

1
1 BREAKING BARRIERS '96

2
3 AN ADA CELEBRATION AND CALL TO ACTION

4
5 July 25, 1996

6
7 7:00 p.m.

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9
10 South Wing Conference Center
11 Kentucky Fair and Exposition Center
12 Louisville, Kentucky
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1 JANET RENO, ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED
2 STATES,
3 was introduced by Jan Day, Executive Director for
4 the Center for Accessible Living, and gave the
5 following keynote address:

6 Thank you, Jan, very much, and thank you
7 for the warm welcome you have given me.

8 But it is I that should be applauding you,
9 for you are the people who are truly making a
10 difference. You are the people, you and people like
11 you across the country, who have taken me by the
12 hand and showed me the way to make America more
13 accessible for all of its people, and to help all of
14 the people of America realize their fullest
15 potential.

16 I'm delighted to be here to celebrate the
17 Sixth Anniversary of the ADA, a law that I think has
18 made a magnificent difference in the lives of so
19 many.

20 Lieutenant Governor Henry, it's good to
21 see you, Judge Armstrong. I thank you all for the
22 warm welcome that Kentucky has given me over these
23 last three years.

24 I especially want to commend the award
25 winners: Mr. Wells, and Sears, and the Actors

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1 Theater of Louisville, and Sharon Fields. And, yes,
2 Sharon Fields, you can cry, because we were crying,
3 too.

4 You each set an example of how to open
5 doors of opportunity for people with disabilities.
6 But more than that, you have set an example for all
7 of us of what can happen when people care about
8 other people, when people reach out to make a
9 difference; not just for themselves, but for all
10 people. You are my heroes and heroines, and I thank
11 you from the bottom of my heart for all that you
12 have done to show the way.

13 An anniversary is a time to celebrate and
14 a time to reflect. The ADA has certainly given us
15 much to celebrate.

16 Each Thursday morning at 9:30 I have a
17 press availability and reporters come in and they
18 can ask me any question they want for half an hour.
19 Oftentimes they get a "No comment. That is a
20 pending investigation." But this morning I led off
21 with the recognition of the Sixth Anniversary, and
22 one reporter afterwards said in a thoughtful way,
23 but kind of, "Why? Why are you always celebrating
24 the ADA's anniversary?"

25 Because -- and I said, "Because at each

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1 anniversary we see more of what has been done by
2 people reaching out to explain the law, to
3 persuading people to comply with the law, and to
4 enforce the law if they don't do it."

5 And if we show what has happened in the
6 past year and in the past six years, it gives us

7 hope and understanding of what we can do if we work
8 even harder for the future.

9 Because of the ADA, doors are opening to
10 jobs, to stores, to city halls. Because of your
11 advocacy, doors are opening to emergency services,
12 to hotels, to restaurants, to rental cars.

13 Indeed, all this nation has to offer is
14 becoming more accessible every day, and it's
15 happening because Americans are coming together to
16 understand how important and how simply wonderful
17 the ADA really is.

18 They've come together to understand in so
19 many instances that it's not that hard to comply,
20 that it's a reasonable law.

21 But most importantly, they are coming
22 together to realize the wonderful potential of all
23 of the people of this nation.

24 Employers now appreciate the skills of
25 workers who have disabilities. Businesses are aware

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1 of the new customers that they had not seen before.
2 And Americans are seeing the potential of their
3 fellow citizens, citizens who happen to have
4 disabilities.

5 This year's Sixth Anniversary falls at a
6 very special time. It comes at a time when the eyes
7 of the world are upon us in Atlanta. For the past
8 six days the Olympics have brought out the best in
9 America, but the ADA has been doing that for the
10 past six years. So it is particularly fitting that
11 the positive impact of the ADA is on display for all
12 of the world to see at the Olympics.

13 All visitors to the Olympic Stadium can
14 see the differences, because it is the most
15 accessible stadium in the world. Visitors in wheel
16 chairs can now sit with their families.

17 It is a beacon to us, a challenge to us
18 that we have got to look beyond our borders to
19 spread the word across this world of the tremendous
20 potential that is in us all, and to make the theory,
21 the concept, if not the law of the ADA applicable --
22 applicable around the world. I cannot tell you how
23 important your work is.

24 For 15 years I served as the State
25 Attorney in Dade County. Advocates would come to
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1 me, they would meet me in the halls of the
2 legislature. They would explain to me, and sometimes
3 they would holler at me. But they always kept
4 coming back to teach me what could be done to break
5 down barriers that kept them from the justice
6 building, that kept them from the county
7 commissioner, that kept them from the legislature.
8 And they educated me.

9 I've reached out to others and said, "Why
10 don't we encourage?" And my personnel director,
11 "Why don't we hire? What can we do?"

12 And it is because of people who educated,
13 it has made such a difference. Keep it up. Don't
14 flag one bit. It is making a difference everywhere
15 you go.

16 When I first became Attorney General, The
17 ADA was only three years old. Already it was
18 breaking down the barriers. On that birthday, I
19 walked the streets of Tacoma Park, Maryland, a small
20 town outside of Washington.

21 Advocates in the Washington, D.C. area had
22 already introduced themselves to me, and they said,
23 "You're coming with us. We want you to see what one
24 community can do when it works with advocates to
25 make a difference in this small town."

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1 I stopped in on business owners who had
2 made their community accessible: A ramp at the gift
3 store, wider aisles at the pharmacy, a new door at
4 the town's health clinic, and that community was so
5 proud of what it had done.

6 That same day, in a conference room at the
7 Justice Building, I met with business leaders who
8 had overcome their fears of the law, representatives
9 of the hotel industry and others, and they told me
10 at first that the regulations terrified them. But
11 they sat down with John Wood Atchen (phonetic), with
12 others, and understood the regulations, and
13 understood that it was not that difficult to comply.
14 And they were prepared to go out and spread the word

15 to other industries, to their colleagues about what
16 could be done.

17 Keep on educating. It makes such a
18 difference.

19 But I also saw that we had a long, long
20 way to go. Two hundred sixty-three million people
21 live in this country. Six million businesses
22 operate in this nation. Forty-nine million
23 Americans with disabilities have tremendous talents
24 to offer this nation if only we break down the
25 barriers.

8
1 If each one will continue to reach out and
2 urge their local supermarket, their
3 neighborhood movie theater or their child's school
4 to comply, our job will be a lot easier.

5 I have continued to meet with people with
6 disabilities who have reached out to their
7 communities, just as you have, to explain what the
8 law requires. A young man from a small town in
9 Kansas -- he needed a bendable straw from the local
10 Dairy Queen to drink a shake. When the owner did
11 that and then said, "What else can I do?", Tim
12 responded. He gave him some ideas. Soon the entire
13 store was accessible.

14 And I had an opportunity to talk with Tim
15 and see the sense of pride he had in what he'd done,
16 and the sense that he could do more.

17 I met a 17-year-old from Albertville,
18 Alabama, in a wheelchair, who had talked to the
19 druggist and said, "If you'd widen your aisles just
20 a little bit, I can come buy things at your drug
21 store, and I will." And the drug store owner was
22 there to let me know what he had done. But that
23 young man traveled through the town telling
24 businesses what they could do to comply.

25 I met a young parent from Norfolk,
9
1 Virginia, who educated the city zoo about providing
2 sign language interpreters so her daughter and other
3 deaf children could participate in summer programs.

4 You are little -- but little lower than
5 the angels. You have such a voice that is being

6 heard throughout this country. You are breaking
7 down barriers. You are opening doors. You are
8 giving America an understanding of the tremendous
9 strength of the human spirit. Do not get
10 discouraged. Your work is so critically important.

11 And when you look at the difference that
12 you have made in six years, think of what happens
13 when we come back in another six years, Sharon
14 Fields, and see what has been done.

15 With the help of advocates across the
16 country, we at the Justice Department have been
17 working with businesses and governments to make
18 access a reality. My plan is a very simple one.

19 First, we educate. Most people want to
20 comply if they understand how they can do it. If
21 that is not successful, then we persuade.

22 [Laughter from audience].

23 Some people are lazy and unimaginative,
24 and it takes a little bit more prodding. And then,
25 if we're still not successful, we litigate, and we

10 litigate as vigorously as possible.

1 Many businesses will voluntarily comply if
2 they simply know what the law entails. But if they
3 thumb their noses at the law, if they show bad faith
4 in refusing to comply, if they look you in the eye
5 and say they don't care about the ADA, then we will
6 not hesitate to use every tool available to us under
7 the law.

8 The ADA is a common sense law. It's
9 flexible and it's reasonable. And if businesses
10 understand this, even more would comply on their
11 own. That is why over the past three years we've
12 been blanketing the airwaves and filling mailboxes
13 with information about the law.

14 We launched our nationwide education
15 campaign not only to educate businesses and
16 governments about their obligation, but to provide
17 the tools to assist people with disabilities in
18 achieving compliance as well. Our efforts have been
19 extensive.

20 Right now we are operating a toll-free ADA
21 information line that receives more than 75 thousand
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23 calls each year. I've been to that office. I've
24 heard some of the calls. It is extraordinary what
25 can be done by that one phone call in terms of

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1 breaking down a barrier or opening a door.

2 We have placed an ADA information file in
3 15 thousand public libraries across the country,
4 including the library here in Louisville. We have
5 mailed out information packets to literally millions
6 of businesses.

7 And today we even went high-tech:
8 unveiling an ADA home page on the world wide web.
9 There, computer-goers more literate than I can find
10 out all technical assistance documents on how to
11 comply. I urge you to try it, I'm going to.

12 But we keep coming up with no new ways to
13 reach out. I suddenly looked and here was the Civil
14 Rights Division struggling from Washington, and I
15 said, "But we have 94 U.S. attorneys out across the
16 country. They can be our eyes and ears. They can
17 relate to the disability community in their
18 district. They can see what is happening."

19 Since then, they have contacted nearly
20 five thousand 911 emergency centers to make sure
21 emergency services are accepted -- accessible to
22 people using TDDX. And we are going to see what
23 other initiatives they can undertake to make sure
24 the ADA is a living, breathing reality in their
25 districts.

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1 In addition, we are working with state
2 attorneys generals from around the country who have
3 formed a disability rights task force. We have
4 worked closely with the attorney generals --
5 attorneys general of 25 states, including Kentucky's
6 Attorney General Ben Chandler, to develop
7 information for businesses about the rights of
8 people who use guide dogs or other service animals.
9 Starting tomorrow, this information will be
10 distributed across the country.

11 We heard your concerns that many
12 restaurants were letting in dogs belonging to those
13 who were blind but were not letting in other service

14 animals. We believe that businesses, once they know
15 how invaluable that one animal can be in breaking
16 down a barrier, in giving a person a competency,
17 when they understand that it is the law, they will
18 comply.

19 I have long stated that I would rather see
20 businesses spend their money attracting
21 new customers than opposing a lawsuit. I would
22 rather see them pay for access than for attorney's
23 fees. I'd rather see them do it early rather than
24 after we have to litigate it in the court.

25 It is this approach that is producing

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1 results, because, while we have only had to file
2 suits in less than 30 cases, we have been able to
3 reach agreements on access in more than 500 cases.
4 Our efforts are also making a real difference in the
5 lives of millions.

6 In just the past year alone, since the
7 time we celebrated that fifth anniversary a year
8 ago, we have made all 911 centers throughout the
9 state of California accessible to people who used
10 TDDX.

11 We have made it possible for people with
12 disabilities to shop at more than 800 Safeway
13 grocery stores across the nation. We have brought
14 about changes at 450 United Artists' theaters across
15 the country, so people using wheel chairs can go to
16 the movies, and we have removed architectural
17 barriers at the Days Inn Hotel in Hazard, Kentucky,
18 and are pursuing today a hotel chain who are
19 building new hotels that are not fully accessible.

20 And we have also begun to open the
21 gateways to educational and professional
22 opportunities: Opportunities for thousands of
23 students with disabilities to take licensing tests
24 or review courses. Opportunities for thousands of
25 citizens with disabilities to get into city hall to

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1 make their voices heard. Opportunities to
2 participate in our justice system by serving on
3 juries.

4 These are just some examples of how the

5 ADA is truly making a difference in the lives of
6 Americans. Yes, we have made a difference.

7 A snapshot survey by the United Cerebral
8 Palsy Association showed that nearly 60 percent of
9 people with disabilities feel the ADA has improved
10 access of buildings, and almost half feel greater
11 inclusion and acceptance in the community. But what
12 about the other 50 percent?

13 We have a long way to go before all people
14 with disabilities truly become part of the
15 mainstream of this great country in terms of their
16 potentials being fully realized. I am not going to
17 stop until we get there.

18 The ADA was inspired and profoundly
19 shaped, as Cass Irvin has noted so eloquently, by
20 early laws protecting women and minorities. It is
21 important to see that connection, to remember that
22 the struggle for disability rights is a continuation
23 of a broader struggle to bring down the walls of
24 exclusion.

25 I will never forget coming home from law
15 school to try to get a summer job, and being told
1 flat out I could not get a job because I was a
2 woman. Let us continue the effort to make
3 opportunity real for all Americans. As we know from
4 our nation's continuing attempts to eradicate race
5 and gender discrimination, our commitment to
6 protecting the rights of peoples with disabilities
7 demands perseverance, it demands vigilance, and it
8 demands vigorous enforcement.
9

10 We will continue to meet these challenges.
11 The President has made that clear. He has made it
12 clear that his commitment to the ADA is a national
13 priority, and he has backed up his words with
14 action.

15 Earlier this year we proposed a 3.9
16 percent increase in the funds we can use to enforce
17 the ADA with the President's support. But like
18 other national priorities, the government alone
19 cannot get the job done.

20 Eliminating all barriers to keep people
21 with disabilities out of the American mainstream

22 will depend on each of you. You are the ambassadors
23 for access. You are the advocates for access. You
24 must continue what you have done so wonderfully
25 today: to help demonstrate that businesses and

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1 governments and people must achieve access. Not
2 because it is the law, but because it is the right
3 thing to do.

4 We have made significant progress in
5 breaking down the barriers, but we are not finished.
6 Decades of indifference cannot be undone in six
7 years.

8 Certainly all our efforts are bringing
9 down barriers every day in architecture and in
10 attitude, but there are more out there. We are
11 committed to working with you every step of the way
12 until each and every barrier has been toppled.
13 Together we have started to break those barriers.
14 Together we can finish the job.

15 Thank you.

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17 [End of address.]

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1 I, DAWN M. MORRISON, Reporter and Notary
2 Public for the State of Kentucky at Large, do hereby
3 certify that the facts stated in the title page are
4 true; that at the time and place stated the
5 foregoing keynote address by ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET
6 RENO hereto personally appeared before me; that said
7 keynote address was taken down in stenotypy writing
8 by me and later reduced to typewriting under my
9 direction, and the foregoing is a true record of the
10 address by said speaker.

11 I further certify that I am not related by
12 blood or marriage to any of the parties NOR AM I IN

13 ANYWISE ASSOCIATED WITH THEIR COUNSEL, and that I am
14 not interested in the outcome of this event.

15 My Commission expires December 21, 1999.

16 GIVEN under my hand this the 28th day of
17 July, 1996.

18 _____
19 DAWN M. MORRISON

20 Notary Public, State of Kentucky
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