

The Americans with Disabilities Act

ANNCR: The Americans with Disabilities Act – on Today's Congressional Moment.

The Americans with Disabilities Act, or ADA, was signed into law on July 26, 1990. At the time the bill was enacted, there were over 43 million disabled Americans, and that number continues to grow. Congress recognized that disabled Americans were at an enormous disadvantage. Not only were they disabled, they were often discriminated against — in their access to public institutions, their educational opportunities, and their ability to find employment.

The ADA prohibits employers from denying jobs, training, advancement, or benefits to any individual because of a disability. The act also improved the access of disabled persons to public buildings and facilities, and required that public busses be wheel-chair accessible. Closed-captioning on TV came about as a result of the ADA.

As the impact of this landmark act becomes more fully felt with each passing year, American society continues to benefit from the talents and skills of individuals with disabilities.

Leaders of the Congressional effort to pass the ADA included Senator Robert Dole — who lost the use of his right arm during World War II — and Senator Tom Harkin — whose brother had a profound hearing loss.

As Senator Harkin said, “People with disabilities ought to be judged on the basis of their abilities. They should not be judged nor discriminated against based on unfounded fear, prejudice, ignorance, or mythologies.”

CLOSING: This is Lee Hamilton. Congressional decisions impact all our lives. To find out more about how Congress works, or to get involved in your government, visit the Center on Congress website at congress.indiana.edu.