

**TESTIMONY OF ALAN A. REICH
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HOUSE GOVERNMENT REFORM SUBCOMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS
AND WELLNESS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES WASHINGTON, DC
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am Alan Reich, president of the National Organization on Disability. I founded this organization in 1982, having joined the disability community two decades earlier, when I broke my neck in a diving accident.

I sincerely thank you and the House Government Reform Subcommittee on Human Rights and Wellness for bringing to the attention of the American people the situation of our minority of 54 million Americans as illuminated in today's landmark N.O.D./Harris report.

Who are we, the 54 million citizens with disabilities? And how are we doing compared to other Americans? This report identifies and defines the challenges our minority faces in terms of the gaps in major life areas between those with and without disabilities. The survey results show that in 2004, these gaps are wide, and we remain pervasively disadvantaged in ten key indicator areas.

- 1) Employment – only a third of people with disabilities of working age are employed full or part-time compared to more than three quarters of those without disabilities (35% versus 78%).
- 2) Education – 21% of people with disabilities have received less than a high school education, compared with only 11% of those without disabilities.
- 3) Socializing – people with disabilities socialize less frequently with close friends, relatives, or neighbors (79% versus 89%).
- 4) Income – people with disabilities are far more likely to have a household income of \$15,000 or less (26% versus 9%).

- 5) Religious worship – 49% of people with disabilities go to a place of worship at least once a month compared with 57% of those without disabilities.
- 6) Entertainment – people with disabilities are less likely to go out to a restaurant at least twice a month (66% versus 73%).
- 7) Political participation – people with disabilities are less likely to be registered to vote (62% versus 78%), as shown by our 2000 Harris survey.
- 8) Transportation – people with disabilities are twice as likely as those without disabilities to consider inadequate transportation a problem (31% versus 13%).
- 9) Healthcare – people with disabilities are more than twice as likely to have gone without needed medical care at least once in the past year (18% versus 7%).
- 10) Life Satisfaction – not surprisingly, in light of these other gaps, people with disabilities are much less likely to say they are very satisfied with life in general (34% versus 61%).

Overall, this is a sorry picture. America can do better. We must.

There are glimmers of hope. Over the past eighteen years, several gaps have closed notably, employment, education, income, and eating out. In the past four years, discrimination toward people with disabilities in the workplace has decreased markedly, undoubtedly as a result of the Americans with Disabilities Act. However, there is still a long way to go before we can say that people with disabilities have the same opportunities to contribute to and participate in American life that other citizens do. Closing these gaps is our goal and it must be America's goal too.

You will hear more about the trends since our 2000 and earlier surveys from Harris Interactive Chairman Humphrey Taylor, one of the worlds foremost survey

researchers. We are indebted to Humphrey for his work and his personal commitment to disability issues. I respectfully request that Humphrey Taylor's presentation on the survey, given earlier today at the National Press Club, be appended to my remarks and placed in the record.

My distinguished colleagues on the panel will amplify these comments. N.O.D. Board Member Robert David Hall is known to America as a lead member of the nation's top-rated television show CSI (Crime Scene Investigation). David, who is a double-leg amputee, has traveled from Hollywood to appear before the Committee today, and we are grateful to him. He will be followed by Peter Blanck, also a Member of the Board of Directors of the National Organization on Disability and professor at the University of Iowa Law School as well as director of their disability law center. Peter is a world authority on disability employment and the Americans with Disabilities Act. He has published and spoken widely.

Again, Mr. Chairman, I would like to commend you and the House Government Reform Subcommittee on Human Rights and Wellness for recognizing 54 million Americans with disabilities are disadvantaged and discriminated against. You are performing a vital service by placing disability squarely on the human rights agenda.

I had the privilege to note recently in testimony before the Congressional Human Rights Caucus that our citizens with disabilities, like our half billion counterparts worldwide, are the poorest, least educated, and the most disadvantaged humans on our planet. This is a human rights travesty.

We want to participate fully and contribute to society – just like everyone else.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.