

A note from AAPD President & CEO Andrew J. Imparato

Dear JFA Readers:

I write to you on Wednesday, November 5 with a spirit of hope for progress on so many of the issues we care about in the context of a new Presidential Administration and a new Congress. During the campaign, AAPD sent a questionnaire to all the candidates for President in both major parties, and Senator Obama was the first to respond in the Spring of 2007.

Senator Obama's response to our questions was elaborated upon in his "Plan to Empower Americans with Disabilities," announced well before any primary votes were cast. Much of the disability community's agenda is touched upon in this comprehensive plan, which centers on four core themes:

- Providing Americans with Disabilities Educational Opportunities (full federal funding for IDEA, improving college opportunities, improving transition);
- Ending Discrimination and Promoting Equality of Opportunity for People with Disabilities (implementing ADA Amendments Act and Genetic Information Non-Discrimination Act, judicial appointments, increasing enforcement funding, improving access to health care, including mental health care);
- Increasing Employment Rate of Workers with Disabilities (improving federal hiring and federal contractor hiring, creating national commission to look at Social Security work disincentives, promoting workplace flexibility); and
- Supporting Independent, Community-based Living for Americans with Disabilities (passing Community Choice Act and CLASS Act, implementing Olmstead decision, protecting voting rights, fixing Medicare "homebound" rule, improving access to technology, strengthening the VA).



In his response to the AAPD questionnaire (which was developed and jointly submitted with the National Council on Independent Living, ADAPT, and Self Advocates Becoming Empowered), Senator Obama also committed to having a full-time Assistant to the President for Disability Policy in the White House Domestic Policy Council, which will help to ensure that the President's disability agenda is integrated and prioritized across multiple federal agencies.

During the Transition, AAPD looks forward to working with President-Elect Obama's team to fill in the details around the four broad themes he has committed to, and helping the new Administration reach out to the disability community so that we are represented at all levels in the new Administration. We are building a talent bank of interested individuals and encourage AAPD members to send your resumes to resumes@aapd.com if you are interested in serving in the new Administration.

Many of Senator Obama's disability-related commitments were made before some of the recent

disruptions in the economy, and the new President is likely to need to adjust the timing of his plans to the new fiscal reality. At a macro level, I think there is a real opportunity for AAPD, our members, and allies to engage with the Transition team and the new Administration and Congress to modernize the biggest federal programs (Medicaid, Medicare, Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability Insurance) and increase our investments in education, training, accessibility and infrastructure development so that we can help more people lift themselves out of poverty, move the needle on employment outcomes and expand access to the American dream for the more than 50 million Americans with disabilities and our families.

The key will be for us to continue to work on a bipartisan basis to craft creative and broadly-supported solutions to some of the most intractable problems facing our community, and to encourage the new Administration and our allies in the Congress to do the same. Change is now on the way. Let's engage with the new leadership of our government to translate that change into good things for disabled people and our families.