

Presidential Documents

Proclamation 7229 of September 30, 1999

National Disability Employment Awareness Month, 1999

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

As Americans, we define ourselves in many ways—not only by our families and communities, but also by our work; not only by who we are, but also by what we do for a living. Millions of Americans with disabilities, however, do not share that experience because their path to the world of work has been strewn with barriers. At a time when the unemployment rate in our Nation is at the lowest level in a generation—4.2 percent—a staggering 75 percent of Americans with disabilities remain unemployed, even though the vast majority of them want to work.

One of the greatest barriers to employment for people with disabilities is that, under current law, they often become ineligible for Medicaid or Medicare if they work. That is why I have challenged the Congress to pass the bipartisan Work Incentives Improvement Act. This proposed legislation would extend Medicare coverage for people with disabilities who return to work and improve access to health care through Medicaid. No American should ever be forced to choose between health care coverage and employment, and this legislation will help ensure that no one has to make that choice.

In addition to fully funding the Work Incentives Improvement Act, my Administration's proposed budget includes a \$1,000 tax credit to help people with disabilities offset the cost of special transportation and other work-related expenses. We are also seeking to double our investment in such assistive technology as braille translators, mobile phones, and voice recognition software that give disabled citizens the tools they need to make the transition to work. And in June of this year, I signed an Executive order to expand employment opportunities for people with psychiatric disabilities and set an example for the private sector by ensuring that the Federal Government's hiring and promotion standards are the same for these workers as they are for people with mental retardation or severe physical disabilities.

Next year our Nation will celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the 25th anniversary of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act—the two landmark pieces of legislation that transformed our country's disability policy and set a standard for other nations around the world. However, putting an end to negative attitudes and shattering destructive stereotypes will require the concerted efforts of all sectors of society. Until we integrate Americans with disabilities as full participants in our social fabric, we will never reach our employment goals.

This year, in addition to rededicating ourselves to breaking down employment barriers, we will highlight the achievements of people with disabilities in areas such as journalism, entertainment, and the arts. People like journalist John Hockenberry prove that a wheelchair need not be an obstacle to traveling the world to report breaking news. Artists like blind sculptor Michael Naranjo and deaf painter Alex Wilhite illustrate that having a disability can be the vehicle for advancing the arts in novel ways. Performers like Laurie Rubin, a classically trained vocalist, show us that blindness need not prevent one from taking the great stage of the opera.

To recognize the enormous potential of individuals with disabilities and to encourage all Americans to work toward their full integration into the workforce, the Congress, by joint resolution approved August 11, 1945, as amended (36 U.S.C. 121), has designated October of each year as "National Disability Employment Awareness Month."

NOW, THEREFORE, I, WILLIAM J. CLINTON, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim October 1999 as National Disability Employment Awareness Month. I call upon Government officials, educators, labor leaders, employers, and the people of the United States to observe this month with appropriate programs and activities that reaffirm our determination to fulfill both the letter and spirit of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this thirtieth day of September, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-nine, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-fourth.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "William J. Clinton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "W" and "C".