

Summing Up: Opportunities of Implementation

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At the White House signing ceremony for the ADA, President Bush ended his remarks by articulating one of the Act's most significant opportunities. He said, "Let the shameful wall of exclusion finally come tumbling down." The opportunity to remove barriers that have excluded and denied persons with disabilities from participating, developing their skills and talents, and contributing to the riches of our nation is one we have before us. It is a chance to recommit ourselves to a fundamental cornerstone of the American dream: equal opportunity.

The ADA presents an opportunity to turn the corner on policies promoting welfare-like dependence and to develop instead supports for independence in the context of working, living, and recreating in the mainstream. In this sense, implementing the ADA is an opportunity to contribute to an improved economy. When persons with disabilities give up public subsidies for jobs, they leave funds in the public coffers. When they become taxpayers, they contribute directly to the public treasuries. When persons with disabilities become consumers in the marketplace, they strengthen the economy.

The ADA offers opportunities for partnerships between the private and public sectors, between persons with disabilities and the business community, and between accessibility experts and industry. The generation of these partnerships will bring opportunities for creativity and

ingenious problem solving as people with disabilities join government officials, proprietors of shops, business owners, industry leaders, unions, technical-assistance experts, and disability service providers to fashion accessible and inclusive situations, environments, and practices.

Finally, implementation of the ADA offers an unprecedented opportunity to advance our knowledge about effective practices in constructing an inclusive and integrated world for people with disabilities. We can learn more about what sort of technical assistance is effective, for whom, and in what circumstances. We can learn about how behaviors and attitudes toward persons with disabilities can change. Research undertaken while policy is put into practice is likely to be relevant to policy makers when they raise the inevitable questions about the success and impact of the ADA. In the rush to proceed with implementation, let us not overlook evaluation as an important component of our efforts.

The ADA is not the answer to all of the challenges faced by persons with disabilities—rather, it is a new beginning. Justin Dart, chairman of the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, articulated this thought lucidly when he said, "The ADA is only the beginning. It is not a solution. Rather, it is an essential foundation on which solutions will be constructed."