for Medicaid or Medicare if they work, forcing them to choose between health care coverage and employment. The Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999, which the President signed today, will break down these barriers for the millions of Americans who are disabled by:

- + creating new options and incentives for states to offer a Medicaid buy-in for workers with disabilities;
- + extending Medicare coverage for an additional 4 ½ years for people on disability insurance who return to work;
- + creating a \$250 million Medicaid buy-in demonstration to help people whose disability is not yet so severe that they cannot work; and
- + enhancing employment-related services for people with disabilities through the new "Ticket to Work" Program.

The President directed his Cabinet to work with states, providers, advocates and employers nationwide to swiftly implement this important legislation.

OFFERING TAX PROVISIONS FOR WORKING FAMILIES, EDUCATION, ENVIRONMENT, AND RESEARCH. In addition to helping people with disabilities return to work, the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act extend several important tax provisions that promote research and development, improve school facilities in poor communities, encourage employers to pay for their workers' continuing education, help people move from welfare to work, encourage businesses to clean up polluted "brownfields," stimulate clean energy, and ensure that American families continue to benefit from important tax credits.

A COMMITMENT TO INCREASING OPPORTUNITY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES. The Clinton-Gore Administration has a record of opening the doors of the workplace for people with disabilities, including:

- + creating a task force to coordinate national policy efforts to increase employment of people with disabilities;
- + providing a \$1,000 tax credit in last year's budget toward work-related expenses for people with disabilities;
- + directing the federal government -- the nation's largest employer -- to hire more people with disabilities;
- + investing in technology to help more people with disabilities work;
- + fully funding the Work Incentives Improvement Act; and
- + issuing an executive order to expand hiring opportunities for people with psychiatric disabilities.

=====

**PRESIDENT CLINTON SIGNS LANDMARK LEGISLATION TO BOOST THE
EMPLOYMENT OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES
December 17, 1999**

Today, in a ceremony at the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial, President Clinton will sign into law the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999. This landmark legislation will make it possible for millions of Americans with disabilities to join the workforce without fear of losing their Medicaid and Medicare coverage. It will also modernize the employment services system for people with disabilities. The enactment of this legislation is a major achievement for president Clinton, who championed the proposal in last year's budget. The President today will praise the strong bipartisan efforts of Senators Jeffords, Kennedy, Roth and Moynihan, as well as Congressmen Lazio, Waxman, Bliley and Dingell, in passing this historic legislation. Finally, he will direct his Cabinet to move swiftly to implement the Act.

MILLIONS OF AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES FACE BARRIERS TO

EMPLOYMENT. Since President Clinton and Vice President Gore took office, the American economy has added over 20 million new jobs. Unemployment is at a 29-year low of 4.1 percent. But the unemployment rate among working-age adults with severe disabilities is nearly 75 percent. While people with disabilities bring tremendous energy and talent to the American workforce, outdated institutional barriers often limit their opportunities to work. Under current law, people with disabilities often become ineligible for Medicaid or Medicare if they work, putting them in the untenable position of choosing between health care coverage and work.

THIS NEW LAW HELPS BRING DOWN THOSE BARRIERS, AND PRESIDENT

CLINTON PLEDGES SWIFT IMPLEMENTATION. As the President will describe today, the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999 will break down these barriers and help the nation tap the full talents of the millions of Americans who are disabled. The President today will:

+ **Highlight the important provisions of the Work Incentives Improvement Act.** This landmark new legislation creates two new options for states to offer the Medicaid buy-in for workers with disabilities and provides \$150 million in grants to encourage states to take this option; creates a new \$250 million Medicaid buy-in demonstration to help people whose disability is not yet so severe that they cannot work; extends Medicare coverage for an additional 4-and-a-half years for people in the disability insurance system who return to work; and enhances employment-related services for individuals with disabilities through the new "Ticket to Work" Program.

+ **Direct his Cabinet to move swiftly to implement this legislation.** Today, President Clinton will instruct Secretary Herman, Secretary Shalala, Secretary Riley, and SSA Administrator Kenneth Apfel to work with states, providers, advocates and employers nationwide to implement this important legislation rapidly. He will call for effective collaboration to ensure that the Medicaid and Medicare programs work closely with agencies overseeing worker retraining and rehabilitation services.

+ **Encourage states to take advantage of the new health care coverage options under this legislation.** The President will challenge states to take advantage of these new options to offer Medicaid to individuals who are not eligible under existing options, including people with disabilities who take advantage of the options provided under the new law. He also will encourage states to apply for the new \$250 million demonstration program that tests whether early medical intervention, made possible through an affordable Medicaid benefit, will enable people with early symptoms of HIV, muscular dystrophy, Parkinson's Disease, or diabetes to stay healthier and keep working.

+ **Commend the work of the Presidential Task Force on Employment of Adults with Disabilities.** The first report of the Presidential Task Force on Employment of Adults laid the foundation for the Work Incentives Improvement Act legislation. At the ceremony, the President will thank the Task Force for all its work on this issue over the past two years and accept the Task Force's second report, which will be transmitted to him today.

THE CLINTON-GORE ADMINISTRATION'S LONGSTANDING COMMITMENT TO INCREASE OPPORTUNITY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES. President Clinton and Vice President Gore have a longstanding commitment to opening the doors of the workplace to more people with disabilities. The Administration has taken a number of actions, including: creating the Task Force two years ago to coordinate national policy efforts to increase employment of people with disabilities; including in last year's budget a historic \$2 billion initiative to provide a \$1,000 tax credit for work-related expenses for people with disabilities, to invest in technology to help more people with disabilities work, and to fully fund the Work Incentives Improvement Act; putting in place new regulations in February to make work pay for people with disabilities receiving Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI), by allowing them to earn more and still receive critical cash and medical benefits; directing the federal government -- the nation's largest employer -- to take new steps to hire more people with disabilities; issuing an executive order in June expanding hiring opportunities for people with psychiatric disabilities; and directing all federal agencies to increase employment of individuals with disabilities.