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...In my country, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 is a landmark breakthrough. People with disabilities have been granted full, legally-enforceable equality by one of the world's most influential nations. Significant leaders in many countries have expressed the intention to pursue similar legislation. The ADA is an absolutely essential legal and educational tool to achieve equality and to achieve employment. But the ADA is not equality and it is not employment. ADA is a promise to be kept.

And what is that promise? For whatever the law says legally, the clear promise of the ADA is that all people with disabilities will be fully equal, fully productive, fully prosperous, and fully welcome participants in the mainstream. Keeping the promise of the ADA is not going to be easy.

(JD Toronto speech Feb 06, 1992)

...But ADA is only the beginning. It is not a solution. Rather, it is an essential foundation on which solutions will be constructed.

We must undertake a courageous reallocation of our society's resources from paternalism to independence and productivity. We must invest in a continuum of new and strengthened programs to liberate people with disabilities from dependency, and empower them to be equal and productive participants in the mainstream: Productivity-oriented education for all citizens. Economic, technological, independent living, vocational rehabilitation, transitional, personal assistance and community based supports for productivity and quality of life. Prevention. Affordable insurance and health care for all. Incentives for productivity to replace disincentives. Accessible communications, transportation, housing, and completely new communities that are accessible as a whole.

A large agenda? Certainly! But no larger than that which faced our patriot forefathers at the successful conclusion of the revolutionary war.

Like them, we have accomplished much. Like them, we have a profound responsibility to make a bold declaration of equality real in the lives of hundreds of millions of people in future generations.

I believe that we will unite to fulfill that responsibility. Because I believe in you, the patriots of ADA. And I believe in you, the patriots to be.

Together we have overcome. Together we shall overcome.

(Justin Dart, Jr., ADA Worklife, Fall 1990 issue by Presidents Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities)

Justin Dart on the ADA

A Promise to be Kept: from Civil Rights to Empowerment

In this foreword, I will offer some personal observations on the ADA, past, present, and future. I have been a wheelchair user for 43 years and active in civil rights, politics, and empowerment process almost the same length of time. I have been deeply involved with the ADA from its early beginnings, but not the

creation of many of its antecedent rights laws. For many years, I lived in Mexico and Japan, and was associated business and rights advocacy there.

...Around 1980, it became clear to me that we would never overcome the barriers to mainstream participation until the message of our full humanity was communicated into the consciousness and process of America by a strong, highly visible, comprehensive civil rights law. It was equally clear that no meaningful mandate for equality could be passed or implemented until our tiny, fragmented disability community movement united, expanded, and matured in the political process.

A decade ago, there was little demand for comprehensive disability rights legislation among the national leaders of our movement. "We can't even enforce 504 [Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973], so why waste our time talking about more?" "The days of civil rights is gone. There will never be another major civil rights law passed." The consensus was for advocating legislation that provided services and partial rights in incremental steps.

Although I was by no means confident that a law like the ADA could be passed in this century, I felt strongly that the project must become the central focus and passion of our movement. To Americans, total equality is a sacred concept of transcending power and majesty. "We hold these truths..." and "I have a dream..." are far easier to communicate than partial rights and particular services. No matter how long it took to pass and implement a comprehensive civil rights law, every day of advocacy for total equality would unite and strengthen our movement, and would contribute to the kind of public consciousness of our equality that is absolutely essential to the achievement of all our goals. In addition, the process would provide an ideal context for advancing particular services and rights.

I determined to devote my life to this project. My role would be (1) to attempt to bring the groups and individuals of our community together; and (2) to promote united advocacy and bi-partisan political and public support for a strong legal mandate for full equality. I would not debate the details of civil rights, services, or turf, except to insist on the principle of full equality and full participation in every area of social process for all who suffered discrimination on account of disability. If I lived to see the enactment of an authentic civil rights law, which I seriously doubted, I would then advocate a comprehensive empowerment policy that would make equality real in daily life.

In this cause, I visited every state from four to 20 times, dialoguing with groups of from three persons to 6,000, from nursing home residents to the President and members of Congress. I sent thousands of united advocacy messages to Congress and to a national network of more than 1,000 disability community leaders.

(1991)

...Civil rights are not a guarantee of the good life, but an equal opportunity and responsibility to participate in producing the good life for oneself and for all. Government alone cannot implement ADA; this is a responsibility of all Americans...

Completing the Revolution of Free Enterprise Democracy

Finally, we will do well to recall that most initially successful revolutions have been frustrated by apathy and disunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act is a landmark victory for human justice. But we are still far from the promised land of equality and empowerment in everyday life.

Our task now is to complete the revolution of free enterprise democracy by implementing the inalienable right and the inalienable responsibility of all people to fulfill their personal potential to be fully equal, fully productive participants in the mainstream of society.

Our revolution will not be easily or quickly accomplished. Like the revolution of '76, it will progress only through inspirational national leadership and the total involvement of united citizen patriots. Like our founding fathers, we will not live to see the final victory. But we can lay the essential foundation of a democratic edifice in which generations of the future – in America and in every nation – will produce a life of quality that transcends the wildest imagination of utopian fiction...

(From ADA to Empowerment, October 12, 1990)