

**House Majority Leader Steny H. Hoyer (MD)**

**Hearing on the Americans with Disabilities Act at 20 – Celebrating Our Progress,  
Affirming Our Commitment**

**Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties**

**July 22, 2010**

“Twenty years ago on Monday, the first President Bush signed into law one of the most consequential pieces of civil rights legislation in recent memory. In the ceremony on the South Lawn of the White House, he said this: ‘With today’s signing of the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act, every man, woman, and child with a disability can now pass through once-closed doors into a bright new era of equality, independence, and freedom.’

“And in large measure, he was right: Those doors have come open. Tens of millions of Americans with disabilities now enjoy rights the rest of us have long taken for granted: the right to use the same streets, theaters, restrooms, or offices; the right to prove themselves in the workplace, to succeed on their talent and drive alone. We all understand why there are cuts in the sidewalk at every street corner, kneeling busses on our city streets, elevators on the Metro, ramps at movie theaters, and accessible restrooms and handicapped parking almost everywhere. Each one is the sign of a pledge: the promise of an America that excludes none of its people from its spirit of equal opportunity. Since its passage, the ADA has helped 50 million Americans live richer lives—and it has helped our country take advantage of a resource that for too long was untapped: the talents of people with disabilities.

“The ADA was a demonstration of just how much we can accomplish when Republicans and Democrats, business leaders and activists, work together to strengthen the ideals that unite us as Americans. The ADA wasn’t simply a collection of rules: it was a set of principles that we have to work to adapt to changing times. That’s what Congress did when we strengthened the ADA and returned it to its original intent, by passing the ADA Amendments Act—again with strong bipartisan support, and again signed by a Republican president. And that’s what we did today, when we announced that we have made the House rostrum wheelchair accessible for the first time—an acknowledgement that the People’s House must meet the challenges of accessibility.

“The ADA’s mission of inclusion and equal opportunity is still a work in progress. Americans with disabilities are still disproportionately less likely to have a job, and more likely to be poor than their fellow Americans. Many Americans with disabilities still struggle to get equal treatment in the classroom, to find transportation to work, or to cast a ballot independently and privately. Changing technologies, from touchscreens to Internet broadcasts, pose new accessibility challenges.

“So as we mark this anniversary, let’s remember the work we have in front of us. The ADA made America a model for other nations and a world leader on one of the central challenges of human rights. It is my hope that Congress will live up to the legacy of the ADA and continue to maintain that leadership.”