

Feb. 1 / Administration of George W. Bush, 2001

administration finds wisdom and always remembers the common good.

When President Harry Truman took office in 1945, he said this: “At this moment, I have in my heart a prayer. I ask only to be a good and faithful servant of my Lord and my people.” This has been the

prayer of many Presidents, and it is mine today.

God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:10 a.m. in the International Ballroom at the Washington Hilton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Representative Zach Wamp.

Remarks Announcing the New Freedom Initiative *February 1, 2001*

Steven, you were brilliant in your introduction. Little did we know—we kind of thought we’d be sitting here during the California race, didn’t we? But here we are, and thank you so much for being here.

I’m so honored that you all are here. I appreciate the folks who served on my coalition for people with disabilities. There’s one hero here that I got to know during the campaign. His name is Jim Mullen. Jim is from Chicago. He’s a police officer, wounded in the course of duty, who is a courageous, fine American. And Jim, thank you so very much for coming today.

I’m glad the First Lady is here. It’s an unusual job where all you’ve got to do is walk down from your living room to come to work. [*Laughter*] I’m really proud of Laura.

It’s good to see Members of the Congress who are here. Thank you all for coming as well. I’m especially pleased that people from all around the country have taken time to help kick off this important initiative.

One of the things I enjoy most about my new job is the walk I get to take every single morning up the Colonnade from the Residence to the Oval Office. I say “up,” because the path rises just slightly. It’s been that way since they took out the steps so that Franklin Roosevelt could make it to his place of work.

This house is among the first places in America to accommodate people with disabilities. And we have come a long way since the days when only a President could hope for that consideration. We are more mindful now of the hardships that come with disability, more generous in responding to the needs of our citizens, more grateful for the contributions you make to our society. Old misconceptions about physical and mental disability are being discredited. Old barriers are falling away. Our task is now clear: We must speed up the day when the last barrier has been removed to full and independent lives for every American, with or without disability.

I am proud that the last great reform in this cause, the Americans with Disability Act, bears the signature of my dad. I see many in this audience who helped him get this important legislation through Congress, and I want to thank you for coming. Because of that law, millions of Americans can now compete for jobs once denied them, enter buildings once closed to them, travel in buses and trains once unequipped for them. For those who have hearing or visual impairments, for those who use walkers and wheelchairs or have mental retardation and mental illnesses, your own country now seems a more welcoming place as a result of that law. Eleven years after the ADA, we are a better country for it.