



The Subcommittee on Human Rights and Wellness

Chairman Dan Burton (R ~ IN)

<http://www.house.gov/reform>



For Immediate Release:
June 23, 2004

Contact: Nick Mutton
(202) 225-2276

CHAIRMAN BURTON TO EXAMINE THE STATUS OF PEOPLE LIVING WITH DISABILITIES IN THE U.S.

- ACTOR ROBERT DAVID HALL OF CSI TO TESTIFY -

Washington, D.C. – According to the United States Census Bureau, there are currently **over 49 million individuals in the United States living with some form of disability**. Unfortunately, a majority of this underserved population doesn't enjoy nearly the same quality of life that many of us take for granted everyday. Chairman Dan Burton will convene a hearing to examine the quality of life experienced by persons with disabilities in the U.S. In addition, the Subcommittee plans to discuss a wide range of efforts on the part of the Federal Government, as well as non-governmental organizations to expand the participation of and contributions from this population of America.

The Subcommittee's oversight hearing, entitled **"Living with Disabilities in the United States: A Snapshot," will be held on Thursday, June 24, 2004, in Room 2154 of the Rayburn House Office Building at 2:30 p.m.**

"I believe, as our forefathers did, that every American has the inherent right to participate in and contribute to their community, and society as a whole," stated Chairman Burton. "At present, there is a staggering number of Americans who suffer from some sort of disability, and it is the duty of their government to ensure they are receiving equitable protection under the law."

A disability is defined as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more life activities of an individual. The U.S. government has taken many actions over the years in order to better accommodate our population of disabled Americans. For instance, the "*Rehabilitation Act of 1973*" was the first civil rights legislation, which represented the initial step towards greater sensitivity and accessibility for the disabled. In addition, the "*Americans with Disabilities Act*" – passed by Congress and signed into law in 1990 - promulgated the first anti-discrimination guidelines on disability.

Congressman James Langevin (D-RI) was rendered paralyzed after an accident occurred while he was attending a Boy Scout event when he was sixteen years of age. Since that time, he has worked hard to advance a variety of healthcare and disability initiatives. Congressman Langevin will talk about his extensive activities with regard to disability policy, as well as share his personal experiences.

The Federal Government has not only ensured that discrimination based upon disability is unlawful in the United States, but has also worked toward providing programs to assist with healthcare and educational opportunities for the disabled population. Mr. Troy Justesen, Acting Assistant Secretary

with the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services at the Department of Education, will testify about the specific educational programs made available to students with disabilities. Mr. Don Young, Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Office of Health Policy at the Department of Health & Human Services (HHS), will further testify on the various healthcare programs and services that HHS has implemented to better assist our disabled population.

To further expound upon disability policy in the United States, Mr. Peter Blanck, Director of the Law, Health Policy & Disability Center at the University of Iowa College of Law will discuss the status of disabilities within the legal arena.

There is no question that persons with disabilities must overcome physical or mental obstacles every day, but there are some individuals who have conquered their impediment and gone on to achieve greatness. For example, even though a car accident rendered Robert David Hall a double-amputee in 1978, he continued his career as an entertainer and went on to act professionally in numerous television and movie roles, most notably as a star of the popular TV show, “CSI: Crime Scene Investigation,” where he has played the role of Dr. Al Robbins for several seasons. As a national figure, Mr. Hall has used his celebrity status to further the cause of disability awareness around the country, serving on various boards promoting disability support, including the National Organization on Disability (NOD). The Subcommittee has invited Mr. Hall to speak on his involvement in the disability community.

While physical disabilities may be perceived as limitations preventing individuals from participating in athletic competition, more than 5,000 individuals with disabilities around the world participate in the Paralympics, a division of the Olympic Committee reserved for persons living with a disability. The Paralympics feature 21 sports, 18 of which are also contested in the Olympics. To gain a better understanding of this competition, the Subcommittee has invited Mr. John Register, Manager of the Paralympic Academy for the United States Olympic Committee and Paralympic Gold Medal winner, to testify on these issues.

Although there have been many advances in technology and disability policy in the United States, surveys have shown that the quality of life for these individuals does not equal that of non-disabled individuals. Recently, the NOD commissioned a Harris Poll survey regarding the lifestyles of both individuals living with and without disabilities. The Subcommittee has invited the President of NOD, Mr. Alan Reich, to testify on the results of this poll, and potential initiatives that may lead to a better quality of life for individuals with disabilities.

Concluded Chairman Burton, “I feel strongly that as an advanced society, we ought to be looking at ways to partner with the private sector, and foster an environment of growth and development for a portion of our population that clearly has much to offer.”

PANEL ONE WITNESSES:

The Honorable James R. Langevin (D-RI-02)
United States Congressman

The Honorable Troy Justesen
Acting Assistant Secretary
Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services
United States Department of Education

The Honorable Don Young
Deputy Assistant Secretary
Office of Health Policy
United States Department of Health and Human Services

PANEL TWO WITNESSES:

Mr. Alan A. Reich
President
National Organization on Disability

Mr. Robert David Hall
Actor, CSI: Crime Scene Investigation
Double Amputee

Dr. Peter Blanck
Charles M. & Marion Kierscht Professor of Law
Director, Law, Health Policy, & Disability Center
University of Iowa College of Law

Mr. John Register
Manager
Paralympic Academy, U.S. Paralympics
United States Olympic Committee

This is the Subcommittee's first hearing on persons living with disabilities. For more information, or to access hearing resource materials, please visit the Subcommittee's website at www.reform.house.gov/WHR.

--30--