

ADA Signing Ceremony Transcript

Prayer by Rev. Harold Wilke from Claremont, Calif. (no arms)

00:02:00

Let My People Go was your decree oh God. Commanding that all your children be freed from the bonds of slavery. Today we celebrate the breaking of the chains which have held back millions of Americans with disabilities. Today we celebrate the granting to them of full citizenship and access to the promised land of work, service and community. Bless this gathering this joyous celebration. Bless our president as he signs the Americans With Disabilities Act and strengthen our resolve as we take up the task, knowing that our work has just begun. Bless the American people and move them to discard those old beliefs and attitudes that limit and diminish those among us with disabilities. Our prayer is in your name oh God who we call by many names. The god and father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Allah. The compassionate and merciful one. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and of Rebecca and Sarah and Ruth. The ground of all being. The infinite source of love and light. Amen.

-Short speech by Evan Kemp. (in wheel chair) He introduces the president.

President George H.W. Bush's Speech:

00:05:05

Evan, thank you so much. And welcome to every one of you out there in this splendid scene of hope spread across the south lawn of the White House. I want to salute the members of the United States Congress, the House and the Senate, who are with us today, active participants in making this day come true.

5:44

This is. This is indeed an incredible day especially for the thousands of people across the nation who have given so much of their time, their vision and their courage to see this act become a reality. You know, I started trying to put together a list of all the people who should be mentioned today. When the list started looking a little longer than the senate testimony for the bill, I decided I better give up or that we'd never get out of here before sunset. So, even though so many deserve credit, I will single out only a tiny handful. And I thank those who have guided me personally, over the years. Of course my friends Evan Kemp and Justin Dart up here on the platform with me. [The president continues to thank several more people.]

7:40

This is an immensely important day. A day that belongs to all of you. And, everywhere I look, I see people who have dedicated themselves to making sure that this day would come to pass. My friends from Congress as I say who worked so diligently with the best interest of all at heart. Democrats and Republicans, members of this administration and I'm pleased to see so many top officials and members of my cabinet here today who brought their caring and expertise to this fight. And then... the organizations. So many dedicated organizations for people with disabilities who gave their time and their strength.

And perhaps most of all. Everyone out there and others across the breadth of this nation... are forty three million Americans with disabilities. You have made this happen. All of you have made this happen.

8:41

And to all of you, I just want to say, your triumph is that your bill will now be law. And that this day belongs to you. And on behalf of our nation, Thank you very, very much.

9:00

Three weeks ago we celebrated our nation's independence day. And today we're here to rejoice in and celebrate another Independence Day... one that is long overdue.

And with today's signing of the landmark Americans for Disabilities Act. Every man, woman, and child with a disability can now pass through once closed doors into a bright new era of equality, independence and freedom. And, as I look around at all these joyous faces, I remember clearly how many years of dedicated commitment have gone into making this historic new Civil Rights Act a reality. It's been the work of a true coalition. A strong and inspiring coalition of people who have shared both a dream and a passionate determination to make that dream come true. And it's been a coalition in the finest spirit, the joining of Democrats and Republicans, of the legislative and executive branches of federal and state agencies, of public officials and private citizens, of people with disabilities and without.

This historic act is the world's first comprehensive declaration of equality for people with disabilities.

The first!

10:27

And, it's passage has made the United States the international leader on this human rights issue. And, already, leaders of several other countries including Sweden, Japan, The Soviet Union and all twelve members of the E.E.C. have announced that they hope to enact now similar legislation.

10:57

Our success with this act proves that we are keeping faith with the spirit of our courageous forefathers who wrote in the Declaration of Independence, "We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal. That they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights."

And, these words have been our guide for more than two centuries, As we have labored to form our more perfect union. But tragically, for too many Americans, the blessings of liberty have been limited or even denied. And, the Civil Rights Act of sixty-four took a bold step towards writing that wrong. But, the stark fact remained that people with disabilities were still victims of segregation and discrimination... and this was intolerable.

And, today's legislation brings us closer to that day when no Americans will ever again be deprived of their basic guarantee of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

12:14

This act is powerful in its simplicity. It will ensure that people with disabilities are given the basic guarantees for which they have worked so long and so hard. Independence. Freedom of choice. Control of their lives. The opportunity to blend fully and equally into the rich mosaic of the American mainstream. And legally, it will provide our disabled community with powerful expansions of protections and then basic civil rights. It will guarantee fair and just access to the fruits of American life which we all must be able to enjoy.

And then specifically... First, the ADA ensures that employers covered by the act cannot discriminate against qualified individuals with disabilities.

13:16

Second, the ADA ensures access to public accommodations such as restaurants, hotels, shopping centers, and offices. And third, the ADA ensures expanded access to transportation services.

And forth, the ADA ensures equivalent telephone services for people with speech or hearing impediments.

13:47

And these provisions mean so much to so many. To one brave girl in particular this will mean the world. Lisa Carl, a young Washington state woman with cerebral palsy who I'm told is with us today. Now, she will always be admitted to her hometown theater. Lisa, you might not have been welcome at your theater, but I'll tell you, welcome to the White House. We're glad you're here.

14:21

The ADA is a dramatic renewal, not only for those with disabilities but for all of us, because a long with the precious privilege of being an American comes a sacred duty to ensure that every other American's rights are also guaranteed. And together, we must remove the physical barriers we have created and the social barriers that we've accepted. For ours will never be a truly prosperous nation until all within it prosper. And for inspiration, we need look no further than our own neighbors with us.

And that wonderful crowd out there are people representing eighteen of the daily points of light that I've named for their extraordinary involvement with the disabled community. We applaud you and your shining example and thank you for your leadership for all that are here today.

15:21

Now let me just tell us a wonderful story - a story about children already working in the spirit of the ADA, a story that really touched me. Across the nation, some ten thousand youngsters with disabilities are a part of Little League Challenger division and their teams play just like others but, and this is the most remarkable part. As they play, at their sides are volunteer buddies from conventional little league teams.

And all of these players work together and they team up to wheel around the bases and to field grounders together and most of all just to play and become friends. We must let these children be our guides and inspiration.

And, I also want to say a special word to our friends in the business community. You have in your hands the key to the success of this act. For you can unlock a splendid resource of untapped human potential that when freed will enrich us all.

I know there have been concerns that the ADA may be vague or costly or may lead endlessly to litigation. But, I want to assure you right now that my administration and the United States Congress have carefully crafted this act. We've all been determined to ensure that it gives flexibility, particularly in terms of the timetable of implementation. And, we've been committed to containing the costs that may be incurred.

This Act does something important for American business though and remember this. You've called for new sources of workers. Well, many of our fellow citizens with disabilities are unemployed. They want to work. And, they can work. And, this is a tremendous pool of people

17:23

And remember this is a tremendous pool of people who will bring the jobs diversity, loyalty, proven low turnover rate, and only one request - the chance to prove themselves. And when you add together federal, state, local and private funds, it costs almost two hundred billion dollars annually to support Americans with Disabilities. In effect, to keep them dependent. Well, when given the opportunity to be independent, they will move proudly into the economic mainstream of American life and that's what this legislation is all about.

18:08

Our problems are large, but our unified heart is larger. Our challenges are great, but our will is greater. And, in our America, the most generous, optimistic nation on the face of the earth, we must not and will not rest until every man and woman with a dream has the means to achieve it. And today, America welcomes into the mainstream of life all of our fellow citizens with disabilities. We embrace you for your abilities and for your disabilities; for our similarities, and indeed, for our differences, for your past courage and your future dreams.

And last year we celebrated the victory of international freedom. Even the strongest person couldn't scale the Berlin Wall to gain the elusive promise of independence that lay just beyond. And so, together we rejoiced when that barrier fell.

And now, I sign legislation which takes a sledgehammer to another wall.

19:22

One which has for too many generations separated Americans with disabilities from the freedom they could glimpse, but not grasp. And, once again, we rejoice as this barrier falls... for claiming together... We will not accept. We will not excuse. We will not tolerate discrimination in America.

19:52

And with again great thanks to the members of the United States Senate, leaders with whom are here today, and those who worked so tirelessly for this legislation on both sides of the aisle. And to those members of the House of Representatives with us here today - Democrats and Republicans as well, I salute you.

And, on your behalf as well as the behalf of this entire country, I now lift my pen to sign this Americans with Disability Act and say, Let the shameful wall of exclusion finally come tumbling down. God bless you all.