

PAGINA BILINGÜE

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November 2, 2007

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES: Remarks at the Granite State Independent Living Forum

I am thrilled to be here and I have to say having the endorsement of this extraordinary senator, leader, champion – means the world to me. Lou, I am thrilled to have you on this team. It's a winning team and we're going to go together to the White House and get the changes that America needs.

I am very happy to be here. I want to thank Clyde Terry, the executive director, who in his remarks pointed out something that all of you know so well, that he was one of the driving forces to help form the Granite State Independent Living organization. And I salute him for that. And you've been blessed with good leadership to keep it going and keep it growing. Clyde thank you, thank you for your efforts.

It's also wonderful to be here with Ted Kennedy, Jr. He is a great leader in the tradition that we would expect. And I'm going to proudly tell his father, when I see Senator Kennedy, that I was with his son and his son is much better looking.

It is great to being here with all of you. I want to make a few remarks and then I know you've got some questions. It is really important that you're holding this forum.

The Manchester Community Television is covering it and you've got more than 20 national disability rights organizations that have come together to host this. I've already seen friends from New York and Washington, DC who are here today.

Well you are doing are doing what has to be done. And that is standing up and fighting for the rights of people with disabilities. My friend and supporter, Senator Maggie Hassan, was just telling me – she said you know, it's a lot easier to be kind than to be just. And we want both. We want both kindness and justice for people with disabilities.

Disability rights are civil rights – the right to be treated equally. They are human rights – the right of all people to fulfill their God-given potentials. And they are an urgent issue for America – because America will never achieve our potential until all Americans can achieve theirs.

Now obviously we have come a long way in this country. But, we have our work cut out for us if we're going to keep the promise that we should – that we will continue to work for a more perfect union that includes Americas. For the past seven years, it's as though people with disabilities have been invisible to this President and his administration.

If you're a child who can't get the special education classes you need – you're invisible.

If you're a citizen who wants to vote, but the polling place doesn't have the right equipment or the right help – you're invisible.

If you're a worker wants a job, but can't find one that accommodates your disability – you're invisible too.

Well, people with disabilities may be invisible to George Bush, but they are not invisible to you, and they will never be invisible to me.

This is a cause I've been involved with for throughout my 35 years.

My first job out of law school was with the Children's Defense Fund. I did not want to go to work for big law firm. I didn't want to work for federal judge. I wanted to work on behalf of children.

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I was assigned to go to New Bedford, Massachusetts as part of a nationwide effort to understand why so many children were not enrolling in school. And how did we know that? Because we had census figures of how many children there were in a community between the ages of five and 18. And we had school enrollment figures. And they didn't match. Where were those children?

Knocking on those doors was eye-opening and heart-breaking experience. I found children who weren't in school because of physical disabilities like blindness and deafness. On the small back porch off her family's home, I met a girl in a wheelchair who told me how much she wanted to go to school. But she knew she couldn't go, simply because she couldn't walk.

These children were kept home because the schools couldn't, and wouldn't, accommodate them. They wanted to learn. They wanted to succeed. But they never had the chance.

I knew then that I wanted to spend my life fighting to be a voice for children who had been left out and left behind. I wanted to give them the same opportunities I had growing up.

The Children's Defense Fund submitted our results to the Congress. And, with the help of strong leaders like Senator Kennedy, and all of you who are advocates, it led to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act – mandating that children with physical, emotional and learning disabilities be educated in the public school system.

My work on this issue came full circle, when as a Senator, when I helped write the IDEA Reauthorization Act in 2004, to ensure we have targeted resources dedicated to teacher training. In the Senate, I have also worked to pass the Community Choice Act, which will finally, we hope, eliminate the institutional bias in our Medicare and Medicaid systems. I have aggressively fought to investigate the linkages between environmental toxins and disabilities. And I have strongly supported the ADA Restoration Act, and look forward to signing it into law as President – and you're all invited to the signing ceremony

When I am President, my White House will welcome you. Our government will be a partner with you. And new opportunities will be open to you.

I have laid out an agenda to increase employment among people with disabilities. These reforms are long overdue. Americans with disabilities have half the employment rate and double the poverty rate of those without disabilities. Even those who have graduated from college work at only two-thirds the rate of others. We need to provide more opportunities for people with disabilities to break into the middle class – not just to survive, but to thrive.

One of my first acts will be to reinstate my husband's executive order that committed the federal government to hiring 100,000 people with disabilities. President Bush was wrong to abandon that commitment, and I'm going to get us back on track.

I'll also double our investment in work-enabling technologies, by providing more low interest loans for purchasing them. I'll provide real-time support for employers so they can make the accommodations necessary for their employees to do their jobs. I want to also propose, and work to pass, a \$1,000 per worker tax credit to offset the expenses of work and transportation for workers with disabilities.

In addition to the positive agenda that I will pursue, I want to get rid of the disincentives for work in so many federal programs. Right now, people with disabilities can lose their Social Security Disability Insurance, their Supplemental Security Income, their Medicare, and Medicaid benefits when they earn even a tiny salary. That is absolutely upside-down. So just think about it. It makes no sense. Even if you can work and want to work, there's a penalty if you try to work. We are a nation that believes in work and we want people to make a contribution. We believe

it's in the individual's interest, as well as the country's. That's bad for taxpayers, it's unfair to people with disabilities, and we need to end it once and for all.

One of the proudest accomplishments of the Clinton Administration was to sign the Ticket to Work and Work and the Work Incentives Improvement Act into law. As a result, 31 states have enacted policies to reduce the disincentives to work. That's significant progress, but state policies are still uneven. That's why we need to move at the federal level. As President, I'll help working individuals with disabilities buy-in to Medicaid; eliminate the Medicare eligibility time limit on the number of years an individual can work; and conduct a review to determine where disincentives to work still exist in federal benefit programs and where we can and must do better.

I think we can break down these barriers to employment and empower people with disabilities to find the jobs and careers that are fulfilling and important to them and the rest of us.

Finally, I want to mention my health care plan. It's called the American Health Choices Plan and it has real significance for people with disabilities. My health care plan will let you keep your existing coverage if you are satisfied with it, but it provides affordable choices if you don't have coverage or you are dissatisfied. And it covers every single American. Everyone will have access to the same choices Members of Congress have now. We have a Congressional plan that covers members of Congress and federal employees. It works pretty well and you pay for it. It provides more than 250 options and it has a lower cost than you'll find through most employers and certainly on your own in the marketplace. I believe if it's good enough for Members of Congress, it's good enough for you and every other American.

And under my plan, you will never be denied coverage because of pre-existing conditions or risk factors. Right now, health insurance companies spend \$50 billion a year trying to figure out how not to cover people. I mean that's their business model. They claim they're in the health insurance business, but they're really in the health no insurance business. They're trying to avoid covering people, and then if they somehow get caught, and they actually cover you, they try to avoid paying for the services that you receive. I think that's wrong. And I'm offering a new business plan. And in fact, I'm going to save them a fortune. Because here's the new policy: more discrimination, period. Cover everybody.

My plan requires insurance companies to compete based on cost and quality, not how skillfully they can exclude patients with the greatest medical needs.

We're also going to start covering prevention. I believe we can actually avoid some disabilities if we provide prevention. The clearest example of that is that government and health insurance plans, rarely pay for a visit to a podiatrist for a diabetic. But they pay for the amputation of the foot. Therefore we have created a disability instead of preventing a disability. And there are many other examples that I could go through in the absolutely backwards way that the health care system currently operates.

My health plan, my disabilities agenda, and all of the policies I've put forward have one unifying principle: that we're all in this together and it's time to start acting like it again. I do not believe in the Bush Republican policies of you're in this on your own. They call it the ownership society. And they are trying to put the entire burden of coping with all of life's unpredictable events on the individual. That was what was behind their attempt to privatize Social Security. That is what is behind their efforts to cut back on support from other systems that enable people to fulfill their God-given potential.

Well I believe that whenever anyone in America can't live up to his or her potential that diminishes all of us. And we owe all of our people wise, sensible policies that recognize the dignity, the value, and the humanity of their all Americans. I know that's what most Americans believe. We just need our political system once again to show the leadership necessary to make it happen. I am excited by my campaign because of the broad support I am receiving across New Hampshire. But I know we have a very tough two months plus to go. And I'm going to do everything I can to travel this state to meet with as many citizens as possible to answer your questions.

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But one thing I that am proud to be representing is the change that Americans deserve to have. Now change is just a word unless you have the strength and experience to make it happen. But I don't any people who are stronger, than people with disabilities, who get up every single day and do the best they can, reach out to others, and I want to recognize that strength. So, yes, kindness is called for from all of us to one another. I believe that we've got to get back to treating each other with that sense of recognition and respect. But never forget that justice is at the core of the American Dream. And we must once again stand for just here at home and around the world.

Thank you all very much.

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