

MAY 17, 2001

SCHAKOWSKY ADDRESSES 5TH ANNUAL WASHINGTON RALLY OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ON INDEPENDENT LIVING

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- I want to thank the National Council on Independent Living. You are passionate fighters for civil rights and economic justice for everyone. We are living in the 21st century. It is time - it is long past time - that we guarantee full and equal rights to every single person in our country.

It is time to close the door on policies that deny people with disabilities the right to employment. We passed the Ticket to Work and the Work Incentive Improvement Act last Congress. Now we have to implement meaningful work opportunities in every state. We cannot afford to lose a single productive member of our society because we refuse to tear down the barriers that lock people out of the workplace. We all lose if we refuse to make the accommodations necessary to get people with disabilities into the workplace.

It is time to close the door on policies that force people with disabilities into institutions, instead of helping them to live at home and in the community. We must expand Medicaid to include personal assistance services. We must increase funding for centers for independent living. We must not only eliminate policy biases toward institutionalization, we must provide all the resources necessary to make comprehensive home and community-based services available and affordable. The U.S. Supreme Court's decision in the Olmstead case was a fabulous victory - but it is not enough. Changing policy makes deinstitutionalization possible, providing the money makes it happen.

It is time that we guarantee every person a decent place to live. Adults with disabilities face an enormous challenge even finding accessible housing. When they do, it is likely to be unaffordable. If we can put people on the moon and uncover the secrets of the human genome, we can build housing that is accessible and affordable.

Congress just passed a budget resolution that does not include the money for MiCASSA or more housing. It does not provide money to install 21st century voting machines in every polling place or to provide real ADA enforcement. Those who voted for that budget resolution need to hear from you. They need to know that a budget that provides tax breaks for the wealthy but doesn't improve housing and health care is just not good enough. They need to be told that they must do better than that.

Most important, it is time that we guarantee the civil rights of every person. The ADA is one of the most important civil rights laws of our generation. Last year, we celebrated its 10th anniversary. This year, we continue to face assaults, whether from inadequate resources for enforcement or bills like the ADA Notification Act. I'm sorry that Clint

Eastwood didn't know enough to make his restaurant accessible. But we can be just as tough as Dirty Harry himself - the law is on the books, it's been there for 11 years now, it must be obeyed. Those who violate other people's civil rights don't deserve a free pass - they deserve to be penalized for ignoring the law of the land.

We also have to fight the nomination of people of like Jeffrey Sutton. President Bush likes to brag about the fact that his father signed the ADA into law. Can we let him get away with appointing Jeffrey Sutton to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 6th District? This is a man who, in arguing the Garrett case for Alabama, said that the ADA is "NOT NEEDED." He argued that we should just rely on state laws. But it is the state of Alabama that discriminated in the Garrett case.

Jeffrey Sutton is not just an enemy of the ADA. He successfully argued against the Age Discrimination Act before the Supreme Court. He also just won a case that, unless overturned by the Supreme Court, will prevent people from using the federal courts to sue states that refuse to provide Medicaid benefits.

Jeffrey Sutton is not a friend of people with disabilities, older Americans, children, women or anyone else. It is a disgrace that he has been nominated and, together, we will prevent him from ever sitting on a federal bench.

We can accomplish these goals but we will not accomplish those goals without you. Just as you led the fight for the ADA eleven years ago, you need to lead the fight now. You all know how to make your voices heard - in the streets, in the halls of Congress, and in the voting booth.

As a member of the House Democratic Caucus Special Committee on Election Reform, I am working with my colleagues to make sure that every person is able to vote and that every vote cast is actually counted. During the last election, some people were kept away from the polls because of roadblocks, intimidation or election officials who refused to honor voting cards. People with disabilities are routinely kept away because of physical obstacles, the lack of accessible transportation to the poll, outdated voting machines, and failure to guarantee privacy in voting. If we tear down the barriers to voter participation, it will go a long way to tearing down the other barriers that face us.