

**WA Parent to Parent Coordinator, Susan Atkins invited to the White House for the 20th Anniversary Celebration to commemorate the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) July 26, 2010.**



Official White House Photo by Pete Souza; Nathaniel Ayers (the Soloist)LATimes.com

"I am still not sure why I was selected, but probably because of the "fabulous family support" that P2P Coordinators and volunteer peer mentors have provided families in our state for the last 30 years. With incredible pride I tried to represent Arc of Washington, Parent to Parent programs, our national organization- P2PUSA and of course all those people with disabilities, like our daughter Alexa, born with Down Syndrome 27 years ago. Alexa is my inspiration as she has challenged her Dad, sisters, and I, other family and our neighbors and friends to see how capable people with disabilities are and always "think the best, work hard and you can be who you want to be". Of course this landmark legislation, passing of the ADA, only helped ensure her possibilities." As I sat on the South lawn of the White House, with the Obama daughters play-yard on my left, Nathaniel Ayers, Patti LaBelle, Marlee Matlin and 300 other Cabinet members, Congress people, disability advocates and grassroots leaders sitting around me, I could not begin to express my thankfulness and wonder of this great nation. I am still floating on cloud nine".

President Obama called the legislation "one of the most comprehensive civil rights bills in the history of the country" and spoke about the important social and economic gains that the ADA provided by ensuring that all Americans could contribute their talents despite any disability.

Obama's remarks at the White House Monday evening followed performances by musician Nathaniel Ayers, singer Patti LaBelle who is diabetic and a speech from actress Marlee Matlin, who is deaf. Ayers has schizophrenia and was the subject of the 2009 film *The Soloist* starring Jamie Foxx. He previously lived on the streets of Los Angeles after dropping out of Juilliard and being institutionalized.

The president also noted that much has yet to be accomplished. In that vein, Obama signed an executive order aimed at increasing employment of people with disabilities in federal jobs. What's more, he said the Justice Department would issue new rules updating ADA building standards to reflect modern times and noted that the agency is working on rules to require Web sites to be fully accessible.

[Kareem Dale](#), President Obama's White House adviser on disability policy, (I have saved his phone call inviting me to the White House, I thought I was being "punked" at first) said advances in technology make revisiting the law a necessity. "When ADA was passed in 1990, the Web wasn't what it is now and technology wasn't what it is now," [Dale said during an interview on Friday](#). "The ADA and the law have to pick up with technology." Dale, who is legally blind, noted that he's unable to type in passwords or use certain authentication software on Web sites. But adding voice-recognition software might help, he said.

The Justice Department also wants to make it easier for 9-1-1 call centers to accept text or video messages from disabled people and to find ways for movie theaters to offer movies with closed captioning. It may also consider mandating the use of more accessible office equipment and furniture, including accessible medical exam tables, chairs and scales and "talking" ATMs.

"Our goal is to help level the playing field with disabilities to ensure that everyone has an opportunity," Dale said. A graduate of the University of Illinois law school, he first met President Obama in 1998 when he invited the then-state senator to speak to the school's Black Law Students Association. He joined Obama's presidential campaign in 2008 as an adviser on disability policy and later became the first White House official to hold such a position. DisabilityScoop.com

"I remember at one point in the speech Obama highlights that 1 in 6 people are affected with some kind of disability so it is likely that all of us are or will be influenced in some way by this legislation either because it directly affects our own daily life or the life of someone we know or love. You may have watched this live but, in case not and/or if you are interested here is a link (to watch later of course-it is about 45 minutes long)."

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7oWNgmjn5uw>

