

citizens needing it most. Due in large part to their limited employment and reduced discretionary income, people with disabilities are more than twice as likely to delay needed health care because they cannot afford it (28 percent versus 12 percent of others).

There is a critical need for further legislation to protect people with disabilities who need medical treatment, and aid them in getting their needed medications. Congress and the Administration must pass the patients' bill of rights; expand health insurance coverage to cover all Americans, including those who are not employed; and ensure that peoples' opportunities to fully participate in life activities are not artificially restricted by their limited access to healthcare.

Education

Opportunity begins, in so many ways, with education. Currently, young people with disabilities are more than twice as likely to drop out of high school (22 percent versus 9 percent), and only half as likely to complete college (12 percent versus 23 percent). Education for students with disabilities is a critical priority. Students with special needs must be given the chance to develop their skills and their minds so they can be prepared for the workforce of the future. In the first decade of the new millennium, America should dramatically close these gaps in opportunities for students with disabilities.

It does well that Congress has increased funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 19 percent this year to \$7.5 billion. This investment will pay huge dividends for the students and families impacted by the IDEA, and for the country.

Tremendous progress has been made in "mainstreaming" students with disabilities since the IDEA was first introduced nearly three decades ago. Mainstreaming is a win/win situations that increases opportunities for those students, and also acclimates other students to peer interaction. Youngsters who have friends and acquaintances with disabilities learn to move beyond the disability and judge the real person. They grow up expecting to interact with diverse people in the workforce and in their communities, dissolving prejudices and stereotypes in the process.

Community Life

It is in the communities of this nation that its 54 million citizens with disabilities go about their daily lives, and this is where these citizens need to be involved. Great progress has been made; commitments from mayors and other leaders have transformed many communities. Disability advocates, no longer willing to be separated from the rest of society, have pushed their communities into becoming more accessible and welcoming places. There is much work still to be done.

Thirty-five percent of people with disabilities say they are not at all involved with their communities, compared to 21 percent of their non-disabled counterparts. Not surprisingly then, those with disabilities are one and a half times as likely to feel isolated from others or left out of their community than those without disabilities.

The current efforts for disaster mobilization are one example of an opportunity for the disability community to remind civic leaders of their responsibility to plan for all citizens. This work may open dialogue in many new and productive directions with regard to overall community efforts.

Religious Life

Faith and religious life are important for many Americans. Churches, synagogues and

mosques need to be accessible to all who wish to worship. With the theme "Access: It begins in the heart," thousands of houses of worship have enrolled in the Accessible Congregations Campaign. Hopefully many other congregations in the country also will commit to identifying and removing barriers of architecture, communications and attitudes that prevent people with disabilities from practicing their faith.

Political Involvement

Citizens with disabilities want to vote, and are doing so at increasing rates. What had been a 20 percentage point participation gap—31 percent versus more than 50 percent—in the 1996 Presidential election was halved when 41 percent of voting-aged citizens with disabilities cast ballots in 2000. This followed a national get-out-the-disability-vote effort. But many polling places remain inaccessible to wheelchair users and others with limited mobility. Once inside the building, others encounter voting machines they cannot use. Persons with limited vision or hand strength are particularly disadvantaged at the polls. People with disabilities want to vote on election day, at the polls, just like everyone else.

Technological improvements now available could make voting at the polls possible for nearly all people with disabilities. All that is needed is the will, or a legal requirement, to put such voting machines into use. The contested 2000 Presidential Election showed that every vote counts. The disability community is determined to have full enfranchisement.

Late in 2001, the House of Representatives passed a bill that did not adequately address the above issues. The Senate's version of the bill, currently under review, is far more promising. Millions of voters and potential voters will be tracking this legislation in the hope that it will improve the voting system for all Americans. None of the barriers that have kept citizens with disabilities from voting should be allowed to remain by the time of the 2004 Presidential election, and the disability community calls on the government at all levels to ensure these obstacles are removed.

The Overall Picture

A clear majority of people with disabilities, 63 percent, say that life has improved for the disability community in the past decade. But when asked about life satisfaction, only 33 percent say they are very satisfied with their life in general—half as many as among those without disabilities. There is much room for improvement, and the disability community looks to the President and his Administration, the Congress, and all those in a position of community leadership to work proactively and productively with us to ensure that no person with a disability is left behind.

Anyone with a disability perspective who travels abroad returns impressed by the way America is, in many ways, the world leader in access, opportunity, and inclusion for people with disabilities. Much progress has been made, and many walls of exclusion have been leveled. People with disabilities celebrate the progress of this nation, and also remain dedicated to the vision of a day when all people, no matter how they are born or what conditions they acquire, will be full and equal participants in American life. This is our dream for the State of the Union.

TRIBUTE TO MANHATTAN BEER DISTRIBUTORS

HON. JOSÉ E. SERRANO

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, February 4, 2002

Mr. SERRANO. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Manhattan Beer Distributors, the first private, non-utility company in the Bronx to use heavy duty Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) trucks to make deliveries. Manhattan Beer Distributors will roll out its first CNG delivery trucks at a ceremony on Monday, February 4, 2002.

Mr. Speaker, Manhattan Beer Distributors first established a facility in the Bronx in 1979. The Bronx site is located on Walnut Avenue, in the industrialized and heavily trafficked area of the Bronx known as Port Morris. Today, the company employs 468 people at its Bronx facility, operates 95 vehicles and has an estimated 30 percent share of the beer market in the New York metropolitan area.

Under the leadership of its President, Simon Bergson, and Vice President Mike McCarthy, Manhattan Beer Distributors will begin the transformation of its fleet with 15 heavy-duty vehicles that will operate exclusively on CNG. The dispatch of these first fifteen could be the ground-breaking catalyst for changing the infrastructure of the South Bronx, from one where pollutant emissions from multitudes of vehicles threaten the delicate health of our children to one where commercial operations can harmoniously co-exist with adjacent residential communities. Manhattan Beer Distributors deserves tribute for its initiative in this project and I hope that many other companies will do the same.

Mr. Speaker, Manhattan Beer Distributors' use of alternative fuel contributes toward several local, regional and national interests. By reducing pollutant emissions through the use of CNG to power delivery trucks, Manhattan Beer Distributors helps improve our air quality. In addition, using CNG helps reduce our nation's dependence on foreign oil, which strengthens our nation's energy security and reduces our nation's trade deficit. Because it has installed a permanent CNG station, it is likely that the Manhattan Beer fleet will evolve into a total clean fuel fleet. The success of this project will demonstrate that other truck-based businesses in the Bronx can make similar improvements. These are the kinds of contributions to environmental quality and economic development that inspired me to introduce legislation providing tax incentives for businesses that use alternative fuels in federal empowerment zones.

Mr. Speaker, our nation must do all that it can to support businesses like Manhattan Beer Distributors, who willingly exercise good corporate citizenship. I heartily urge all of my esteemed colleagues to join me in honoring this bold, conscientious and innovative enterprise.