

Press Release

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SCHAKOWSKY COMMEMORATES ADA'S FIFTEENTH ANNIVERSARY

WASHINGTON, DC - Fifteen years ago on July 26th, 1990, President George H.W. Bush signed the Americans with Disabilities Act into law. U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky delivered a statement in the House of Representatives recognizing the significant progress made by the ADA, while recognizing that much progress is still needed in the battle to guarantee equal rights and access for disabled Americans.

Representative Schakowsky has consistently fought for equal rights for disabled Americans in her career as a consumer advocate, state legislator, and U.S. Representative. This Congress, Representative Schakowsky has sponsored a bill called the Inclusive Home Design Act (H.R. 1441) a bill that would require newly-constructed, federally-assisted single family houses and town houses to include at least one level that is accessible to the disabled.

Representative Schakowsky's remarks are below:

"Mr. Speaker, today I rise to celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. When the ADA was signed on July 26, 1990, it promised "equality of opportunity, economic self-sufficiency, inclusion and independence" for people with disabilities. This landmark legislation - one of the most important civil rights bills of our generation - is designed to allow the disabled to be full and productive members of our society. The goal of the ADA is that no one should be isolated or denied the opportunity that is the American dream."

"The motivating idea behind the ADA is the recognition that persons with disabilities deserve to enjoy true equality and independence, to be part of our nation not isolated within it. The ADA says it is wrong that individuals cannot join their friends at a movie theater or restaurant or sports stadium simply because they are in a wheelchair. It is wrong that disabled individuals are not hired because employers refuse to make workplace accommodations. It is wrong that, because individuals must deal with a disability, they must also deal with the lack of accessibility to public buildings, transportation and services. That kind of discrimination goes against the fundamental principles of our nation. It is those types of obstacles that the ADA has sought to eradicate. By integrating people with disabilities into the workforce and community, we have all benefited."

"While there were many individuals who were instrumental in winning the passage of the ADA, I want to acknowledge and thank two leaders in the disability rights movement: Justin Dart and Marca Bristo. Justin Dart was an inspiration for all of us who care not just about disability rights but about human rights. Marca Bristo, a constituent and friend, continues to lead the effort to expand opportunities and respect for persons with disabilities. I have had the personal privilege of knowing and learning from them and, like so many others, have been profoundly influenced by them."

"Justin Dart was born in Chicago in 1930, contracted polio in 1948 and spent the rest of his life in a wheelchair. Although he died in 2002, his legacy lives on both through the thousands of advocates he has inspired and through the work of Yoshiko Dart and the rest of his family. He was known for his grassroots activism, touring the nation, rallying people to support disability rights. In 1981, Mr. Dart was appointed by President Reagan to be the vice-chair of the National Council on Disability. He and others on the Council drafted a national policy that called for national civil rights legislation to end the centuries-old discrimination against people with disabilities -- what would eventually become the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. In 1988, he was appointed to lead the Congressional Task Force on the Rights and Empowerment of Americans with Disabilities. Mr. Dart toured the nation, touting the ADA as "the civil rights act of the future." In 1990, Justin Dart received the first pen used by former President Bush at the signing ceremony for the Americans with Disabilities Act. For the remainder of his life, Justin Dart continued to work passionately to see that disabled persons were given the rights they deserve and to win 'Justice for All.'"

"Marca Bristo is a nationally and internationally acclaimed leader in the disability rights movement. In 1977, Ms. Bristo suffered a spinal injury in a car accident. Her new condition forced her to see life in a new way, and she has since been a passionate and tenacious advocate for disability rights. In 1980, she founded Access Living in Chicago,

one of the nation's first centers for independent living. Ms. Bristo served as the Presidentially-appointed chairwoman of the National Council on Disability from 1994 to 2002 and while heavily involved in the drafting of the ADA, has not been afraid to point out the need for improvements in it. As chairwoman of the NCD, she released a report on the ADA five years ago which focused specifically on implementation problems and has persistently argued that rights must be enforced in order to be real. Marca Bristo continues to work hard for disability rights and to improve the lives of people in Chicago and around the nation."

"Our nation has come a long way in the fifteen years since passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. We have changed, we have become a more inclusive society, but we have not achieved our goal. The ADA has done much to break down barriers for the disabled, but we must recognize that we have far more to do to end discrimination. For fifteen years now, it has been illegal for employers to discriminate against job applicants because of their disabilities. Yet, 2 of every 3 disabled persons are unemployed. It is illegal for state and local governments to deny disabled persons access to public services such as mass transit. Yet, funding constraints still leave persons with disabilities without accessible and convenient transportation options. Public and commercial buildings must be constructed and, where possible, modified to accommodate disabled persons. Yet, homes are still being built that lock people out instead of being built to be accessible and inclusive. That is why I have introduced H.R. 1441, the Inclusive Home Design Act. Finally, too many people are still locked out of their communities because of the lack of home- and community-based services. We need to build upon the initial success of the ADA to solve these problems. Yet, today we are defending against Social Security privatization schemes that would slash disability benefits for 8 million people with disabilities and against Medicaid cuts that would jeopardize health and long-term care services."

"The Americans with Disabilities Act has changed our society in these past fifteen years. However, as with most civil rights issues, there is still so much more progress to be made. We must remember the vision of Justin Dart and listen to the message of Marca Bristo. While we take time to celebrate today's anniversary, we must never be content until the promise of the Americans with Disabilities Act becomes reality so that every person is guaranteed 'equality of opportunity, economic self-sufficiency, inclusion and independence.'"