

Five years ago, when the ADA became law, we became the first nation in the world to commit ourselves to equal rights and equal opportunities for all citizens with disabilities. Because of the ADA, our country is stronger today. Our fellow citizens are being judged by their ability to contribute, not by their disabilities. Now all of you and millions of others all across this country have an opportunity they never had before to make the most of their own lives.

That opportunity is critical to what we have to do as a nation to meet the great challenges we face and to move forward into the next century. In many ways, the ADA is the perfect example of what I mean when I talk about our job is to create more opportunity and demand more responsibility from all of our citizens.

The ADA has meant more opportunity for 49 million Americans with disabilities to do their part to make us a stronger and better country. It has meant that more people can go to work and participate in community life and do things that most Americans take for granted, like helping to take care of their families or getting a good education or registering and voting. It's also a perfect example of what I have meant in recent weeks when I have urged the American people to come together to find common ground in order to move forward together as a nation.

That was true across party lines. Members of both parties, including three who are here today, Senator Harkin, Representative Hoyer, and former Congressman Tony Coelho, fought for the ADA in the Congress. And President Bush signed it into law. The ADA became law because Americans, like so many of you, worked together in the best interest of everyone, putting party behind country. There was a realization that the best way to keep our country moving forward was to allow every American, regardless of whether he or she used a wheelchair, was blind, had a mental disability, or was HIV-positive, to live up to his or her God-given potential.

And today, even as we celebrate the rights gained under the ADA, the budget cuts proposed by the congressional majority would sharply reduce the services and the supports that enable people to effectively exercise the rights granted by the ADA. Under the pro-

posed cuts, States would be forced to drop 1.4 million people with disabilities from Medicaid rolls, and 4 million disabled Americans on Medicare would have to pay more every year for the same health care. They also have proposed eliminating funds for training special education teachers.

Now, we have to join together to maintain our commitment and our common ground. I will vigorously implement and enforce the ADA through the Cabinet and the administration. We will not allow Americans with disabilities to be kept from realizing their dreams by closed doors or narrowed minds.

We should also celebrate, all of us, this fifth anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act in the best way possible: By all, each of us, rededicating ourselves to creating a society of equal access and equal rights for all. That is the best kind of affirmative action for all the American people.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:22 a.m. in the Cash Room at the Treasury Department. In his remarks, he referred to Tony Coelho, Chair, President's Committee on Employment of People With Disabilities; R. Scott Hitt, Chair, Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS; Gilbert F. Casellas, Chairman, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission; Marca Bristo, Chair, National Council on Disability; Reed F. Hundt, Chair, Federal Communications Commission; and Patricia S. Fleming, Director of National AIDS Policy.

### **Remarks to the White House Community Empowerment Conference July 26, 1995**

Thank you very much, Mr. Vice President; to all the mayors and other distinguished visitors who are here; to the Members of Congress and all those who have worked on the empowerment zone program here in our administration. And I'd like to say a special word of thanks to the Vice President and all of his staff, and to Secretary Cisneros and Andrew Cuomo. They have literally worked themselves to exhaustion to make sure that this program is a success.

We told you when we started this that this would not be some one-shot deal and there would be no followup. And I think it's fair

to say we have kept our word. And from the looks of this crowd, you have kept your word. And I thank you for that.

I also want to say a special word of thanks to Congressman Rangel and to the other Members of Congress here who were very active in passing the empowerment zone legislation as a part of the budget plan in 1993.

I can't say how much I appreciate the work the Vice President's done on this community empowerment board, because it's one thing to talk about all this and quite another to do it. And your presence here proves that you also are committed to doing it.

As I have said many times in many places, I think this country has two great challenges. The first is to restore the American dream of opportunity for all Americans and the American value of responsibility from all Americans. And the second is to rebuild our sense of community, our sense that we are working together, not at odds with one another, toward the same goals. The more I work at this job the more I become convinced that we can't achieve solutions to our economic or our social problems unless we do a better job of working together and reaching across the divides. That is, by definition, what you all had to do to be selected to be part of the empowerment zone program in the first place.

In the past few weeks, I have tried to talk to the American people more about how we can find common ground even in very controversial issues. I gave a speech at Georgetown laying it out, and then I went to the Vice President and Mrs. Gore's Family Conference and talked about how we could find common ground on the controversial issue of the role of the media in our family lives and community lives. And as if that weren't controversial enough, I then went out to James Madison University—James Madison High School here and talked about where I thought our common ground was on the issue of religion in public education in America. And then, of course, I had the opportunity just a few days ago to talk at the National Archives on the important subject of affirmative action.

Today, I want to say to you that I think that the empowerment zone concept embodies everything we have to do as Ameri-

cans—everything. To make it work, we have to create economic opportunity, solve social problems, and pull people together who have been apart. It is the embodiment of what we want to do.

The second point I want to make at the very beginning is, I think it is good for the rest of America and is a good model for the rest of America, because if you look at it, one of the things that troubles me about the debate we are having now on balancing the budget is that the congressional majority wants to balance the budget but admits that if their plan is implemented, our economy will have anemic growth for 7 years in a row. I want to balance the budget because I think it will explode economic growth. I think it will lower interest rates and free up money and cause more people to borrow money and invest in our communities.

And why do we have slow growth? Why is the cover of Business Week magazine, the current issue, about how wages aren't going up? Why does survey after survey after survey reveal when we tell the American people that we have lowered the deficit and provided 7 million new jobs to this economy, voters say, "I don't believe you. Don't bother me with the facts, I don't believe you." Why is that? Because people think, "Well, if that had happened, I would somehow feel more secure in my own life."

So we have to increase the rate of economic activity in America. And how can we do that? Well, we can do it by expanding trade, and I've tried to do that. But we also can do it by finding underutilized assets in America. That's what the empowerment zones are all about. The greatest residual economic asset left in the United States, the new economic frontier in America, are old-fashioned Americans who've been left behind in the rush to the 21st century. And if we can tap into that, then all Americans will benefit. All Americans will see increases in their incomes as the economy grows more rapidly.

So this is not just a program for Baltimore or Philadelphia, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, New York, the Kentucky Highlands, South Texas, the Mississippi Delta, you name it—Los Angeles, wherever else I left out that's here. I'm sorry. [Laughter] You will help—

you will help everybody. If economic activity rises in the Philadelphia-East Camden, New Jersey area, it will be felt in western Pennsylvania. It will also be felt in the Western part of the United States. This is a very important issue. And if you prove that this strategy works, then other people will do it, and it will spread like wildfire throughout the country.

When I talked the other day about affirmative action, I said that I thought we ought to mend it, not end it. I thought that it was important but that everybody should realize something. The people who didn't think they were for it should understand that if we got rid of it, it wouldn't solve the economic problems of America. And the people who were for it should realize that if we keep it, it won't solve their economic problems either, unless we find ways to grow this economy and bring the American people together and deal frankly and forthrightly with our challenges. That's what this is all about. It's about bringing opportunity back.

Government has got to become a real meaningful partner again for people in urban America and rural America who are trapped in cycles of poverty. I know it can be done from my own experience. I was thinking today as I was walking over with the Vice President, when I was reelected Governor of Arkansas in 1982, we had an unemployment rate that was 10 percent or higher in the State. In the Mississippi Delta portion of our State, we had several counties with over 20 percent unemployment—several, not just one or two.

The first thing I did as a Governor-elect was go to a town that had had a Singer sewing machine plant there since the 1920's and shake hands with over 600 people as they walked off the job for the last time. It was a very sobering experience. And we tried everything we could to restructure our economy and to get it going.

At length, I noticed something. After working for about 2 years, I noticed that in isolated pockets in the poorest part of America, the Mississippi Delta, there would be a town here and a town there that for reasons no one could explain by economic, social, or racial makeup, had lower unemployment rates and higher growth rates, had schools

where the races went to school together and there was no white flight, no big movement toward private schools, had functioning public institutions. No one could explain it. So I decided I'd figure out why on my own. And the answer wasn't complicated. People found a way to work together in those counties. In those communities, people found a way to take advantage of the opportunities they had instead of just bellyaching about the problems they had.

One of these little towns was in the middle of a county with an astronomical unemployment rate, and they had about a 5 percent unemployment rate, because every time a plant closed they sent a team of 50 people to the State and they used our WATS lines all night long, day-in and day-out, until they called hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people to come look at their little town and put their people back to work.

That simple experience was the beginning for me of this whole empowerment zone idea. And so we set up a process in the 11 poorest counties in our State to try to do what we've attempted to do here. Today, our State's unemployment rate is just a little above 4 percent. It took a long time to turn around, but it happened. And if you have the patience and the roots deep enough to make the commitment necessary to turn your communities around, you can turn America around by setting an example and proving this works. You can do it.

This sort of locally driven positive approach was not invented by me or anybody else. It came out of the grassroots of America. It was endorsed when I was a young man by Robert Kennedy when he went into the poorest areas of our country and when he supported what became known as the Bedford-Stuyvesant Corporation. Republicans have embraced it, who have had experience with it. I applaud Jack Kemp for his remarks in the last several days, saying that instead of using issues like affirmative action to divide us, we should be searching for ways like empowerment zones to fight poverty and create opportunity for all Americans. We need more of that kind of talk from people without regard to their political parties. And I applaud him for doing it.

I was interested the other day in a comment that Speaker Gingrich made about affirmative action, which was encouraging to me. As you know, there are those who say that we should get rid of affirmative action because they think there's no need for it or it's inevitably biased. I don't agree with that. I think that we have to continue with these efforts, even though we have to improve them until there is no more need for them. But I also was encouraged, even though I didn't agree with what the Speaker said about affirmative action—because he said he didn't like it—he also admitted that just getting rid of it was no answer. And I thought that was hopeful. He said that he didn't want to end affirmative action until they found something to replace it.

Well, I don't think we should end it until we don't need it anymore. But I do think we should do some more things. Discrimination is, as I said before, only one of the things that traps people. The general conditions of the economy, the terrible social problems we face, they take away more American dreams every day. And that is something Americans share in common.

When Mr. Gingrich said that he thought we ought to design a program to lend a helping hand, I say that's exactly what we're trying to do with the empowerment zones, with the Community Development Act, with the improvements for the community reinvestment program, with the community development financial institutions, with all the other empowerment initiatives of this administration. So I say, based on what Jack Kemp said and based on what the Speaker said, I want to invite the leaders of the Republican Party to join me in a comprehensive approach to solving these problems, because every Republican in America will be better off if we can revitalize our inner cities and our forgotten rural areas and so will every Democrat and so will every independent.

This should not be a partisan issue. If you look at the problems that have plagued us, whatever our race or gender or background, urban or rural, north, south, east, or west, if we could address them, this country would have about half the problems we've got today. You know it, and I know it. So I hope that this conference, this gathering, and these

hopeful comments that have been made by two different Republicans in the last couple of weeks means that we may have a chance to come together here and work together at the national level the way I see Republicans and Democrats working together at the city level and in the urban areas where these empowerment zones have prevailed because of the partnerships we've created. I wish we could follow your example here in Washington, and I'm going to do my best to get that done.

Now, let me say that when you look at where we ought to go beyond affirmative action and beyond what we're doing with the empowerment zones, as a part of our affirmative action review, it occurred to me that while we shouldn't replace affirmative action, we should reform it, and we should also supplement it, because it was clear that no amount of affirmative action could create economic opportunity where there was none. We give everybody an equal opportunity at a shrinking pie, that's not a nice prospect. What we want is for everybody to have an equal opportunity at an expanding pie.

And that is why I have proposed to set aside Government contracts for businesses that lay down roots in poor communities, to locate there and hire people there. I think we ought to have contracts that can bring money and opportunities to poor neighborhoods every day. Businesses make profits; employees get paychecks; workers take their paychecks home to their families and lift their children out of poverty, buy groceries from local merchants, support their local community organizations and stronger community police forces to make the streets safer, to make the schools better. Opportunities that can go to people without regard to their race or gender if they meet a simple condition: they live in a place with genuine need.

I believe this can make a real difference to America, not to get rid of affirmative action but to create real opportunity for all Americans. And I hope you will support this. I have asked the Vice President to examine this challenge and to take it on, as he has so many others, and to come up with what I have to do to get this done, whether I have

to send a bill to Congress or fashion an Executive order or do a combination of both.

But I think this can make a real difference. And it is utterly consistent with the empowerment zone strategy. It emphasizes the three things that make the empowerment zone work: the values of family and work and responsibility, a sense of investment in our people and our opportunities, and a partnership across all the lines that too often divide us.

I am very, very hopeful about that, and I believe it can reinforce some of the other things we're doing. If you look at this values issue, I think we need some values incentives that are tough. That's why we think that people on welfare who can work ought to be required to work. That's why we're trying to get the toughest possible child support enforcement. That's why the crime bill had tougher penalties.

But I also think if you want to promote values, empowerment works there. People ought to have the incentives. That's what the Family and Medical Leave Act was all about. That's what child care and a welfare reform program is all about. That's what the crime prevention aspects of the crime bill were all about. And I think it's interesting to point out, as they're under assault today, that it was the law enforcement communities of America, the people in uniform and the prosecutors and the former prosecutors, like Mayor Rendell, who told us that we had to have crime prevention programs and something for our children to say yes to as well as to say no to. I have walked the streets of Baltimore with Mayor Schموke, who was a former prosecutor, and seen examples of that.

So if we're going to promote values, let's think of empowerment as well as restraint. We need to do both. When we think of investment, we ought to think of empowerment. Head Start is an empowerment program. The college loan program is an empowerment program. The national service program is an empowerment program. The Goals 2000 program, no matter what the attacks on it, is the biggest piece of local incentive, local reform legislation for public schools passed by the Federal Con-

gress in the 30 years we've been acting in the education area.

We need to think of these things as empowerment, not Federal prescriptions. If you think about our community investments, the crime bill was about community empowerment. That's what 100,000 police officers does. That's what the whole community policing program is about.

So I hope that you can help us to develop a language and an attitude and a frame of mind for discussing our common problems as a country so that Americans, even Americans who don't live within your jurisdiction and have the particular benefits of the empowerment zone, will see this as a way of not only solving our economic problems, dealing with our social problems, but empowering people and bringing them together. That is the issue for America at this point in our history. That is the issue.

We cannot maintain the American dream if we go another 20 years when we are very successful by some measures. I mean, consider the last 2½ years. I came to this job committed to restoring the middle class, and I did everything I knew to do. We lowered the deficit. We increased investment in education, in technology, in research and development. We expanded trade frontiers. We have 7 million more jobs. We have a record number of millionaires. We have an all-time high stock market. We have more new businesses than ever before in the history of the country in each of the last 2 years. And most people are still working harder for lower pay than they were making the day I was sworn in as President.

We have to change that. And the only way we can change it is if we realize that we have to get beyond these big ideological debates and roll up our sleeves and reach out to each other and create opportunity for everybody just like you're trying to do. And we should talk about all of these initiatives in terms of what it does to enable people and families and communities to solve their own problems and make the most of their own lives.

That could be the enduring legacy of this administration and very much worth all the efforts that the Vice President and Secretary Cisneros and others have put into this and very much worth the very heated fight that

these Members of Congress here present waged for this program over 2 years ago.

So I ask you to think about all that. I want this to work in your community. I know you do, too. I know you will evaluate these empowerment zones based on whether they do bring people together and they create jobs and opportunity for your people. But I want you never to forget that you may be creating the way that we do business as Americans in the 21st century. And if you can do it, if you can bring people together across all the lines that divide them around the concept of commitment to opportunity for everybody, we'll be a long way down the road toward ensuring the viability of the American dream in the 21st century.

So I ask you to think about that. And when we have these debates up here in Washington about what to fund and what to cut, about how to balance the budget—not whether to balance the budget—you ask yourself: Are they funding the empowerment programs where there's very little bureaucracy in Washington and a whole lot of things happening out in the country? Don't we need some more of the community development banks like we established in Los Angeles? Don't we need to protect a sensible community reinvestment act when we know that credit still does not go evenhandedly to all who are qualified? Don't we need to keep the Small Business Administration functioning when they proved they could double the loan output and lower their budget and increase dramatically loans to women and minorities without lowering their quality standards? Don't we need, in short, to continue on the empowerment agenda when we make our decisions about what to cut and what to fund?

We need to be in a position to help you not just now, but next year and the year after that and the year after that, long into the future. So I ask you to think about that as well.

And again, I say this need not be a partisan issue. You have to ask yourself—we've been pretty successful as a country in identifying the things on which our security hinged and building a consensus for them. I mean, for 50 years we maintained a remarkable—almost 50 years—a remarkable bipartisan con-

sensus that we would spend more than any other country in the world on maintaining a strong national defense, not only for ourselves but for others, so that communism would not prevail and there would never be an incentive to launch a nuclear war. And we fought like crazy about other things, but we created this umbrella that permitted us to grow and go forward as a country. We had a general national consensus created almost 50 years ago that we would be an engine of expanding opportunity throughout the world because that would help us to grow here at home and it would stabilize people throughout the world, to give them hope and help them promote democracy.

So what is it that threatens our security as Americans today? The kids that are being lost every day on our street, the schools that aren't functioning, the number of the people who work hard and are never rewarded, rising levels of anxiety among our families. We ought to be able to find ways to have the kind of consensus on that reflected by the process that brought you here.

So I tell you, you want to do something for your country? Make your empowerment zone work. And make sure everybody in America knows it and knows that's the way we ought to do America's business, not just where you live but here where the American people all have a stake in the future.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:23 p.m. in Room 450 of the Old Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Edward Rendell of Philadelphia, PA, and Mayor Kurt Schmoke of Baltimore, MD.

### **Remarks on Presenting the Congressional Space Medal of Honor to James A. Lovell, Jr., and an Exchange With Reporters**

*July 26, 1995*

**The President.** I am delighted to be here with all these distinguished Members of Congress. I hope I don't miss any. I have Senators Mikulski, Burns, Heflin, Glenn; Members of the House, Congressmen Hall, Sensenbrenner, Cramer, Chapman, and Mineta. I also want to thank Dr. Jack Gibbons,