

**WASHINGTON, DC - Congressman Steny H. Hoyer (D-MD) spoke on the House Floor today in support of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Amendments Act, which passed the U.S. House of Representatives this afternoon. Rep. Hoyer was the lead sponsor of the original ADA, which became law in 1990 and is seen as a major civil rights achievement. [A summary of the bill can be found here.](#) Below are Rep. Hoyer's remarks as prepared for delivery:**

“Eighteen years ago next month, the first President Bush signed into law one of the most consequential pieces of civil rights legislation in recent memory. In the ceremony on the South Lawn of the White House, he said this: ‘With today's signing of the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act, every man, woman, and child with a disability can now pass through once-closed doors into a bright new era of equality, independence, and freedom.’

“And in large measure, he was right: Those doors have come open. Tens of millions of Americans with disabilities now enjoy rights the rest of us have long taken for granted: the right to use the same streets, theaters, restrooms, or offices; the right to prove themselves in the workplace, to succeed on their talent and drive alone. We all understand why there are cuts in the sidewalk at every street corner, kneeling busses on our city streets, elevators on the Metro, ramps at movie theaters, and accessible restrooms and handicapped parking almost everywhere. By now they've become part of our lives' fabric. And we wouldn't have it any other way, because each one is the sign of a pledge: the promise of an America that excludes none of its people from our shared life.

“That was the promise of the ADA. But looking back 18 years, the hard truth is that we were, in some ways, too optimistic. The door President Bush spoke of is still not entirely open-and every year, millions of us are caught on the wrong side.

“In interpreting the law over those 18 years, the courts have consistently chipped away at Congress's clear intent-and I know what that intent was, because I was there when we drafted the ADA. I know that many of my colleagues were, as well. And I know they share my disappointment in a series of narrow rulings that have had the effect of excluding millions of Americans from the law's protection, for no good reason.

"We said we wanted broad coverage for people with disabilities and people regarded as disabled. But the courts narrowed the coverage with a 'strict and demanding standard,' a severely restrictive measure that virtually excluded entire classes of people, even though we had specifically mentioned their impairments as objects of the law's protections.

"We never expected that people with disabilities who worked to mitigate their conditions would have their efforts held against them. But the courts did exactly that, throwing their cases out on the grounds that they were no longer disabled enough to suffer discrimination.

"None of that was our intent.

"But we are here today because a truly wide coalition-members of the disability community ready to claim their equal share; Members of both parties who are tired of seeing constituents shut out; business groups eager to unlock new pools of talent-an alliance as broad as the one that joined forces to pass the original ADA, has come together to help the courts get this right.

"With the ADA Amendments Act, we make it clear today that a cramped reading of disability rights will be replaced with a definition that is broad and fair. That those who manage to mitigate their disabilities are still subject to discrimination-and still entitled to redress. And that those 'regarded as' having a disability are equally at risk-and deserve to be equally protected.

"I'm proud to have worked for so long with my colleague Jim Sensenbrenner. He's been a leader in advancing this legislation, and we've joined together to submit for the record a legal analysis of the bill that we've worked so hard to bring to fruition. And I want to thank my good friend, former Congressman Tony Coelho, for originally enlisting me in this effort. Finally, it is my honor to dedicate this bill to the late Justin Dart-the pioneering disability advocate and an inspiration behind the ADA-as well as to his wife, Yoshiko Dart.

"Mr. Speaker, few kinds of discrimination, in all of history, have been more widespread than the exclusion of those with disabilities. But it was America that passed a pioneering law to help end that exclusion-we were the first in the world to do so; we were the world's model on this central challenge to human rights. Eighteen years later, we cannot afford to fall behind. Let us pass this bill and bring one step closer the day when the fruits of life in America are at last

available to all.&quot;

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