

President Obama. I think it will send a clear message that the overwhelming number of countries who not only participated in the deal, the P5-plus-1, but who have observed what's happened, recognize that this is by far our strongest approach to ensuring that Iran does not get a nuclear weapon. There is broad international consensus around this issue, not just among the international community, but also among experts in nuclear proliferation. And my working assumption is, is that Congress will

pay attention to the broad-based consensus. All right?

Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:14 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, President Buhari referred to former President Goodluck Jonathan of Nigeria; and former Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission for Nigeria Attahiru Muhammadu Jega.

Remarks on the 25th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act July 20, 2015

The President. Hello, everybody! Well, welcome to the White House. And thank you so much, Haben, for that amazing introduction and for working to make sure that students with disabilities get a world-class education, just like you have. So please give Haben a big round of applause.

So, on a sunny day 25 years ago—I don't know if it was as hot as it is today—[laughter]—President George H.W. Bush stood on the South Lawn and declared a new American independence day. “With today's signing of the landmark Americans [with] Disabilities Act,” he said, “every man, woman, and child with a disability can now pass through once-closed doors into a bright new era of equality, freedom, and independence.”

Twenty-five years later, we come together to celebrate that groundbreaking law and all that the law has made possible. Thanks to the ADA, the places that comprise our shared American life—schools, workplaces, movie theaters, courthouses, buses, baseball stadiums, national parks—they truly belong to everyone. Millions of Americans with disabilities have had the chance to develop their talents and make their unique contributions to the world. And thanks to them, America is stronger and more vibrant; it is a better country because of the ADA. That's what this law has achieved.

So today we honor those who made the ADA the law of the land, many of whom are here today. Tom Harkin—[applause]—Tom Harkin is in the back there, and he—Tom de-

livered speeches in sign language on the Senate floor in favor of this law, in part inspired by his brother Frank.

Bob Dole is here. A war hero whose combat-related disability informed the way he advocated for all Americans with disabilities.

Tony Coelho—[applause]—told he couldn't become a priest because of his epilepsy, so he became a Congressman instead—[laughter]—and helped to pass the ADA so fewer Americans would find the word “no” being an obstacle to their dreams.

In the 1970s, Judy Heumann helped lead the longest sit-in at a Federal building in U.S. history, in support of disability rights. Today, she's at the State Department, advocating for people with disabilities worldwide. She and all the others I mentioned deserve America's thanks for their tireless efforts.

I want to thank some of the activists who are here, folks like Ricardo Thornton and Tia Nelis. In 1999, the Supreme Court ruled that institutionalizing people with disabilities—isolating them, keeping them apart from the rest of the community—is not just wrong, it is illegal. Ricardo and Tia have pushed to make sure that ruling is enforced. And I am proud of what my administration has done to ensure that people with disabilities are treated like the valuable members of the communities that they are.

And I want to thank all the Members of Congress and members of my administration who are here today, including our outstanding Secretary of Labor, Tom Perez, and the White

House's fantastic new Disability Community Liaison, Maria Town is here. [Applause] Yay, Maria!

Now, days like today are a celebration of our history. But they're also a chance to rededicate ourselves to the future, to address the injustices that still linger, to remove the barriers that remain.

The ADA offered millions of people the opportunity to earn a living and help support their families. But we all know too many people with disabilities are still unemployed, even though they can work, even though they want to work, even though they have so much to contribute. In some cases, it's a lack of access to skills training. In some cases, it's an employer that can't see all that these candidates for a job have to offer. Maybe sometimes, people doubt their own self-worth after experiencing a lifetime of discouragement and expectations that were too low. Whatever the reason, we've got to do better. Our country cannot let all that incredible talent go to waste.

A few years ago, I issued an Executive order requiring the Federal Government to hire more Americans with disabilities. And in part because of that Executive order, today, more people with disabilities are working with us than at any point in the last 30 years. Some of these folks are some of my closest colleagues and have been incredible leaders on behalf of the administration on a whole host of issues, and I'm grateful for their contributions every single day.

And we've strengthened the rules for Federal contractors to make sure they have plans in place for hiring people with disabilities. I'm hoping more employers follow suit, because Americans with disabilities can do the job, and they're hungry for the chance, and they will make you proud if you give them the chance.

The ADA also made our more—made our Government more responsive to Americans with disabilities. But we've still got more to do to live up to our responsibilities. My administration created the first office within FEMA dedicated to disability, so that when disaster strikes, we're prepared to help everybody, including those with physical or mental condi-

tions requiring extra help. And we created the first Special Adviser for International Disability Rights at the State Department, because this is not just about American rights, it's about human rights, and that's something our Nation has to stand for.

So we've still got to do more to make sure that people with disabilities are paid fairly for their labor, to make sure they are safe in their homes and their communities, to make sure they have access to technology, including high-speed Internet, that allows for their full participation in this 21st-century economy. We've still got to do more to make sure that children with disabilities get every opportunity to learn and acquire the skills and the sense of self-worth that will last a lifetime. That is our most sacred charge. And we need Republicans and Democrats in Congress to make sure we have a budget that lets us keep that promise and keep that commitment.

So I don't have to tell you, this fight is not over.

Audience member. Oh, no.

The President. Oh, no. [Laughter] But we're building a stronger foundation. And thanks to generations of Americans who fought for better laws, who demanded better treatment, who in—by just being good and decent people and effective workers and working hard every day and treating others with respect and asking the same in return, folks have overcome ignorance and indifference and made our country better.

I'm thinking of folks like Hamza Jaka, who's here from Wisconsin with his mom. He gloated that he's a Packers fan—[laughter]—and they've been beating the Bears a lot lately. But Hamza has cerebral palsy. As he puts it, people always assume his condition must limit him. But the opposite is true. His disability has given him unique experiences and a sense of purpose that he cherishes. He traveled to Syria to meet other young people with disabilities, and together, they created a comic book featuring a Muslim superhero who uses a wheelchair called the "Silver Scorpion." [Laughter] This fall, he's starting law school, where he's going to learn how to be an even more effective advocate.

And then you've got somebody like Leah Katz-Hernandez. Leah is one of my favorites. [Laughter] She is—her smiling face is one of the first things that people see when they come into the White House. She is the West Wing receptionist. We call her ROTUS. [Laughter] I'm POTUS, this is VPOTUS, and that's ROTUS. [Laughter]

And ROTUS is the first deaf American to hold that job. She is poised, she is talented, and as she puts it, a lot of her accomplishments may not have been possible without the ADA.

And just on a very practical level, this law meant she could ask for sign language interpretation on job interviews, very straight forward. But without this law and without enforcement of the law, those things don't happen. On a deeper level, the fact that the ADA was passed a few years after Leah was born opened possibilities to her that previous generations didn't always have. She says that, thanks to this law, "I grew up knowing I was equal, not subhuman."

And I've told this story before, but whenever I think about the ADA, I think about my father-in-law Fraser Robinson, who was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in his early thirties. By the time I knew him, he needed crutches to get around. He was holding down a job and raising a family at a time where the ADA had not yet been passed. He never missed a day at work. He had to wake up an hour earlier than everybody else just to put on his shirt, just to get dressed, just to get down to the job, but he was never going to be late.

If he went to his son's basketball games, he and the family would have to get there 45 minutes early because he didn't want to interrupt people as he climbed one stair at a time on crutches so that he could cheer on his son. Same thing if he went to Michelle's dance receptions. And just through the power of his example, he opened a lot of people's eyes, including mine, to some of the obstacles that folks with disabilities faced and how important it is that the rest of us do our part to remove those obstacles.

And just an aside on this, for a long time, he would not get a motorized wheelchair because he had gotten this disability at a time when

they weren't available and it was expensive and they weren't wealthy and insurance didn't always cover it. And it just gave you a sense of—Michelle and I would talk sometimes about how much more he could have done, how much more he could have seen. As wonderful as a dad as he was and as wonderful as a co-worker as he was, he was very cautious about what he could and couldn't do, not because he couldn't do it, but because he didn't want to inconvenience his family and he didn't want to be seen as somehow holding things up.

And that's what, even for folks who had amazing will, was the nature of having a disability before this law was passed. It wasn't just physical obstacles. It was also constraining how people thought about what they should or should not do. And that's why this is personal. That's why it's so important for us to remember what this law means. That's what today is all about. We've got to tear down barriers externally, but we also have to tear down barriers internally. That's our responsibility as Americans, and it's our responsibility as fellow human beings.

As long as I've got the privilege of serving as your President, I'm going to make sure every single day that I'm working alongside you to tear down those barriers. I know Joe Biden is going to be doing the same. And I am going to make sure that when we look back at—18 months from now, we're going to say we have made some significant advances. And once I'm no longer President, I'm going to keep on pushing as well.

So thank you, everybody. God bless you. Proud of you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:33 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Haben Girma, Skadden Fellowship attorney, Disability Rights Advocates; former Sens. Thomas R. Harkin and Robert J. Dole; and former Rep. Anthony L. Coelho. He also referred to his brother-in-law Craig M. Robinson. The related proclamation of July 24 is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.