

ORIGINAL

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PRESENTED TO THE 3RD ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM ON
PERSPECTIVES ON EMPLOYMENT OF HANDICAPPED INDIVIDUALS
GALLAUDET COLLEGE, WASHINGTON, D.C.
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(GREETINGS TO HOSTS, GUESTS, FRIENDS, ETC.)

I'M DELIGHTED TO JOIN YOU THIS MORNING AT THIS, YOUR LAST SESSION. I'VE SEEN YOUR PROGRAM AND I'M IMPRESSED WITH THE RANGE OF RESOURCE EXPERTS THAT HAVE BEEN HERE SINCE WEDNESDAY. AND ONCE AGAIN, LET ME SAY THAT IT HAS BEEN A PRIVILEGE FOR THE U.S. PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE TO HAVE BEEN A CO-SPONSOR FOR THIS ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM.

THE COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR PROGRAM THIS WEEK DESERVES A STRONG VOTE OF COMMENDATION AND THANKS. AND I WILL ADD MY PERSONAL THANKS TO YOUR CHAIRMAN, PAUL MEYER, AND TO OUR OWN P.H.S. REPRESENTATIVE, A VERY ABLE AND DEDICATED INDIVIDUAL, MR. JOE FAHA.

I MUST SAY THE EXCELLENCE OF THE PROGRAM OF THE PAST COUPLE OF DAYS MAKES MY JOB THIS MORNING A LITTLE DIFFICULT. I CAN'T COME UP HERE WITH A LOT OF FACTS AND FIGURES TO CONVINCING YOU OF THE NEED FOR EXPANDING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR DISABLED PERSONS.

THAT'S ALREADY BEEN DONE QUITE WELL BY SUCH SPEAKERS AS FRANK BOWE AND CLARENCE THOMAS, AND HAROLD RUSSELL, EVERETT ALVAREZ, AND MANY OTHERS.

WITH THEIR WORDS STILL RINGING IN YOUR EARS, YOU SHOULD LEAVE THE SYMPOSIUM LATER TODAY AS "TRUE BELIEVERS" AND "REAL ACHIEVERS." I CERTAINLY HOPE THAT YOU DO. FOR, THROUGH YOUR EFFORTS, MANY THOUSANDS OF OTHERS -- DISABLED AND HANDICAPPED PERSONS -- WILL REAP THE MANY TANGIBLE AND INTANGIBLE BENEFITS OF FEDERAL EMPLOYMENT.

ALSO BENEFITING WILL BE THE AMERICAN TAXPAYER, OUR EMPLOYER, WHO HAS NEVER BEEN LET DOWN YET BY DISABLED PERSONS IN THE FEDERAL WORK-FORCE.

BUT YOU'RE THE KEY TO THE OPPORTUNITIES. YOU ARE WHERE THE JOBS ARE. AND SO WE LOOK TO YOU TO BE YEAR-ROUND ADVOCATES FOR BROADER EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES RIGHT TO THE AGENCY, DIVISION, AND BRANCH LEVEL.

I FIRMLY BELIEVE THAT WHEN YOU CARRY OUT THAT KIND OF FUNCTION, YOU REFLECT THE VERY BEST TRADITIONS OF THE CIVIL SERVICE AND OF AMERICAN SOCIETY ITSELF.

I DON'T SUPPOSE THAT ASPECT OF THIS SUBJECT WAS TREATED VERY MUCH AT THIS SYMPOSIUM. IT RARELY IS. PEOPLE FEEL AWKWARD EXPRESSING THESE KINDS OF SENTIMENTS. BUT I DON'T. AND SO, WITH YOUR INDULGENCE, I'M GOING TO TALK ABOUT IT JUST A LITTLE BIT THIS MORNING.

IN THE HEAT OF OUR DAILY ACTIVITY, WE SOMETIMES FORGET -- OR SIMPLY TAKE FOR GRANTED -- THE NATURE OF THE SOCIAL CONTRACT THAT BINDS TOGETHER ALL AMERICANS. IT'S NOT A SINGLE WRITTEN DOCUMENT, SO IT CAN'T BE PULLED OFF THE SHELF AT YOUR LOCAL LIBRARY. IN FACT, LIKE ALL REALLY GOOD CONTRACTS, THIS ONE IS NOT WRITTEN DOWN SO MUCH AS IT IS HANDED DOWN.

OUR SOCIAL CONTRACT SAYS THAT WE ALL COME INTO THE WORLD WITH AN EQUAL CHANCE TO BE SOMEBODY. EACH OF US IS OBLIGED TO RECOGNIZE AND ACCEPT THAT ABOUT OUR FELLOW CITIZENS. OVER THE YEARS WE'VE BUILT UP SOME LAW TO HELP SORT OUT THE MEANING OF THE TERM "EQUAL OPPORTUNITY," SO THAT IT DOESN'T MEAN COMPLIANCE ACHIEVED THROUGH FORCE OR INTIMIDATION OR ANYTHING LIKE THAT. BUT EVEN HERE, WE HAVE A RATHER LONG AMERICAN TRADITION OF "FAIR PLAY," TO WHICH THE LAW MAKES ITS CONTRIBUTION. BUT OUR TRADITION BEGAN BEFORE OUR SYSTEM OF LAW BEGAN. I THINK EVEN A QUICK READING OF EARLY AMERICAN HISTORY WILL REVEAL THAT.

OF COURSE, RESTRICTIONS ON FORCE AND FEAR ARE ONE SIDE OF THE EQUATION, THE NEGATIVE SIDE. THE OTHER SIDE, HOWEVER, IS POSITIVE. THIS IS THE SIDE THAT SAYS, "YES, REGARDLESS OF WHO YOU ARE AND WHERE YOU LIVE AND WHO YOUR PARENTS ARE AND WHAT THEY DO FOR A LIVING...YOU HAVE A RIGHT TO BE THE VERY BEST AND MOST SUCCESSFUL PERSON YOU KNOW HOW TO BE."

AND THAT, TOO, HAS BEEN DEEPLY EMBEDDED IN THE AMERICAN CONSCIOUSNESS. AND WHAT IS RATHER REMARKABLE IS HOW QUICKLY THIS POSITIVE SIDE TO AMERICAN OPPORTUNITY IS RECOGNIZED AND ACCEPTED BY NEWCOMERS TO OUR SOCIETY, IMMIGRANTS FROM THE 6 OTHER POPULATED CONTINENTS.

AND THERE'S ANOTHER CLAUSE IN THAT REMARKABLE SOCIAL CONTRACT. THIS CLAUSE REQUIRES EACH OF US TO HELP ANOTHER, IF THAT OTHER PERSON INDEED REQUIRES A HELPING HAND. THIS IS HOW WE DEMONSTRATE THAT FORCE AND FEAR ARE NOT ACCEPTABLE. WE DO THE REVERSE...WE EXTEND A HAND OF HELP AND FRIENDSHIP. AND THIS IS HOW WE DEMONSTRATE THAT THOSE POSITIVE IDEALS OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITY ARE NOT JUST GOOD RHETORIC, BUT ARE FUNDAMENTAL TO THE WAY WE LIVE...DAY-BY-DAY...IN THIS COUNTRY.

IF WE WERE BORN HERE AND GREW UP HERE, THESE ARE THINGS WE ALL LEARNED FROM THE VERY BEGINNING. AND IF WE ARE LATER ARRIVALS, THESE ARE THINGS WE'VE BEEN LEARNING EVERY DAY, AS WE NEGOTIATE OUR WAY MORE DEEPLY INTO AMERICAN LIFE.

THE INTERESTING THING IS THAT WE LEARN THESE THINGS REGARDLESS OF OUR OWN FAMILY'S CULTURAL OR RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS, PRIMARILY BECAUSE THE PRECEPTS OF LASTING VALUE IN OUR SOCIETY ALSO HAPPEN TO COINCIDE WITH THE VERY HIGHEST OF HUMAN ASPIRATIONS ANYWHERE.

THERE OBVIOUSLY IS A TRANSCENDANT AMERICAN ETHOS THAT WE LEARN ABOUT VERY EARLY AND THAT GUIDES MANY OF THE THINGS WE DO FOR THE REST OF OUR LIVES. AND WE ARE FORTUNATE THAT SUCH IS THE CASE.

WHAT DOES ALL THIS HAVE TO DO WITH THIS SYMPOSIUM? IN MY OPINION, THESE IDEAS LIE AT THE VERY CENTER OF OUR PURPOSE HERE THIS WEEK. OF COURSE, IF I ASKED SOME OF YOU WHY YOU'RE ATTENDING, I'M SURE I'D GET A COLLECTION OF QUITE DIFFERENT ANSWERS:

* YOU'D TELL ME THAT YOUR SUPERVISOR MADE YOU COME...

* OR THAT THIS IS AN ADDITIONAL DUTY YOU CARRY AND YOU WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT IT...

* OR THAT YOUR AGENCY DIRECTOR HAS CHOSEN "HIRE THE HANDICAPPED" AS HIS OR HER NEW GOAL FOR FISCAL YEAR 1985 AND YOU'RE JUST GOING ALONG WITH IT.

I'M SURE THERE ARE OTHER REASONS, TOO, BUT THEY'RE ALL SECONDARY, TO MY WAY OF THINKING. I BELIEVE WE'RE HERE BECAUSE...

THE WORK OF EXTENDING OPPORTUNITY TO EVERY CITIZEN IS INTRINSICALLY AMERICAN WORK...AND THE EQUAL EMPLOYMENT AND ANTI-DISCRIMINATION STATUTES ARE INTRINSICALLY AMERICAN STATUTES.

SOME OF US MAY FEEL THAT THE LAWS CAME ALONG QUITE LATE. AND THAT'S PROBABLY TRUE. WITH THE HELP OF THE COLD LIGHT OF HISTORY, I'D HAVE TO AGREE. BUT MAYBE IT TAKES US A LITTLE WHILE FOR THE LAW IN OUR SOCIETY TO CATCH UP WITH ITS VALUES...TO INTERPRET THE BREADTH AND SCOPE OF ITS TRADITIONS...AND TO CARVE OUT A CODE OF CONDUCT THAT REFLECTS OUR NATIONAL CODE OF ETHICS.

NEVERTHELESS, WE'RE DOING IT, YEAR BY YEAR. AND FOR THE PAST DECADE OR SO WE HAVE BEEN ESPECIALLY ATTENTIVE TO THE NEEDS OF DISABLED PERSONS IN OUR SOCIETY:

THOSE WITH MENTAL OR PHYSICAL LIMITATIONS...

THOSE WHO HAVE A SENSORY DEPRIVATION...

OR THOSE WHO SUFFER FROM AN EMOTIONAL OR PSYCHOLOGICAL DEFICIT.

AGAIN, I MUST REMIND YOU THAT THIS DIFFICULT TASK IS COMPLETELY WITHIN THE STILL UNIQUE AMERICAN TRADITION OF EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY ...AND I SAY "UNIQUE" BECAUSE IT IS SIMPLY NOT TO BE FOUND AS A NATIONAL COMMITMENT IN ANY OTHER COUNTRY.

IN MY PREVIOUS POSITION AS A PEDIATRIC SURGEON, I HAD MANY OCCASIONS TO TRAVEL TO OTHER COUNTRIES. AND, OF COURSE, AS SURGEON GENERAL IT HAS BEEN MY PRIVILEGE TO REPRESENT OUR COUNTRY BEFORE A NUMBER OF OTHER GOVERNMENTS.

AND I'VE MET MANY GOOD PEOPLE AND I'VE BEEN IMPRESSED WITH THE GOODNESS AND DECENCY OF MANY OTHER GOVERNMENTS. BUT I CAN TELL YOU THAT THERE SIMPLY ISN'T ANOTHER COUNTRY WHOSE PEOPLE HAVE DONE WHAT WE HAVE DONE, THAT IS, NO OTHER SOCIETY HAS SO DELIBERATELY SET ABOUT TO MAKE A REALITY OF THAT PROMISE OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL.

NOBODY SAYS THAT IT'S EASY. FOR ONE THING, WE ARE TRYING TO CORRECTLY RECOGNIZE DIFFERENCES, BUT AT THE SAME TIME TRYING TO OVERCOME ANY DIVISIONS BETWEEN AND AMONG THOSE DIFFERENCES. OUR COMMITMENT AS A PEOPLE HAS BEEN TO EXTEND THE FRUITS OF THE AMERICAN DREAM TO EVERYONE...YOUNG AND OLD...MALE AND FEMALE... WHITE, BLACK, BROWN, YELLOW, AND RED...ABLE-BODIED AND DISABLED, TOO.

I'M SURE THAT SOMEONE OVER THE PAST COUPLE OF DAYS HAS POINTED OUT THE COST-EFFECTIVENESS OF HIRING AND PROMOTING THE HANDICAPPED. AND THERE MAY BE SOMETHING TO THAT...BUT IT IS NOT CENTRAL TO WHO WE ARE.

AND NO DOUBT THE ARGUMENT HAS BEEN MADE THAT THE DISABLED HAVE CERTAIN PERSONAL QUALITIES AND RESPONSES THAT MAKE THEM ESPECIALLY GOOD EMPLOYEES. I KNOW THAT'S TRUE FOR MANY PERSONS, BUT THIS ALSO IS NOT THE REAL REASON WE CARE ABOUT THEM.

AND NATURALLY SOMEONE HAS NOTED THE FACT THAT EXTENDING OPPORTUNITIES TO THE HANDICAPPED IS NOW THE LAW OF THE LAND AND SO, IF YOU WANT TO STAY OUT OF TROUBLE, YOU'D BETTER GET WITH IT AND OPEN UP YOUR OFFICE TO DISABLED INDIVIDUALS. YOU SHOULD, BUT NOT BECAUSE YOU ARE LEGALLY BOUND TO. AS I INDICATED BEFORE, THE LAW HAS FOLLOWED IN THE TRACKS OF OUR TRADITION. IT'S NOT THE OTHER WAY AROUND.

NO, ALL THOSE REASONS AND PROBABLY A DOZEN OTHERS HAVE BEEN OFFERED HERE THIS WEEK. AND THEY'RE ALL VALID, AS FAR AS THEY GO. BUT I WILL SUBMIT TO YOU THAT THEY DO NOT REPRESENT THE WHOLE STORY BECAUSE THEY DON'T ADEQUATELY EXPRESS THE FUNDAMENTAL REASON WHY WE EXTEND OPPORTUNITIES TO THE DISABLED AT ALL.

WE DO IT BECAUSE WE LIVE AND WORK HERE...BECAUSE WE ARE BOUND BY THE SOCIAL CONTRACT THAT EXISTS FOR US ALL HERE...AND BECAUSE SUCH EFFORTS ARE EXPRESSIONS NOT SO MUCH OF ECONOMIC WISDOM OR POLITICAL POWER OR SOCIAL SAVVY BUT, RATHER, THEY ARE EXPRESSIONS OF WHAT OUR COUNTRY ESSENTIALLY IS AND WHAT IT FUNDAMENTALLY STANDS FOR...RIGHT HERE.

AS I WAS PREPARING THESE REMARKS, A THOUGHT STRUCK ME. AND SO, OUT OF CURIOSITY, I ASKED THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF FUND-RAISING COUNSEL TO GIVE ME AN IDEA OF THE SCOPE OF THE AMERICAN HABIT OF GIVING. SPECIFICALLY, I ASKED THEM WHAT THE RECORD OF CONTRIBUTIONS HAS BEEN LIKE FOR THE YEARS 1980 THROUGH 1983.

I HAD A HUNCH. MY HUNCH WAS THAT -- IN GOOD TIMES AS WELL AS IN POOR TIMES -- AMERICANS WILL CONTINUE TO OPEN THEIR HEARTS AND THEIR POCKETBOOKS TO SUPPORT GOOD CAUSES. AND SO THEY HAVE.

BACK IN 1980 YOU MAY REMEMBER THAT INFLATION WAS UP IN THE DOUBLE DIGITS. SO WAS UNEMPLOYMENT. NEVERTHELESS, THE FUND-RAISING PEOPLE TELL ME THAT, OF THE TOTAL AMOUNT OF MONEY CONTRIBUTED BY ALL AMERICANS TO GOOD CAUSES OF ONE KIND OR ANOTHER, 14 PERCENT WENT TO THE CATEGORY OF "HEALTH AND HOSPITALS," TO PLACES LIKE THE CANCER SOCIETY AND MUSCULAR DYSTROPHY AND MT. SINAI HOSPITAL AND ST. JUDE'S.

IN 1981 AND 1982, THE ECONOMY BEGAN TO TURN AROUND. WE BROUGHT DOWN INFLATION, BUT AT THE SAME TIME WE WENT THROUGH A DIFFICULT PERIOD OF RECESSION. INFLATION CAME DOWN BUT UNEMPLOYMENT WENT UP, AND MANY AMERICANS WERE NOT HAVING AN EASY TIME OF IT.

THAT SITUATION ALSO TURNED AROUND IN 1983. INFLATION STAYED DOWN...AND UNEMPLOYMENT CAME DOWN, TOO. IT WAS A KIND OF ROLLER-COASTER PERIOD. HOWEVER, DURING EACH OF THOSE YEARS OF 1980 THROUGH 1983, THE TOTAL NUMBER OF DOLLARS GIVEN TO WORTHY CAUSES CONTINUED TO CLIMB, FROM \$48 BILLION IN 1980 UP TO \$65 BILLION IN 1983.

AND, OF EQUAL IMPORTANCE, THE PORTION OF THAT MONEY THAT WENT TO "HEALTH AND HOSPITALS" REMAINED THE SAME: A STEADY 14 PERCENT OF ALL GIVING IN AMERICA YEAR AFTER YEAR. IT'S A LITTLE EERIE, LIKE ADAM SMITH'S "INVISIBLE HAND" IN THE FREE MARKETPLACE. BUT WHATEVER THE REASON, THE FACT IS THAT THE FIGURE FOR "HEALTH AND HOSPITALS" ALSO ROSE STEADILY THROUGHOUT THOSE FOUR YEARS, ALONG WITH THE STEADY RISE IN THE OVERALLA TOTAL. THE "HEALTH AND HOSPITALS" SHARE WENT FROM \$6.6 BILLION IN 1980 TO \$9.2 BILLION IN 1983, A RISE OF 50 PERCENT OVER 4 YEARS.

I THINK THAT RECORD IS ANOTHER OF MANY EXAMPLES OF HOW WE AMERICANS TRY TO LIVE UP TO OUR IDEAL OF TOGETHER SHOULDERING A COMMON BURDEN.

LET ME REPEAT, THEN, THAT I'M REALLY HAPPY TO COME ALONG AT THE END OF THIS SYMPOSIUM. IT'S GIVEN ME THIS CHANCE TO TALK ABOUT WHAT IS, FOR ME, THE REAL MOTIVATION IN THE WHOLE FIELD OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AND CIVIL RIGHTS. IT'S A RATHER SIMPLE MOTIVATION, BUT A VERY POWERFUL ONE.

I AM MOVED TO TRY TO BE THE VERY BEST KIND OF PERSON FOR THIS, THE VERY BEST KIND OF SOCIAL SYSTEM. I WANT TO BE PART OF WHAT THIS SYSTEM TRULY MEANS, NOT JUST IN ORDER TO BENEFIT MYSELF PERSONALLY BUT FOR THE BENEFIT OF EVERYONE WHO IS BOUND TO ME IN OUR AMERICAN SOCIAL CONTRACT...WHATEVER THEIR COLOR OR HERITAGE OR SEX OR AGE OR CONDITION OF PHYSICAL OR MENTAL HEALTH.

SO I ASK YOU TODAY TO LEAVE THIS SYMPOSIUM, ARMED WITH MUCH NEW INFORMATION, NEW KNOWLEDGE, AND NEW SENSITIVITY, AND RETURN TO YOUR AGENCIES WITH A RENEWED COMMITMENT TO PUT ALL THAT NEW MATERIAL TO THE SERVICE OF A VERY OLD IDEA -- A COUPLE OF CENTURIES AT LEAST -- THE IDEA THAT EVERYONE IN OUR COUNTRY HAS THE RIGHT TO TRY TO BECOME THE VERY BEST, MOST SUCCESSFUL PERSON HE OR SHE CAN BE. AND EACH ONE OF US IS OBLIGATED, BY VIRTUE OF BEING A CITIZEN HERE, TO DO THE VERY BEST WE CAN TO HELP.

THANK YOU.

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