JEFF-
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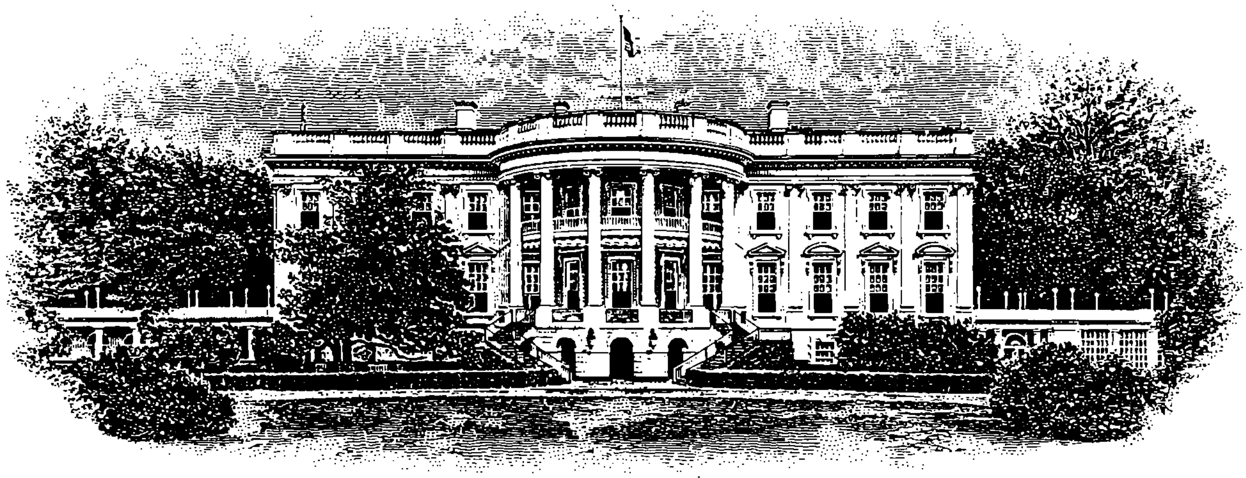
The White House



January 12, 1999

NEW INITIATIVE TO PROVIDE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES

DATE:	January 13, 1999
TIME:	11:35 am to 12:30 pm
LOCATION:	East Room
FROM:	Bruce Reed/Gene Sperling Chris Jennings/Ben Johnson

I. PURPOSE

To announce an employment-related disability initiative, which will be touted by the disability community as the boldest disability initiative since the ADA. This initiative will demonstrate your commitment to providing real economic opportunity for people with disabilities, whose unemployment rate is around 75 percent.

II. BACKGROUND

You will unveil a historic new initiative that will remove significant barriers to work for people with disabilities. This three-part budget initiative, which invests over $2 billion over five years, includes: (1) full funding of the Work Incentives Improvement Act which will be introduced by Senators Jeffords, Kennedy, Roth, and Moynihan next week; (2) a new $1,000 tax credit to cover work-related costs for people with disabilities; and (3) expanded access to information and communications technologies. With these new proposals, the Administration will have taken action on every recommendation made in the report of your Task Force on the Employment of Adults with Disabilities, which the Vice President accepted last month. Justin Dart, one of the foremost leaders of the disability communities, stated in response to today's proposals: "The Clinton-Gore Administration has a long history of supporting the disability community. This policy initiative is one of the boldest since the landmark passage of the ADA."

Critical Need to Remove Barriers to Work

Since you took office, the American economy has added 17.7 million new jobs, and unemployment is at a 29-year low of 4.3 percent. The unemployment rate among all working-age adults with disabilities, however, is nearly 75 percent. According to current estimates, about 1.6 million working-age adults have a disability that leads to functional limitations and 14 million working-age adults have less severe but still significant disabilities.

People with disabilities can bring tremendous energy and talent to the American workforce, but institutional barriers often limit their ability to work. Most critically, people with disabilities often become ineligible for Medicaid or Medicare if they work. This means that many people with disabilities are put in the untenable position of choosing between health care coverage and work. In addition, advances in technology and communications are often not accessible to people with disabilities.

Three-Part Initiative to Improve Economic Opportunities for Americans with Disabilities

- **Funding the Work Incentives Improvement Act in your budget.** Health care -- particularly prescription drugs and personal assistance -- is essential for people with disabilities to work. Today, you are announcing that your FY 2000 budget will fund the full cost of the Work Incentives Improvement Act. This proposal, which costs $1.2 billion over 5 years, would:

  - Improve access to health care by:

    -- Expanding states' ability to provide a Medicaid buy-in to people with disabilities who return to work. This provision would enable states to offer the buy-in to people whose assets and/or income exceed current limits. It also would give states the option of offering the buy-in to people with medical conditions, such as rheumatoid arthritis, who do not meet the current disability standard, but who can work only because of medical treatment. Finally, this provision would give health care grants to those that do so.

    -- Extending Medicare coverage, for the first time, for people with disabilities who return to work. Although Medicare does not provide as comprehensive a benefit as Medicaid, this aspect of the proposal ensures that all people with disabilities who return to work have access to health care coverage, even if they live in a state that does not take the Medicaid option.

    -- Creating a new Medicaid buy-in demonstration to help people with a specific physical or mental impairment that is not yet severe enough to qualify for health care assistance, but that is reasonably expected to lead to a severe disability in the absence of medical treatment. This demonstration could help people with muscular dystrophy, Parkinson's Disease, HIV or diabetes who are able to work with appropriate health care.

  - Modernize the vocational rehabilitation system by creating a "ticket" that will enable SSI or 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.

  - Create a Work Incentive Grant program to provide benefits planning and assistance, facilitate 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.** The daily costs of getting to and from work, and being effective at work, can be high if not prohibitive for people with disabilities. Under this new proposal, workers with significant disabilities would 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 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. The credit will cost $700 million over 5 years.

- **Improving access to assistive technology.** Technology is often not adapted for people with disabilities and even when it is, people with disabilities may not be able to afford it. This new initiative would accelerate the development and adoption of information and communications technologies that can improve the quality of life for people with disabilities and enhance their ability to participate in the workplace. The initiative would: (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. It would cost $35 million in FY 2000, more than double the government's current investment in deploying assistive technology.

Program Participants

You will be introduced by *Karen Moore,* who is a 53 year old polio survivor. Ms. Moore receives SSDI ($493 a month) and Medicare, plus Medicaid personal attendant benefits. She currently works as a dispatcher for River City Transit and Pier. Without her personal attendant benefits, which she receives through the Medicaid program, Ms. Moore would be unable to work, because she is unable to get ready in the morning without assistance. Her job position entitles her to make $7.50 an hour, but when she was hired, she asked the company to lower her salary to $5.50 an hour to reduce a copayment for her Medicaid benefit. Ms. Moore is not sure she can continue working at her current level of salary and co-payment. Today's initiative could improve her health care coverage, as well as give her a tax credit for employment-related assistance.

III. PARTICIPANTS

<u>Briefing Participants</u>
The Vice President
Secretary Shalala
Secretary Herman
Gene Sperling
Bruce Reed
Ben Johnson
Tracey Thornton

Jordan Tamagni
Jeanne Lambrew
Sarah Bianchi
Jonathan Young

Program Participants
You
The Vice President
Senator Kennedy
Senator Jeffords
Senator Harkin
Karen Moore

IV. PRESS PLAN

Information about the new initiative has been advanced to all major national papers for Wednesday. In addition, Secretary Herman will be available to brief the press at the top of Joe Lockhart's briefing.

V. SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

-- **You** and the Vice President, together with Secretary Herman, Secretary Shalala, Senator Jeffords, Senator Kennedy, Senator Harkin, and Karen Moore are announced into the East Room.
-- The Vice President delivers remarks and introduces Karen Moore.
-- Karen Moore delivers brief remarks and introduces **you**.
-- **You** deliver remarks and introduce Senator Jeffords.
-- Senator Jeffords delivers remarks and introduces Senator Kennedy.
-- Senator Kennedy delivers remarks and introduces Senator Harkin.
-- **You** deliver brief closing remarks and depart.

VI. REMARKS

Your remarks have been prepared by Speechwriting.

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IAPSRS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
DATE: January 13, 1999

CONTACT: Paul J. Seifert
Phone: 410-730-7190

The International Association of Psychosocial Rehabilitation Services (IAPSRS) Applauds President Clinton's Support of Senate Effort to Improve Work Incentives for People with Psychiatric Disabilities

PRESIDENT'S ANNOUNCEMENT HELPS BUILD MOMENTUM FOR JEFFORDS/KENNEDY/ROTH/MOYNIHAN LEGISLATION

Washington, DC -- The International Association of Psychosocial Rehabilitation applauds President Clinton's support for the Jeffords/Kennedy/Roth/Moynihan effort to improve the work incentive provisions in the federal government's disability programs. The bi-partisan legislation, titled the *Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999*, is expected to be introduced later this month and could be approved by the Senate Finance Committee as early as this Spring.

This latest announcement by the President to include work incentive reforms in his FY 2000 budget helps build momentum for the Senate's effort to make major improvements in the federal government's disability programs by allowing people with psychiatric and other disabilities to work without the fear of losing access to their health care and by providing people with disabilities a voucher that allows them to pick the rehabilitation provider of their choice. The legislation also provides funding for work incentive planning and assistance to help beneficiaries understand the new work rules.

"The President's full support of the Senate legislation is a critical step in the effort to improve the work rules in our nation's federal disability programs -- SSI and Medicaid, and SSDI and Medicare," said Ruth Hughes, CEO of IAPSRS. People with psychiatric disabilities are the fastest growing population on the Social Security disability rolls; they come on earlier in their lives than people with other disabilities, and on average stay on the rolls longer. "Despite the fact that the unemployment rate is the lowest in our nation's history, the unemployment rate for people with psychiatric disabilities is near 95%. The barriers to work in the federal disability programs are a huge obstacle to employment, and, ultimately, the independence of people with psychiatric disorders," Hughes said.

The President's budget proposal will also include two additional provisions: 1) a $1,000 tax credit for impairment-related work expenses, or IWREs, to help people with disabilities pay for the extraordinary costs of working with a disability; and 2) funding for R&D for new assistive technologies for people with disabilities and a state loan program to help make these technologies more affordable.

More than 8 million working-age adults currently receive benefits under federal disability programs. Fewer than 1% ever leave the rolls through employment, even though a 1998 Harris survey showed 7 out of 10 persons with disabilities would like to work. A major barrier to employment is the loss of federal health care benefits once the individual becomes employed.

The International Association of Psychosocial Rehabilitation Services represents over 1,400 agencies and individual providers of rehabilitation & employment services for people with psychiatric disabilities.

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Chapter One

Initial Recommendations to the President from the Presidential Task Force on Employment of Adults with Disabilities

The Task Force wishes to recognize the outstanding work already completed and underway by the Clinton Administration to improve the employment of adults with disabilities. On July 29, 1998, President Clinton signed an Executive Memorandum to reinforce the mission of the Executive Order through initiatives carried out by the Small Business Administration, the Department of Justice, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and the Department of Health and Human Services.

The Task Force also wishes to acknowledge the efforts of the Section 2 work groups. The Task Force has received the work group summaries and will be reviewing and using them as the basis for future activities as appropriate. We have included these reports in Appendix A. Again, the Task Force has yet to review the summaries or to endorse the recommendations.

The Task Force respectfully submits the following recommendations to the President of the United States of America for immediate consideration:

The Task Force recommends that:

> ***The President direct the Department of Health and Human Services, the Social Security Administration, and other appropriate Administration representatives to continue their work with Senators Jeffords and Kennedy and the leadership of the 106th Congress to pass affordable, feasible legislation promptly that helps people with disabilities maintain their health care coverage and return to work.***
>
> Americans with disabilities often are unable to obtain health care insurance that provides coverage of the services and supports that enable them to live independently and to enter or to rejoin the workforce. The Work Incentives Improvement Act proposed by Senators Jeffords and Kennedy in the 105th Congress would increase Medicaid options and state resources for people with disabilities. It would also allow all Americans receiving Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) to retain Medicare coverage when they return to work. An additional component of this legislation, called the "ticket," would provide SSDI and SSI adult beneficiaries with a greater set of options regarding vocational rehabilitation and other employment services by enabling them to select a provider in the public or private sector.

The Task Force recommends that:

> ***The President continue to work with Congress to pass the Patients' Bill of Rights.***
>
> The Bill of Rights would require a choice of providers, including provider network adequacy provisions, access to specialists, information disclosure, transitional care provision; access to emergency room services, participation in treatment decisions, laws on anti-gag clauses,

disclosure of financial incentives, protection of the confidentiality of health information, anti-discrimination provisions, and access to an appeal process.

The Task Force recommends that:

The President direct the Department of Treasury to examine tax options to assist adults with disabilities in paying for expenses related to work.

Working-age adults with disabilities often have a disincentive to work because of the high cost of personal attendant services and other services or technologies required for employment. Similarly, the cost to employers of hiring an individual requiring personal attendant services can be prohibitive. Tax credits provide a flexible way to assist people with disabilities in defraying these expenses.

The Task Force recommends that:

The President propose a program to increase the employment rate of adults with disabilities by fostering interdisciplinary consortia and service integration by providers of services to adults with disabilities at the state and local level.

Adults with disabilities often require services and resources from a variety of places, such as health care and transportation. If agencies and departments are not well coordinated, it can be difficult for these adults with disabilities to have adequate information to obtain and to retain employment. This program would help facilitate coordination and create partnerships among the many agencies serving adults with disabilities.

The Task Force recommends that:

The President should consider accelerating development and adoption of information and communication technologies that can be used by the 54 million Americans with disabilities. A first step would be to provide support to universities that develop curricula on universal design.

These courses would be offered in traditional classrooms settings and use distance-learning technologies that would train hardware and software engineers to develop products that are accessible to and usable by persons with disabilities.

The Task Force recommends that:

The President direct the Small Business Administration to launch a new outreach campaign to educate Americans with disabilities who own or want to start their own businesses. The campaign would provide greater access to entrepreneurial development programs, financial assistance initiatives, and government contracting opportunities, including the Section 8(a) program, HUB Zones, and small disadvantaged business (SDB) program.

Section 8(a) provides contracting opportunities for disadvantaged businesses. An outreach campaign would improve communication of information to the disability community about their eligibility for this program and other related opportunities for adults with disabilities who own or want to start their own businesses through SBA

The Task Force recommends that:

The President direct Office of Personnel Management and other appropriate agencies to explore measures aimed at eliminating the stricter standards currently applied to adults with psychiatric disabilities and to extend to these individuals opportunities currently available to individuals with mental retardation and severe physical disabilities.

There are three excepted appointment authorities explicitly applicable to individuals with disabilities. Excepted appointing authorities exempt individuals from the competitive appointment process. Schedule B excepted appointments for individuals with psychiatric disabilities are more stringent than Schedule A excepted appointments.

The Task Force recommends that:

The President direct agencies and departments to implement a model plan to be developed by the Office of Personnel Management to increase the representation of adults with disabilities in the federal workforce.

While the federal government has made significant hiring gains, the percentage of adults with severe disabilities in the federal workforce still lags far behind their availability. The Task Force urges the President to direct the Office of Personnel Management to develop a model plan to increase representation of adults with disabilities in the federal workforce that: 1) helps departments and agencies provide opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in internship and student employment programs; 2) encourages all departments and agencies to give full consideration to employees with disabilities for inclusion in developmental opportunities designed to enhance their leadership skills and to advance their careers; 3) urges all departments and managers to recruit widely for positions at all levels of the federal workforce, including at the GS-13 to 15 and senior executive service levels, and 4) collects and maintains data to monitor the success in achieving a higher percentage of adults with disabilities in the federal workforce.

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The Arc Applauds President Clinton and Senate Leaders for Bi-Partisan Work Incentives Efforts

For Immediate Release

Wednesday, January 13, 1999

Contact: Marty Ford
The Arc
202-785-3388

Washington, D.C. — The Arc, the nation's leading national organization on mental retardation, applauds President Clinton and Vice President Gore and Senators Jeffords, Kennedy, Roth, and Moynihan for their bipartisan proposal to remove some of the barriers faced by people who receive Social Security/SSI disability benefits who want to start, or return, to work. The President announced today that he will incorporate the proposal in his Fiscal Year 2000 budget proposal with some additional enhancements.

The new initiative would remove two of the most serious barriers to work for people with mental retardation and other disabilities by providing quality, affordable health insurance for people with SSI or SSDI who work. The proposal would also provide "tickets to work" so that people with disabilities would be able to choose their own provider of employment services in the private or public sector. In addition, the President's proposal would provide a $1,000 tax credit for people with significant disabilities for formal and informal costs related to work, such as personal assistance services or transportation.

This proposal does not remove all barriers to work, but it represents a major step forward in assisting people with disabilities to work. The Arc and other disability advocates hope to garner similar bipartisan co-sponsorship of a companion bill in the House. The Arc calls on the 106th Congress to enact this vital legislation early in this session.

If 75,000 (or just 1%) of the 7.5 million Americans with disabilities become successfully employed, savings in cash assistance would total $3.5 billion over the work life of the individuals.

The Arc represents over 7 million children and adults with mental retardation and their families. Several hundred thousand working-age people with mental retardation are potential beneficiaries of this bipartisan initiative. The Arc has over 140,000 members within approximately 1,000 state and local chapters nationwide.

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The Arc

a national organization on mental retardation

formerly Association for Retarded Citizens of the United States

nish
CREATING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE WITH SEVERE DISABILITIES

2235 Cedar Lane • Vienna, VA 22182-5200 • (703)560-6800 • TDD (703) 560-6512 • FAX (703) 849-8916

Javits-Wagner-O'Day JWOD

For Immediate Release

Contact: Michael Losow
703/208-7489

NISH Cheers White House Support for Disability Work Incentives

January 13, Washington D.C. - Daniel W. McKinnon, President of NISH (formerly National Industries for the Severely Handicapped), today praised the White House on its commitment to ensuring passage and fully funding employment work incentives for people with disabilities who are Social Security beneficiaries. The President has thrown his support to the Jeffords/Kennedy/Roth/Moynihan Work Incentives Improvement Act, a bill that will be introduced January 22.

"NISH is pleased to see such strong bipartisan support for this important legislation," said McKinnon. "This bill would provide individuals with disabilities who are receiving Social Security benefits incentives to work without having to fear the loss of health care coverage. The bill would also provide for a "ticket-to-work," and access to work incentive planners." The 'Ticket to Work' would allow individuals with disabilities to choose where they would obtain vocational rehabilitation, employment and other support services - from state vocational rehabilitation programs as well as alternative providers such as community rehabilitation programs. "We believe strongly in consumer choice," said McKinnon "With this legislaiton, ultimately everyone wins; the individual who will enjoy a better quality of life, the government which will save money, and society which will grow stronger from inclusion of people with disabilities."

NISH maximizes employment opportunities for people with severe disabilities by providing professional and technical assistance to not-for-profit Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) to encourage and assist their participation in the Javits-Wagner-O'Day (JWOD) Program and other employment and training activities as appropriate. NISH is the nonprofit agency designated by the Committee for Purchase from People who are Blind or Severely Disabled to provide assistance to CRPs interested in obtaining federal contracts under the JWOD Program. It is one of NISH's goals to expand employment, personal advancement and placement of people with disabilities by maximizing opportunities created by the JWOD Program while taking advantage of other employment opportunities.

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Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities

The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities Social Security Task Force Welcomes President Clinton's Support in Improving Work Incentives in the Federal Government's Disability Programs

President's Announcement Helps Build Momentum for Legislation Sponsored by Senators Jeffords, Kennedy, Roth, and Moynihan

For Immediate Release

Wednesday, January 13, 1999

Contact: Tony Young, UCPA 703-425-8633
Paul Seifert, IAPSRS 410-730-7190
Marty Ford, The Arc 202-785-3388
Michael Losow, NISH 703-208-7489

Washington, D.C. — The Social Security Task Force of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities welcomes the President's support for the Jeffords/Kennedy/Roth/Moynihan effort to improve the work incentive provisions in the federal government's disability programs. The bi-partisan legislation, titled the Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999, is expected to be introduced later this month and could be approved by the Senate Finance Committee as early as this spring. The President's FY 2000 budget will include the major provisions of the draft legislation.

This latest announcement by the President to include work incentive reforms in his FY 2000 budget helps build momentum for the effort to make major improvements in the federal government's disability programs by allowing people with disabilities to work without the fear of losing access to their health care and by allowing people with disabilities a voucher that allows them to pick the rehabilitation provider of their choice. The legislation also provides funding for work incentive planning and assistance to help beneficiaries understand the new work rules.

The President's budget includes two additional provisions: 1) a $1,000 tax credit for employment-related work expenses to help people with disabilities pay for the extraordinary costs of working with a disability; and 2) funding for research and development for new assistive technology for people with disabilities and a state loan program to help make these technologies more affordable.

The Co-Chairs of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities Social Security Task Force are Tony Young (United Cerebral Palsy Associations), Marty Ford (The Arc), Paul Seifert (International Association of Psychosocial Rehabilitation Services), and Michael Losow (NISH).

The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities is a 100 member coalition of organizations allied to improve lives of people with disabilities.

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PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA

NEWS

801 Eighteenth Street, NW ★ Washington, DC 20006-3517 ★ (202) 872-1300 ★ (202) 416-7622 tty ★ www.pva.org

For immediate release January 13, 1999

PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA APPLAUDS WORK INCENTIVES IMPROVEMENT ACT

Paralyzed Veterans of America applauds Senators James Jeffords, Edward Kennedy, William Roth and Daniel Patrick Moynihan for their plans to pursue the Work Incentives Improvement Act in the 106th Congress. We further commend President William Jefferson Clinton for offering the support of his administration in this effort as well as the recommendations for a new work-related expenses tax credit and greater access to assistive technology. These bipartisan initiatives represent the most significant attempt in many years to remove barriers to employment for people with disabilities. In providing ongoing access to affordable health care coverage and choice of vocational rehabilitation providers, the Work Incentives Improvement Act offers essential supports that will enable millions of individuals with disabilities to become full members of society through productive employment. PVA pledges its support to Congress and the Administration to ensure enactment during this session of Congress of the Work Incentives Improvement Act and the other important employment proposals announced today.

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American Network of Community Options and Resources

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Press Release

For more information, contact
Suellen Galbraith (703-642-6614)
ANCOR Director for Public Policy

ANCOR APPLAUDS PRESIDENT AND SENATE BIPARTISAN EFFORTS TO REMOVE BARRIERS TO WORK FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Washington, D.C., January 13, 1999: The American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR) applauds President Clinton, Vice President Gore, and Senators Jeffords (R-VT), Kennedy (D-MA), Roth (R-DE), and Moynihan (D-NY) for their bipartisan efforts to remove the powerful disincentives which currently punish and prevent people with mental retardation and other disabilities who want to work from entering the workforce. Senators Jeffords, Kennedy, Roth, and Moynihan will introduce their historic legislation—the *Work Incentives Improve Act of 1999—next week.*

The President unveiled today a three-part initiative, which includes $1.2 billion in the Administration's FY 2000 budget for the bipartisan Jeffords-Kennedy-Roth-Moynihan bill. The sponsoring Senators intend to make *1999 the year that Congress fulfills the dream of all Americans with disabilities to be a part of our Nation's workforce and growing economy.*

ANCOR congratulates the President and Vice President for proposing initiatives that invest $2 billion over five years in helping people with mental retardation and other disabilities add their contributions to America's workforce in the 21st Century.

In addition to recommending full funding for the *Work Incentives Improvement Act*, President Clinton announced two other initiatives also forwarded last month by the President's Task Force on Employment of Adults with Disabilities in its report *Recharting the Course.* The President also signaled that his FY 2000 budget would contain a new $1,000 tax credit for work-related expenses for people with disabilities, and expanded access to information and communication technologies to promote research and aid to people in the workforce.

For over two years, ANCOR and its 650 private providers of supports and services to people with disabilities have worked to secure passage of legislation that would remove the serious barriers to employment of

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
DATE: January 13, 1999

CONTACT: Paul J. Seifert
Phone: 410-730-7190

The International Association of Psychosocial Rehabilitation Services (IAPSRS) Applauds President Clinton's Support of Senate Effort to Improve Work Incentives for People with Psychiatric Disabilities

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"The President's full support of the Senate legislation is a critical step in the effort to improve the work rules in our nation's federal disability programs -- SSI and Medicaid, and SSDI and Medicare," said Ruth Hughes, CEO of IAPSRS. People with psychiatric disabilities are the fastest growing population on the Social Security disability rolls; they come on earlier in their lives than people with other disabilities, and on average stay on the rolls longer. "Despite the fact that the unemployment rate is the lowest in our nation's history, the unemployment rate for people with psychiatric disabilities is near 95%. The barriers to work in the federal disability programs are a huge obstacle to employment, and, ultimately, the independence of people with psychiatric disorders," Hughes said.

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The International Association of Psychosocial Rehabilitation Services represents over 1,400 agencies and individual providers of rehabilitation & employment services for people with psychiatric disabilities.

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PRESIDENT CLINTON AND VICE PRESIDENT GORE UNVEIL NEW INITIATIVE TO IMPROVE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES
January 13, 1999

Today, President Clinton will unveil a historic new initiative that will remove significant barriers to work for people with disabilities. This three-part budget initiative, which invests over $2 billion over five years, includes: (1) full funding of the Work Incentives Improvement Act which will be introduced by Senators Jeffords, Kennedy, Roth, and Moynihan next week; (2) a new $1,000 tax credit to cover work-related costs for people with disabilities; and (3) expanded access to information and communications technologies. With these new proposals, the Administration will have taken action on every recommendation made in the report of the President's Task Force on the Employment of Adults with Disabilities, which the Vice President accepted last month. Justin Dart, one of the foremost leaders of the disability communities, stated in response to today's proposals: "The Clinton-Gore Administration has a long history of supporting the disability community. This policy initiative is one of the boldest since the landmark passage of the ADA."

CRITICAL NEED TO REMOVE BARRIERS TO WORK
Since President Clinton took office, the American economy has added 17.7 million new jobs, and unemployment is at a 29-year low of 4.3 percent. The unemployment rate among all working-age adults with disabilities, however, is nearly 75 percent. According to current estimates, about 1.6 million working-age adults have a disability that leads to functional limitations and 14 million working-age adults have less severe but still significant disabilities.

People with disabilities can bring tremendous energy and talent to the American workforce, but institutional barriers often limit their ability to work. Most critically, people with disabilities often become ineligible for Medicaid or Medicare if they work. This means that many people with disabilities are put in the untenable position of choosing between health care coverage and work. In addition, advances in technology and communications are often not accessible to people with disabilities.

THREE-PART INITIATIVE TO IMPROVE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES

- **Funding the Work Incentives Improvement Act in the President's budget.** Health care -- particularly prescription drugs and personal assistance -- is essential for people with disabilities to work. Today, the President is announcing that his FY 2000 budget will fund the full cost of the Work Incentives Improvement Act. This proposal, which costs $1.2 billion over 5 years, would:

  - Improve access to health care by:

    -- Expanding states' ability to provide a Medicaid buy-in to people with disabilities who return to work. This provision would enable states to offer the buy-in to people whose assets and/or income exceed current limits. It also would give states the option of offering the buy-in to people with conditions, such as rheumatoid arthritis, who no longer meet the current disability standard because of medical treatment that allows them to work. Finally, this provision would give health care grants to those that do so.

-- Extending Medicare coverage, for the first time, for people with disabilities who return to work. Although Medicare does not provide as comprehensive a benefit as Medicaid, this aspect of the proposal ensures that all people with disabilities who return to work have access to health care coverage, even if they live in a state that does not take the Medicaid option.

-- Creating a new Medicaid buy-in demonstration to help people with a specific physical or mental impairment that is not yet severe enough to qualify for health care assistance, but that is reasonably expected to lead to a severe disability in the absence of medical treatment. This demonstration could help people with muscular dystrophy, Parkinson's Disease, HIV or diabetes who are able to work with appropriate health care.

- Modernize the employment services system by creating a "ticket" that will enable SSI or 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.

- Create a Work Incentive Grant program to provide benefits planning and assistance, facilitate 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.** The daily costs of getting to and from work, and being effective at work, can be high if not prohibitive for people with disabilities. Under this new proposal, workers with significant disabilities would 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. The credit will cost $700 million over 5 years.

• **Improving access to assistive technology.** Technology is often not adapted for people with disabilities and even when it is, people with disabilities may not be able to afford it. This new initiative would accelerate the development and adoption of information and communications technologies that can improve the quality of life for people with disabilities and enhance their ability to participate in the workplace. The initiative would: (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. It would cost $35 million in FY 2000, more than double the government's current investment in deploying assistive technology.

With these steps, the Administration has taken action on all Task Force Recommendations. In December, the Vice President accepted the report of the President's Task Force on the Employment of Adults with Disabilities, took action on some of their recommendations, and pledged that the Administration would review others in the budget process. With the new steps taken today, as well as an announcement that Mrs. Gore will make tomorrow, the Administration has taken action on all the Task Force formal recommendations:

- Work to pass the Work Incentive Improvement Act -- included in Adminstration's budget.
- Work to pass a strong Patients' Bill of Rights -- high Administration priority.
- Examine tax options to assist with expenses of work -- included in Administration's budget.
- Foster interdisciplinary consortia for employment services -- included in Administration's budget.
- Accelerate development and adoption of assistive technology -- included in Administration's budget.
- Direct Small Business Administration to expand outreach -- Vice President announced in December.
- Remove Federal hiring barriers for people with mental illness -- Mrs. Gore will unveil tomorrow.
- Direct OPM to develop model plan for Federal hiring of people with disabilities -- Vice President unveiled in December.

PRESIDENT CLINTON AND VICE PRESIDENT GORE UNVEIL NEW INITIATIVE TO IMPROVE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES
***BACKGROUND*: January 13, 1999**

Today, President Clinton will unveil an historic new initiative that will remove significant barriers to work for people with disabilities. This three-part budget initiative, which invests over $2 billion over five years, includes: (1) full funding of the Work Incentives Improvement Act which will be introduced by Senators Jeffords, Kennedy, Roth, and Moynihan next week; (2) a new $1,000 tax credit to cover work-related costs for people with disabilities; and (3) expanded access to information and communications technologies. With these new proposals, the Administration will have taken action on every recommendation made in the report of the President's Task Force on the Employment of Adults with Disabilities, which the Vice President accepted last month. Justin Dart, one of the foremost leaders of the disability communities, stated in response to today's proposals: "The Clinton-Gore Administration has a long history of supporting the disability community. This policy initiative is one of the boldest since the landmark passage of the ADA."

BARRIERS TO WORK FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

- **Millions of working-age adults have disabilities**. About 1.6 million working-age adults have a disability that leads to functional limitations (i.e., needs help with at least one activity of daily living). About 14 million working-age adults are disabled using a broader definition (e.g., uses a wheelchair, or walker; has a developmental disability).

- **The unemployment rate among people with disabilities is staggering**. Nearly 75 percent of people with disabilities are unemployed. Not only is it more difficult for people with disabilities to work; when they do work, their earnings are lower. According to one study, the average earnings for men with disabilities are 15 to 30 percent below those of men without disabilities. These disparities are greater for those needing help with daily activities.

- **Multiple barriers to work**. People with disabilities face a number of challenges, including:
  - **Lack of adequate health insurance**. In most places in the U.S., people with health problems can be charged high premiums by private insurance companies or denied coverage altogether. Those who are insured may not be covered for some of their needs, such as personal assistance. Medicaid covers these services, but eligibility is generally restricted to people who cannot work. Thus, there is little incentive to return to work.

  - **Higher costs of work**. People with disabilities not only face lower than average wages, but typically pay more to get to and from work and to function at work. Thus, for some, returning to work may decrease rather than increase their savings.

  - **Disconnected employment service system**: A variety of vocational rehabilitation, educational, training and health programs exist to facilitate work for people with disabilities, but they rarely work together in a coordinated way.

  - **Inaccessible or unavailable technology**: Technological advances facilitate work, improve productivity and reduce the costs of such technology. Yet, people with disabilities often lack information on what exists, how to use it, and how to afford it.

ADMINISTRATION COMMITMENT TO IMPROVING OPPORTUNITIES

The President has made expanding economic opportunities to all Americans -- particularly people with disabilities -- a priority. His accomplishments include:

- **Most diverse Administration in history** by appointing a large number of people with disabilities to senior positions. The Federal government now employs about 127,000 employees with some type of disability.
- **Strong efforts to end job discrimination**. In July 1998, the President directed key federal civil rights agencies (Department of Justice, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the Small Business Administration) to increase outreach and implementation efforts.
- **New Medicaid buy-in option for workers with disabilities**. 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.
- **Improving employment services**. On August 7, the President signed the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), including the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998. It establishes better links between the vocational rehabilitation and the workforce development systems.
- **Expanding accessible transportation**. In September 1998, the Department of Transportation issued the final regulation implementing the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) provisions for over-the-road bus (OTRB) accessibility.
- **Reauthorizing and expanding the Assistive Technology Act**. In October, 1998, the President signed the "Tech Act" which provides assistive technology to low-income people with disabilities and encourages small businesses to design and market innovative ideas.
- **TASK FORCE ON EMPLOYMENT OF ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES**. One of the most important actions taken by President Clinton was the signing of the executive order establishing the Presidential Task Force on Employment of Adults with Disabilities on March 13, 1998. Led by Alexis Herman, Secretary of Labor, and Tony Coelho, this Task Force is charged with coordinating an aggressive national policy to bring adults with disabilities into gainful employment. It produced a set of interim recommendations in December, 1998, summarized below:

RECOMMENDATION	ACTION
1. Work to pass the Work Incentive Improvement Act	President includes in budget
2. Work to pass the Patients' Bill of Rights	High Presidential priority
3. Examine tax options to assist with expenses of work	President includes in budget
4. Foster interdisciplinary consortia for employment services	President includes in budget
5. Accelerate development/adoption of assistive technology	President includes in budget
6. Direct Small Business Administration to start outreach	Vice President announced 12/98
7. Remove Federal hiring barriers for people w/ mental illness	Mrs. Gore announced tomorrow
8. Develop a model plan for Federal hiring of people w/ disabilities	Vice President announced 12/98

WORK INCENTIVES IMPROVEMENT ACT

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. It is the centerpiece of the President's initiative to provide economic opportunities to people with disabilities. Altogether, it would cost an estimated $1.2 billion over 5 years. Its major components are described below.

HEALTH INSURANCE PROTECTIONS

Health care -- particularly prescription drugs and personal assistance -- is essential to enabling people with disabilities to work. This proposal would: (1) expand option and funding for the Medicaid buy-in for workers with disabilities; (2) extend Medicare coverage for people with disabilities who return to work; and (3) create a demonstration of a Medicaid buy-in for people with disabilities that have not yet gotten severe enough to end work and qualify them for disability, Medicaid or Medicare.

- **Expanding the State Medicaid Buy-In Option for Workers with Disabilities.** Two new optional eligibility categories would allow states to expand Medicaid coverage to workers with disabilities beyond the current option created in the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 (BBA). Additionally, a new grant program would be provide $150 million in funds to states taking these option to help them start their programs and outreach to eligible workers.

  The BBA option allows people with disabilities who would be eligible for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) but for earned income up to 250 percent of poverty to buy into Medicaid at a premium set by the state. This would be expanded through two new options:

  Workers with higher earned income, unearned income, and assets. The first new option allows states to expand this Medicaid buy-in to people with disabilities with earned income above 250 percent of poverty with assets, resources and unearned income to limits set by the state. This is important since many workers with disabilities have either assets and resources that exceed the current limit of $2,000 or are transitioning from Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and have unearned income exceeding the limit of about $500.

  Workers whose conditions improve but still are disabled. The second new option would allow states that elect the first option (covering working people with disabilities with assets, resources and unearned income below limits set by the state) to also extend the Medicaid buy-in to people who continue to have a severe medically determinable impairment but lose eligibility for SSI or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) because of medical improvement. Often, such improvements are possible only with health care.

To give an example of who might be helped by this option, a person with rheumatoid arthritis whose condition prevents work could receive disability and health coverage. If, at the medical review, laboratory tests were still positive but the therapy and a new drug allowed the person to work, benefits would essentially end. Although this temporary remission is mostly attributable to health care coverage, the improvement would disqualify the person from disability and thus health benefits under current law.

Grant assistance. States that take one or both of the new eligibility options for working individuals with disabilities would be eligible for a new grant program. This program would give states funds for infrastructures to support working individuals with disabilities as well as to build the capacity of states and communities to provide home and community-based services. Funds could also be used for outreach campaigns to connect people with disabilities with resources. A total of $150 million would be available for the first 5 years, and annual amounts will be increased at the rate of inflation for 2004 through 2009. States meeting these criteria would receive a grant no less than $500,000 and no more than equal to 15 percent of expenditures on medical assistance for individuals eligible under the new state options. Funds would be available until expended.

Both options would be treated like any other Medicaid eligibility option (e.g., same Federal matching rate, benefits rules). States could not supplant existing state spending with Medicaid funding under these options and would have to maintain effort for current spending for people made eligible under these options.

- **Continuation of Medicare Coverage for Working Individuals with Disabilities.** A ten-year trial program would allow people who are receiving Medicare because of their receipt of SSDI payments to continue to receive Medicare coverage when they return to work. Under current law, these individuals may receive Medicare coverage during the 39-month period following their trial work period, but have to pay the full Medicare Part A premium after that time. In many cases, people returning to work following SSDI either work part time and thus are not eligible for employer-based health insurance or work in jobs that do not offer insurance. This leaves them no alternative to the individual insurance market which can charge people with pre-existing conditions exorbitant premiums or deny them coverage altogether in many states. This option, which allows these workers to maintain their Medicare coverage so long as they remain disabled (as determined through continuing disability reviews), would remove a critical barrier to returning to work.

- **Demonstration of Coverage of Workers with Potentially Severe Disabilities.** A demonstration program would allow states to offer the Medicaid buy-in to workers that, as defined by the State, have a disability that without health care could become severe enough to qualify them for SSI or SSDI. Funding of $300 million would be available for this demonstration, which sunsets at the end of FY 2004. States could participate in this demonstration if they have opted to expand coverage through at least one of the new Medicaid eligibility options for workers with disabilities. People covered in this demonstration would receive the same coverage as other workers with disabilities.

This demonstration is intended to help people whose condition has not yet deteriorated enough to prevent work but who need health care to prevent that deterioration. For example, a person with muscular dystrophy, Parkinson's Disease, or diabetes may be able to function and continue to work with appropriate health care, but such health care may only be available once their conditions have become severe enough to qualify them for SSI or SSDI and thus Medicaid or Medicare. This demonstration would provide new information on the cost effectiveness of early health care intervention in keeping people with disabilities from becoming too disabled to work.

TICKET TO WORK AND OTHER PROVISIONS

- **Ticket to Work.** Currently, SSDI and SSI disabled beneficiaries believed to benefit from employment-related services are mostly referred to state vocational rehabilitation (VR) programs administered by the Department of Education, which are then reimbursed based on cost. This provision would give more consumer choice in receiving employment services and increases provider incentives to serve SSI and SSDI beneficiaries. Components of the ticket proposal include:

  Consumer Options for Employment Services. The ticket would enable an SSI and SSDI beneficiary to go to either a public or a participating private provider.

  Provider Options for Reimbursement. Providers who accept the ticket would select their preferred reimbursement: (1) outcome payments system (e.g., 40 percent of benefits saved for five years once the recipient leaves the rolls), or (2) an outcome-milestone payment system (e.g., a flat payment when a specific employment related goal is achieved plus a portion of benefits saved once the recipient leaves the rolls).

  Temporary Suspension of Continuing Disability Reviews. During the period when a beneficiary is "using a ticket" the individual would not be subject to continuing disability reviews -- medically scheduled or triggered by work activity.

- **Demonstrations**. This provision requires SSA to undertake a demonstration project that reduces SSDI benefits by $1 for each $2 earned above a certain level. Under current law, a DI beneficiary in the extended period of eligibility who earns more than the substantial gainful activity level, currently $500 a month, does not receive a cash benefit. Another provision would extend SSA's SSDI demonstration authority which expired in June 1996.

- **Changes in Continuing Disability Reviews (CDRs)**. SSA uses CDRs to determine if a beneficiary continues to meet the definition of disability over time. This provision would prohibit using work activity as the sole basis for scheduling a CDR for individuals during the first 24 months of DDSI eligibility. Additionally, this proposal would provide an expedited eligibility determination process for SSDI applicants who received benefits for at least 24 months & engaged in substantial gainful activity during their extended periods of eligibility.

WORK INCENTIVE GRANTS

The Work Incentive Grant proposal would combine the strong ideas in Title IV of the Work Incentive Improvement Act with those of the Task Force on the Employment of Adults with Disabilities to improve the existing infrastructure for providing information and services to individuals with disabilities. The new grant program would build upon the *Workforce Investment Act (WIA)*, signed into law by the President last year, by ensuring that people with disabilities have access to the full range of employment and re-employment services in the One-Stop delivery system established by the WIA.

- **New partnerships.** Competitive grants (totaling $50 million a year) would be awarded to partnerships of organizations (public and private), including organizations of people with disabilities in every state. These partnerships will be responsible for working with the One-Stop system to augment that system's capacity to provide a wide range of high quality services to people with disabilities working or returning to work, including:
  - <u>Providing benefits planning and assistance</u>;
  - <u>Facilitating access to information</u> about services and work incentives available in the public, private, nonprofit sectors (e.g., availability of transportation services in the local area, eligibility for health benefits, and access to personal assistance services);
  - <u>Better integrating and coordinating</u> employment and support services on the Federal, state, and local levels of government.

- **Building on current efforts.** The new grant program would build upon the solid base formed by the state and local workforce investment boards mandated by the Workforce Investment Act. The WIA sets forth a new priority on ensuring that individuals with disabilities are provided access to employment and training information and services. The Federally-funded Vocational Rehabilitation agencies are required to participate in the One-Stop delivery system of employment and training services. Further, the local workforce investment boards are required to include representatives of community-based organizations, including those that represent persons with disabilities. DOL will encourage local boards to include business leaders with experience in employing such individuals.

- **Administration**. As the lead Federal agency for employment and training services for all Americans, DOL would administer these grants. DOL would consult with National Council on Disability, the President's Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities, and the Task Force on the Employment of Adults with Disabilities, the Education Department, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Social Security Administration, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Small Business Administration, the Department of Commerce, and others on the development of its solicitation for grant applications, on review of applications for quality and comprehensiveness, and on monitoring and evaluating the grants and the operations of the One-Stop system.

TAX CREDIT FOR WORKERS WITH DISABILITIES

Eligible workers with disabilities would receive a $1,000 tax credit beginning in 2000. This would help about 200,000 to 300,000 people, at a cost of $700 million for 2000-04.

- **Goal**. This new tax credit would help offset some of the formal and informal costs associated with employment for people with disabilities. As such, it would provide a greater incentive to begin working, and help those people with jobs maintain them. It would complement the Work Incentives Improvement Act and would be available to all people with disabilities, irrespective of their state Medicaid eligibility options. For participants in a Medicaid buy-in, it could pay for services not covered (e.g., special clothing, transportation). It also gives the person with disabilities flexibility in directing the credit toward the services that they need the most.

- **Amount of the credit**. The credit would be $1,000. It would phase out for higher income tax payers (taxpayer with modified adjusted gross income exceeding $110,000 for couples, $75,000 for unmarried taxpayers, and $55,000 if the taxpayer is married but filing a separate return; same phase-out as the child tax credit). This credit cannot exceed the total amount of tax liability except, however, that it may be refundable for taxpayers with 3 or more dependents.

- **Eligibility.** A taxpayer (or his or her spouse) would qualify for the proposed tax credit if he or she had earnings and was disabled. "Disabled" for this credit would be defined as being certified within the previous 12 months as being unable, for at least 12 months, to perform at least one activity of daily living (bathing, dressing, eating, toileting, transferring and continence management) without personal assistance from another individual, due to loss of functional capacity.

- **Interaction with other tax provisions**. Worker with severe disabilities who also qualify for the President's proposed long-term care credit may receive both credits since they are intended to help with different types of costs.

  Individuals receiving this credit may also be eligible for the present-law deduction for impairment-related work expenses of persons with disabilities (this deduction is not subject to the 2 percent limit). However, many individuals with disabilities may not be able to itemize their deductions or incur significant work-related expenses outside the workplace (which do not qualify for the deduction).

- **Who benefits**. About 200,000 to 300,000 workers would receive this credit.

- **Cost**: $700 million over 5 years.

EMPOWERING AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES WITH ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

This multifaceted initiative would improve the development, adoption and prevalence of technologies that help people with disabilities work. It would cost $35 million in FY 2000, more than doubling the government's current investment in deploying assistive technology.

- **Goal**: This initiative would accelerate the development and adoption of information and communications technologies that can be easily used by Americans with disabilities. Information technology has the potential to significantly improve the quality of life for people with disabilities, enhance their ability to participate in the workplace, and make them full participants in the Information Society.

- **Elements of the initiative**. This initiative has five parts:

  - **Making the Federal government a model employer.** The government would expand its purchases of assistive technology and services to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities in the federal government.

  - **Supporting state loan programs to make assistive technology more affordable.** The Department of Education's National Institute on Disabilities and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) would provide matching funds to states that create or expand loan programs to make assistive technology more affordable for people with disabilities.

  - **Investing in research and development and technology transfer to make technology more accessible**. NIDRR and the National Science Foundation would invest in research on technologies such as "text to speech" for people who are blind, automatic captioning for people who are deaf, or speech recognition and eye tracking for people who cannot use a keyboard.

  - **Developing an "Underwriters Laboratory" for accessible technologies**. The government would provide start-up funding to a private sector organization, analogous to the Underwriters' Laboratory, that would test information and communications technologies to see if they are accessible. This would help expand the market for accessible technologies.

  - **Encourage industry to make products more accessible**, Building on a successful partnership with the Internet industry (the Web Accessibility Initiative), the government would provide matching funds to industry consortia that work with disabilities community to make key technologies accessible, such as interactive television, small, hand-held computers, and cellular phones.

- **Cost**: $35 million per year.

Good Morning President Clinton, Vice President, Madam Secretary Herman, Madam Secretary Shalala, **Secretary Slater, Director La Chance, Social Security Administrator Apfel and NEC Chairman Sperling,** Honorable Tony Coello, esteemed Congressional leaders, and honored guests. My name is Karen Moore. I live in St. Pierre, South Dakota, and I am honored to be here today to share my personal triumphs and to talk about the social barriers that prevent me from achieving full economic independence.

On August 15, 1998, with the support of the South Dakota Rehabilitation Services, Easter Seals South Dakota, and several other agencies, I secured full time employment as a dispatcher for River Cities Transit System, my first job since raising my daughter. It is a new accessible coordinated community transit system in our community. I have worked hard to learn everything they have asked of me, from voice recognition technology software, which **helps me use my computer and type just as fast as everyone else,** to scheduling of clients. I am good at what I do and love my job.

Interestingly, since going to work full time, I find I need less medical care; I am making friends and acquaintances, and even my relationship with my family has improved. I feel better about myself while contributing to my community. I am a taxpayer who has reduced her SSDI benefits, helping to save the Trust Fund that **everyone agrees is so important to our children's futures.**

However, I am afraid for my future and the future of millions of people with disabilities who are in situations like mine. The way that the current system is set up, people with disabilities who return to work often lose the health care that enables them to work in the first place. I depend on attendant care services every day to participate in the community and prepare for work. Attendant care is a necessity, not a luxury that I can go without. It literally enables me to get out of bed every morning. **However, I had to ask the company I work for to reduce my salary from $7.50 an hour to $5.50 so I could receive help paying for this care. Even with this help, my payments for attendant services are greater than my monthy salary. I believe in contributing for these services, but the current arrangement**

makes it impossible for me to continue working. I am a humble person from South Dakota; yesterday was the first time I had ever been on a plane. My wants are simple. I am just ~~trying~~ working to make a better life for myself and my family, but too many barriers are blocking my path towards economic independence.

President Clinton, Vice President Gore, I know that you support the rights of people with disabilities. I pray that Congress will act quickly to adopt the initiatives you are proposing today, which are critically important to me and millions of Americans with disabilities. I hope the members here take my plea to pass this legislation back to the other members of Congress, because until the barriers in the current health care systems are eliminated, people with disabilities will never fully achieve economic freedom. With the way the system is now, the American Dream remains inaccessible to people like me.

It is now my honor to introduce someone who is working hard to help Americans with disabilities. Please welcome President William Clinton.