

The National Council on Disability

Forum Titled “Disability in the Budget: Why It Matters”

Statement by Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers

May 12, 2011

I would like to thank you all for providing Members of the Disabilities Caucus with the opportunity to present to you today. I believe that we have a unique opportunity in this Congress to move the disability agenda forward.

Last year, we commemorated the 20th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The anniversary gave each of us the opportunity to evaluate how far we’ve come as a nation in recognizing the needs of disabled Americans. It also gave us the opportunity to determine what promises remain unfulfilled.

I believe today we find ourselves at a crossroads. Let me explain why. The ADA is about full integration, independence, and productivity.

We’ve witnessed tremendous progress in virtually all aspects of society. From the changes made to sidewalks and our public transportation sectors to the accommodations made in our businesses, communities, and schools, there are few places where disabled Americans can’t go.

But, what I’m talking about is changing minds. Changing the national conversation about what it means to be disabled.

Having a disability should not mean automatic confinement or institutionalization. It should not mean a life of government dependence.

The ADA and disability policies and programs that the federal government should be advocating should be about fulfilling the abilities and ambitions of each and every American to the fullest extent possible – whether it is pursuing an education, a job, enhancing job skills, or just living on one's own. They should not be about creating and perpetuating a dependence on the federal government.

I believe the time is ripe. As Congress discusses critical topics such as job creation, health care, education – disabled Americans should be a part of the conversation.

Let's use unemployment as an example. There is no reason that the unemployment rate for disabled Americans should be ten times the national rate – particularly when disabled Americans have the skills needed to enter the job market.

The National Council on Disability should be at the forefront of those discussions – guiding both the Administration and Congress as it considers these critical issues.

Never again should a disability be looked upon as automatic confinement. It should be about empowerment to the fullest extent possibility and the support needed to get there.

As a mother, I am grateful for those who have paved the way for my son Cole. But, as a Member of Congress, I'm determined to pursue policies that ensure that every door that can be opened for him -- and the millions of other disabled Americans – is opened.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak to you this afternoon.