

But there is more to do, and today I propose we move forward. This morning I sent to Congress a set of proposals called the New Freedom Initiative. It is an important step in ensuring that all Americans with disabilities, whether young or old, can participate more fully in the life of their communities and of our country. Wherever a door is closed to anyone because of a disability, we must work to open it. Wherever any job or home or means of transportation is unfairly denied because of a disability, we must work to change it. Wherever any barrier stands between you and the full rights and dignity of citizenship, we must work to remove it, in the name of simple decency and simple justice.

Often, as you know, such barriers are unintentional. One is the high cost of assistive technologies. For many people with disabilities, new technologies are helping to defeat dependence and frustration and isolation: text telephones for those with hearing impairments; computer monitors with Braille displays for those with visual impairments; infrared pointers for people who cannot use their hands, allowing them to operate computers by pointing at functions on the monitor or the keyboard; lighter wheelchairs; lighter artificial limbs. These modern wonders make the world more accessible; yet, they are often inaccessible to people who need but cannot afford them. These technologies were once beyond the dreams of Americans with disabilities. Today, they're only beyond their means, and we can help.

In our New Freedom Initiative, we're asking Congress to significantly increase Federal funding for low-interest loans so that more Americans with disabilities can purchase assistive technology. And to ensure that even better technologies are available in the future, we're asking Congress to increase Federal investment in assistive technology research and development.

My administration will also work with businesses to bring more assistive technologies to the marketplace. Once available,

these technologies will allow Americans with disabilities to use more of their own gifts, make more of their own choices, and lead lives of greater independence.

Many Americans with disabilities work or would like to have more freedom to do so. And you know that the greatest challenges are often not in the job itself but in the distance between your job and your home. For some people with disabilities, this challenge means no job at all, no opportunity to work and to contribute and to use their talents. This is changing as more Americans work at home. Yet here, too, the cost of computers and telecommuting are sometimes beyond the means of those with disabilities, and we can help.

In our New Freedom Initiative, we are asking Congress to create a fund to help people with disabilities to buy the equipment they need to telecommute. We will provide tax incentives to encourage employers to provide such equipment. And we will protect home offices from needless OSHA regulations. Some 40 million Americans today work out of their homes. For most, it is a convenience. For workers with disabilities, it is a revolution. And we want as many Americans as possible to share in this revolution of independence.

Our plans also include transportation solutions for people with disabilities. Specifically, we're asking Congress to fund pilot programs for innovative transportation plans that serve people with disabilities. And we'll provide Federal matching grants to community groups to provide alternative methods of transportation.

There are several additional proposals in this package, but let me just mention one more. We will provide additional funding each year to help churches, synagogues, mosques, and other civic groups become more fully accessible to all Americans. In many houses of worship and civic centers, intentions are good, but resources are scarce. We can help make these community places open to all.