

June 18 / Administration of George W. Bush, 2001

- Demonstrated Commitment of Haiti's Minister of Justice to the Professionalism of the Judiciary, and Progress Toward Judicial Branch Independence. Sincerely,

GEORGE W. BUSH

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to Joseph R. Biden, Jr., chairman, and Jesse Helms,

ranking member, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations; Robert C. Byrd, chairman, and Ted Stevens, ranking member, Senate Committee on Appropriations; Henry J. Hyde, chairman, and Tom Lantos, ranking member, House Committee on International Relations; and C.W. Bill Young, chairman, and David R. Obey, ranking member, House Committee on Appropriations.

Remarks to Employees of the Computer/Electronic Accommodations
Program Technology Evaluation Center in Arlington, Virginia
June 19, 2001

Thank you all. Thanks. Be seated. Please be seated. Mr. Secretary, thank you very much for your hospitality and your leadership. Senator Jeffords, Congressmen Green, Horn, and Langevin, thank you all for coming. It's good to see you all. These four Members of the United States Congress have had a piece—a hand in the strategy that I'm about to talk about, and I thank them for their leadership.

Dinah, thank you very much. It's always a joy to be around somebody who loves what she's doing—an enthusiastic soul, and someone who is making people's lives better. And I really appreciate you having me here. I want to thank David Chu for his work, and I want to thank Rhett Dawson, as well, who is the president of the Information Technology and Industry Council.

My fellow Americans, when the Americans with Disabilities Act was signed in 1990, our Nation made a promise: We will no longer underestimate the abilities of Americans with disabilities. We will treat Americans with disabilities as people to be respected, rather than problems to be confronted.

Our Nation has made progress in both attitude and law. Navigating through buildings and buses is far easier than it was just a decade ago. Now, the growth of new

technologies creates new hopes and new obstacles.

The Internet brings a world of information into a computer screen, which has enriched the lives of many with disabilities. Yet, technology creates challenges of its own. The brilliant graphics that add life to many Web pages can make it difficult for a visually impaired person to get the information he or she needs from a Web site. Video technology is turning many computers into television sets. Yet, without closed captioning, many see a picture and no words. And complex keyboard commands make it difficult for a person with impaired motor skills to tap a computer's full potential. As a result, computer usage and Internet access for people with disabilities is half that of people without disabilities.

Researchers here at the Department of Defense and at other agencies throughout the Federal Government and in the private sector are developing solutions to these problems. I have just had the opportunity to tour the Department's assistive technology center, and I saw technologies that are helping people with disabilities enjoy the full range of opportunities made possible by the technology boom. Software allows hearing-impaired people to communicate with their coworkers by computer.

Screen reading technology makes it possible for the visually impaired to access information on a monitor. And voice recognition software unlocks new computing possibilities for people with impaired dexterity.

The technologies on display here have helped more than 20,000 Defense Department employees enjoy greater access to communications and computing equipment. And they will help countless individuals in the public and private sectors become fully integrated into the workplace.

I'm committed to bringing that technology to users as quickly as possible, and I'm committed to ensuring that Government Web sites become compatible with this evolving technology. And that is why I'm pleased to announce that when Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, authored by Jim Jeffords, becomes effective for all Federal agencies next Monday, there will be more opportunities for people of all abilities to access Government information. Section 508 requires Federal agencies to make sure that the electronic and information technology they use is accessible for people with disabilities.

Increasingly, Americans use information technology to interact with their Government. They rely on thousands of Government Web pages to download forms, learn about Federal programs, find out where to turn for Government assistance, and communicate with elected officials, such as the President. And because of Section 508, Government Web sites will be more accessible for millions of Americans who have disabilities.

Section 508 will also make the Federal Government a better employer, as roughly 120,000 Federal employees with disabilities will have greater access to the tools they need to better perform their jobs.

This is one example of the successful public-private partnerships that are removing barriers to full community participation by Americans with disabilities. I thank the leaders from the technology industry who

are with us today for your innovation and your ongoing cooperation.

Full implementation of Section 508 is a key element of an agenda I announced a year ago and began implementing in February. It is called the New Freedom Initiative, and its goal is to prepare—is to help Americans with disabilities realize their potential and to achieve their dreams.

We've asked Congress to increase funding to bring assistive technologies to market more quickly, to help make them more affordable for the people who need them, and to speed research in developing new technologies. We have sought to make it easier for Americans with disabilities to enter the workforce by finding new ways to get people to their jobs or relying on new technologies to help people work from their home.

We recognize that small businesses and community groups like churches, synagogues, mosques, and civic organizations may have trouble finding the resources to fully comply with the ADA. So we've asked Congress to support efforts to help them make their facilities more accessible. And we understand that new policies will mean little if we don't fully enforce the ADA. So my administration is doing just that.

While these Federal efforts are crucial to guaranteeing full accessibility for Americans with disabilities, we must also help them connect with their local communities. So I've signed an Executive order requiring full implementation of the Supreme Court's 1999 *Olmstead* decision. *Olmstead* and the ADA rightly mandate that individuals with disabilities who can receive support and treatment in a community setting should be given a reasonable opportunity to live close to their families and friends when appropriate.

My Executive order directs key Federal agencies, like the Departments of Housing and Urban Development, Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Justice and the Social Security Administration to work with States to implement the

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Olmstead decision and the ADA. It directs those Agencies to explore how we can increase community-based services for people with disabilities, and it directs Attorney General Ashcroft and Secretary Thompson to fully enforce Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act and ensure that no one is unjustly institutionalized. Secretary Thompson has also made seed money available to help every State develop a plan for implementing *Olmstead*.

The *Olmstead* Executive order will increase freedom for people with disabilities. It is compassionate; it is needed; and it is now the Federal official policy of my administration. Americans must have the opportunity to live independently, work productively, and participate fully in community life.

Many Americans achieve this independence through homeownership. But too often, the high cost of therapeutic care and assistive equipment and technologies make the goal of homeownership unattainable for people with disabilities. That's why I'm optimistic about a pilot program led through the Congress by Representative Mark Green, and soon to be implemented by Secretary Mel Martinez at HUD, that will allow many people with disabilities to buy

their own homes. By making the Section 8 low-income rental assistance program more flexible, the Federal Government can make homeownership a reality for more Americans.

The new Section 8 HUD pilot program, the *Olmstead* Executive order, and the full implementation of Section 508 will help eliminate the barriers that many Americans with disabilities face. The proposals I sent to Congress will build on our society's commitment to welcome all Americans as friends and neighbors. When governments, business, and individuals work together to build a welcoming society, Americans of every ability will benefit.

Thank you for what you're doing here at the Department of Defense. Thank you for your compassion. And may God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:19 a.m. in the auditorium at the Pentagon. In his remarks, he referred to Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld and Dinah Cohen, director, Computer/Electronic Accommodations Program. The Executive order of June 18 on community-based alternatives for individuals with disabilities is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

Remarks at the Summit on the 21st Century Workforce June 20, 2001

Thank you all very much. Thank you very much. Please be seated. Madam Secretary, thank you very much, and I appreciate so very much your service to the country. I made a good pick when I convinced Elaine to join my Cabinet; she's doing a terrific job. I think Rod Paige is here, too, the Secretary of Education. If he's not—he is here. Hey, Mr. Secretary. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

Members of Congress, thank you all so very much for being here. I spend a lot

of quality time with Members of Congress these days. [*Laughter*] I think we're making pretty good progress, and I appreciate you all for coming.

I want to thank the business and labor leaders who are here. And I want to thank you all for taking an interest in the American workforce.

As Elaine mentioned, I just came back from Europe and had a fascinating experience. It's such an honor to represent our great Nation around the world. We've spent