

Keynote Speech – RNC Chairman Clayton Yeutter

The RNC Writers Group created numerous speeches and talking points for the Party Chairman and other G.O.P. officials. Among the more challenging assignments involved instances when the Party was reaching out to new constituencies. One example is this speech (excerpted below) that I prepared for Chairman Clayton Yeutter; he was very pleased to receive a standing ovation from the audience!

Clayton Yeutter Chairman, Republican National Committee to Annual Convention National Federation of the Blind

July 3, 1991

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for that kind introduction, your kind welcome and for inviting me to address the largest gathering of blind Americans in the country. I'm told that this convention might be the largest assembly of people with disabilities anywhere this year.

I'm especially proud to be here as a representative of the Bush Administration. President Bush, as I'm sure you all know, is a good friend of persons with disabilities, and, thanks largely to his leadership, we now have the Americans With Disabilities Act — the most important piece of civil rights legislation in decades.

The ADA lays the groundwork for comprehensive Civil Rights protection for all disabled Americans. The ADA guarantees non-discrimination in:

- Employment;
- Access to public accommodations;
- Access to transportation; and
- Equity in telecommunications.

I'm preaching to the choir here, but please allow me, because the significance of this legislation, and the demonstration of this type of leadership by the President, are important enough to go over some things many of you in this room already know.

The ADA was originally developed by the National Council on Disability in 1986, because they

believe people with disabilities belong in businesses and communities, not on welfare rolls and in nursing homes. They believe that disabled Americans are one of our nation's most misunderstood and untapped resources — that we are losing too many talented people who should be in the work force, in academia, in government — too many good minds blocked from pursuing careers and advancing our society.

As you have often heard, the National Council

thinks it is more important to give people with disabilities the right to *earn* a dollar, rather than *giving* them a quarter. The Republican philosophy is based on the same principle.

Today, about two-thirds of all working-age disabled Americans are not

employed — even though the vast majority wants to be. The ADA will help change this, and that will benefit society as a whole and stimulate our economy as well. It will promote independence, letting disabled persons enter the mainstream — and as they work they will earn, pay taxes, depend less on Social Security, and spend more on consumer goods.

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As disabled Americans and as members of the National Federation of the Blind fully participate in our society, they must also take on a greater role in shaping our democracy.

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Unfortunately, the same myth that says wisdom belongs only to the learned also says that vision belongs only to the sighted. But we must, as a society, surpass such myths — we must venture past a person’s disability to the person — the self-reliant, courageous man or woman who knows the issues, knows the community and is ready to lead.

We need more disabled Americans leading our nation. We need more blind citizens stepping up to the podium and expressing ideas, and we need more of them to run for office.

On what issues will they run? A stronger economy, better schools, safer streets, and a more peaceful world.

And on whose ticket will they run? Of course, I believe it should be the Republican ticket — because those issues are at the heart of our party and in the hearts of everyone in this room — and in the hearts of every American.

If you’re not ready to run for office, you *are* ready to join in a campaign. What position will you hold? Campaign manager, finance manager, communications manager, phone bank coordinator. And on whose campaign will you work? A Republican’s campaign, because he or she will welcome your contribution as an involved citizen.

Finally, if you don’t volunteer for a campaign, you most certainly do vote. Study the issues facing your state and community, and vote for the candidate who has common-sense ideas for bringing together the forces of government, business, community and family to address the urgent problems we face today.

For whom will you vote? I believe you will vote for the Republican candidate, because he or she will speak to your spirit of self-reliance, community involvement and personal courage.

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The Declaration of Independence states that all people are created equal. And the signers, some of whom were disabled by disease or war, saw no irony in that statement. Because each individual — regardless of disability, race, creed or gender — deserves an equal chance to succeed in this country, to enjoy life and liberty, and to pursue happiness.

But happiness is inherently linked to pursuit, both in the Declaration and in our lives today. I believe blind persons want to *pursue* their goals, not have them handed over by government. They want the obstacles removed, the structures and social stigmas set aside. That’s what the ADA will help to do, and that’s what America *must* do if it is to reach its full potential.

In learning more about the ADA and the National Federation philosophy, I understand that the real prob-

lem of blindness is not the blindness itself; it is the mistaken attitudes of others that keep you out. The ADA guarantees access to public accommodations —so you can shop in your favorite store, eat in your favorite restaurant,

and go to a doctor’s office without hindrance or discrimination. These advances must be accompanied by new social attitudes that embrace the diversity and uniqueness that give America its strength.

On this eve of Independence Day, we have much to celebrate and much work we know we must accomplish. But we can gain courage from the words of one of the disabled Americans who, more than 200 years ago, made the rough journey to Philadelphia to take part in the affirmation of our independence. It’s said that Rhode Island Delegate Stephen Hopkins, who had cerebral palsy, set his pen to the parchment and stated: “My hand trembles, but my heart does not.”

My friends, with strong hearts, the National Federation and the Republican Party will create a new alliance, based on common principles and mutual respect. I look forward to working with you all as we face the challenges and share the opportunities of a new era in America.

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