



Remarks by John McCain to the Americans with Disabilities Conference

By Press Office
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ARLINGTON, VA -- U.S. Senator John McCain's presidential campaign today released the following remarks by John McCain as prepared for delivery via satellite to the Americans with Disabilities conference:

In a few months' time, Americans will choose their next president, and the course that our country will follow in the years to come. Many thousands of those votes would never be cast at all, were it not for this organization and its Disability Vote Project.

Like so many other rights and privileges in our country, the right to vote always belonged to Americans with disabilities. But exercising that right could be a very different matter. The franchise isn't worth much to someone who has been overlooked in registration, or can't operate the voting machinery, or has no means of even getting to the polling place. For men and women with disabilities, a great many obstacles once stood in the way of the right to vote. And it was your good work that overcame them.

Overcoming barriers is what your organization does. And as your victories add up, in legislatures and courtrooms, you don't just serve one constituency -- you serve our country. When men and women with disabilities are excluded from joining fully in the life of our nation, that is an injustice to them and it is a loss to America. It falls to you at the AAPD to hold America to its own ideals. You extend the promise of America to more citizens. You afford people with disabilities the chance to put their talents and great gifts to use, and America is richer for it.

Along the way, I have been proud to count myself a friend to the cause of equal opportunity for all Americans -- with or without a disability. And so often what these reforms in law established were standards of simple fairness and consideration. We helped to assure equal access to the use of phones and television for the hearing or speech impaired. We reformed job training and placement services to expand opportunities, and we made colleges and universities more welcoming to students with disabilities. We improved Medicaid to permit greater opportunities for work and self-sufficiency. And when a monument was commissioned in honor of our only president with a disability, I shared your own strongly held opinion that the greatness of the man was best captured sitting in his chair.

In recent memory, the greatest step forward for the cause was the Americans with Disabilities Act, of which I was a principal co-sponsor. And for all the good that law has brought into millions of lives, more work remains to be done. In reauthorizing the ADA, we must remove all doubt that the law is intended to protect Americans from any kind of discrimination on the basis of a physical or mental disability. And we must clarify the definition of a disability, to assure full protection for those the law is intended to serve. Last month, the House passed the ADA Amendments Act of 2008 by a substantial margin. I support that House bill, and intend to support a Senate version that adheres to the same principles.

One of the most fundamental principles of all is that the presence of a disability should not mean the absence of choice. When the government does its duty by extending aid to Americans with disabilities, it should not do so in a heavy-handed way that restricts personal freedom. I will work to enact legislation that would build on the principles of the Money Follows the Person Initiative, while also keeping my commitment to a responsible budget. The offer of assistance in living with a disability should not come with the condition of perpetual confinement to an institutional setting. The great goal here should be to increase choices, to expand freedom, to open doors, and to allow citizens with disabilities to live where they want and to go where they wish.

Everyone who seeks the presidency brings to the office his or her own experiences. And one of the finest experiences in my life has been to witness the power of human courage to overcome adversity. I have seen it in war, in prison camps, and in

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military hospitals. I have seen the capacity of men and women to overcome the hardships, challenges, and bad breaks that life can bring our way. How we face such obstacles can define our lives. And how we support one another at those times can define the character of our country. You at the AAPD have seen these same qualities of courage, determination, and grace -- you have seen them in each other. And when you enlist your fellow citizens in the cause of equality and fairness for Americans with disabilities, you call upon the best that is in our country.

I thank you all the good work that you do. I thank you for your kind attention this afternoon. And now let me turn you back over to Judy to kick off our discussion.

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