

Mr. RAMSTAD. Mr. Speaker, 9 years ago today, President Bush signed the Americans with Disabilities Act into law. Since my election to the House later that same year and as a Minnesota State Senator from 1981 to 1990, I have worked hard to help people with disabilities live up to their full potential. That is why I, like many Members of this Chamber, strongly support the Americans with Disabilities Act, and we celebrate its enactment. But, Mr. Speaker, much more work needs to be done.

In signing the ADA, President Bush noted the law is designed "to ensure that people with disabilities are given the basic guarantees for which they have worked so long and so hard: independence, freedom of choice, control of their lives, the opportunity to blend fully and equally into the rich mosaic of the American mainstream."

As we celebrate the anniversary of this historic legislation, we reflect on all that has been achieved for people with disabilities. We must also, however, address where we have failed to empower people with disabilities.

In 1990, President Bush, in signing that historic act, reminded us that many of our fellow citizens with disabilities are unemployed. They want to work, and they can work. This is a tremendous pool of people who will bring to jobs diversity, loyalty, low turnover rate, and only one request: the chance to prove themselves.

Mr. Speaker, despite the remarkably low unemployment rate in America today, people with disabilities are still asking for this chance to prove themselves in the workplace. A recent Harris poll found that unemployment among people with disabilities is between 70 and 75 percent. Think of that: 70 to 75 percent, or three-quarters of people with disabilities are unemployed in America today. Historically, fewer than 1 percent of people with disabilities leave the SSI and SSDI rolls following successful rehabilitation. Individuals with disabilities have insufficient access to and choice of services they need to become employed. Most SSI and SSDI beneficiaries are never even offered rehabilitation services.

Mr. Speaker, we all know the ADA sought to improve this situation. But the ADA did not remove all the barriers within the current Federal programs that prohibit people with disabilities from working. It is time to eliminate work disincentives for people with disabilities. Eliminating work disincentives for people with disabilities is not just humane public policy, it is sound fiscal policy. It is not just the right thing to do, it is also the cost-effective thing to do.

President Bush knew that discouraging people with disabilities from working, from earning a regular paycheck, paying taxes and moving off public assistance actually results in re-

duced Federal revenues. He noted, and I am quoting again: "When you add together the Federal, State, local and private funds, it costs almost \$200 billion annually to support Americans with disabilities. In effect, to keep them dependent." And that was in 1990, Mr. Speaker. We certainly spend more than that today to keep people with disabilities dependent on the system.

Like everyone else, people with disabilities have to make decisions based on financial reality. Should they consider returning to work, or even making it through vocational rehabilitation, the risk of losing vital Federal health benefits often becomes too threatening to future financial stability. As a result, Mr. Speaker, they are compelled not to work.

Given the sorry state of present law, that is generally a reasonable and a rational decision for people with disabilities. The National Council on Disabilities said it best in its report to the 105th Congress on removing barriers to work when it wrote: "Social Security programs can be transformed from a lifelong entitlement into an investment in employment potential for thousands of individuals." Transforming these Federal programs to springboards into the work force is a goal of legislation that I cosponsored in the House with the gentleman from New York (Mr. LAZIO) and many others on both sides of the aisle, the Work Incentives Improvement Act, or H.R. 1180. This critical legislation has been passed by the Committee on Commerce and a similar bill has been approved by the Senate.

Mr. Speaker, preventing people from working runs counter to the American spirit, one that thrives on individual achievements and the larger contributions to society that result. We must not rest until we pass the Work Incentives Improvement Act. People with disabilities deserve the opportunity to fulfill their dreams. Let us give them the chance to prove themselves now.

**RECOGNIZE THE KASHMIRI  
PANDITS AS A MINORITY GROUP  
UNDER INDIAN LAW**

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, although the world welcomes the apparent withdrawal this month of Pakistani forces from India's side of the line of control in Kashmir, we are continually reminded of the dangerous situation that still exists in that mountainous region.

Last Wednesday's New York Times reported that 20 Hindus were killed in 3 incidents before dawn last Tuesday in what the newspaper suggested could be a stepped-up campaign of hit-and-run tactics by Muslim insurgents in remote

areas of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. I am sad to have to report that these kinds of attacks are nothing new, Mr. Speaker.

The worst of these attacks in the village of Lihota left 15 dead. Last week's violence was the fourth mass killing in Kashmir in just 3 weeks.

Mr. Speaker, this spring, when Islamic militants had been infiltrating India's territory with the support of, and active collaboration with, Pakistan, the world took notice. The fact that India and Pakistan are both nuclear powers stirred up fears of a wider war. When it became apparent even to Pakistan's ruler that their gambit in Kashmir was both a military and a propaganda disaster, the Pakistani Government reverted to its traditional ploy by trying to internationalize the conflict by bringing in the United States as a mediator, an effort that our administration has wisely resisted.

However, Mr. Speaker, the prospect of an India-Pakistan war obscures the ongoing violence that has destroyed the life of this entire region. While people of all faiths have suffered, the Hindu community of Kashmir has been particularly severe. The Pandits have suffered as individuals, singled out for violence, and as a community, forced to leave their ancestral homes and way of life, turned into refugees in their own country.

Mr. Speaker, in light of the ongoing unique suffering of the Kashmiri Pandits, I am urging the Indian government to recognize the Kashmir Pandit community as a minority under Indian law to provide additional benefits and protection. While Hindus are the majority religion in India as whole, they are a minority, and indeed, a persecuted minority in Jammu and Kashmir.

Mr. Speaker, it is my understanding that the chairman of the National Minority Commission has proposed that Hindu minorities in various Indian states be officially classified as minorities. The chairman's recommendation is pending before the government. Although such a designation would usually require an amendment to be passed by the parliament, the Lok Sabha, the lower House of the Indian Parliament, there may be occasions where the commission can unilaterally act.

While the details of such an action are obviously an internal matter for India's government, I soon will be circulating a letter to India's Prime Minister Vajpayee, which I hope my colleagues in Congress will join me in signing, urging that the appropriate steps be taken to provide the Pandits with the minority designation.

Mr. Speaker, the militants, with Pakistan's backing, have transformed a peaceful, secular state in India, one which happens to have a predominantly Muslim population, into a killing field. The militants make no secret