

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Vice President

For Immediate Release December 14, 1998

**VICE PRESIDENT GORE EMBRACES REPORT FROM TASK FORCE
AND TAKES STEPS TO INCREASE EMPLOYMENT
OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

Washington, DC -- Vice President Gore commended the President's Task Force on Employment of Adults with Disabilities and called on the Administration to implement specific recommendations -- part of a longstanding commitment to improving opportunities for people with disabilities.

"I applaud the Task Force for its powerful recommendations to provide critically needed employment opportunities for people with disabilities," Vice President Gore said. "Finding new ways to ensure that people with disabilities are able to keep and obtain a job doesn't just benefit them -- it enriches our whole society."

The Vice President accepted "Re-charting the Course," the first report of the Presidential Task Force on Employment of Adults with Disabilities. The Vice President applauded the recommendations and called on the Administration to immediately implement the following specific recommendations:

The Vice President asked the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to develop a model plan to increase representation of adults with disabilities in the Federal workforce. According to the 1998 Harris Survey of Americans with Disabilities, less than three out of ten (29%) working-age adults with disabilities are full or part-time employees, although 75% of adults with disabilities indicate they would prefer to work. To help address this problem, the Vice President asked OPM to develop -- by March 1, 1999 -- a model plan for agencies to increase representation of adults with disabilities in the federal workforce. This plan will include ways to involve more students with disabilities in federal internship programs, give employees with disabilities options to enhance their leadership skills and advance their careers, and recruit more people with disabilities at all levels of the federal workforce.

The Vice President asked the Small Business Administration (SBA) to launch a new outreach campaign to help Americans with disabilities start their own businesses. People with disabilities have higher rates of self-employment and small business experience than the rest of America, yet too often they don't know what assistance

they may be eligible for. The Vice President asked SBA to begin implementing right away the Task Force's recommendation to educate people with disabilities who want to start their own businesses. This campaign would provide greater access to entrepreneurial development programs, financial assistance incentives, and government contracting opportunities, including the Section 8 (a) program, HUB Zones, and the small disadvantaged business program.

The Vice President also gave the Hammer Award to the Computer/Electronic Accommodation Program (CAP) and committed the Administration to assuring that all Federal employees have the accessible technology they need to work. The Vice President gave the Hammer Award to the Department of Defense's CAP program, which provides assistive technology to DoD employees with disabilities to ensure that they have the telecommunications and computer technology they need to perform their jobs. Since its inception, CAP has filled over 14,500 requests for accommodations. The Vice President also committed the Administration to finding ways to assure that assistive technology is available to all Federal employees.

The Vice President reiterated the Administration's commitment to passing a strong enforceable patients' bill of rights to improve the quality of care for people with disabilities. The Vice President also reiterated that the first priority when Congress returns should be to pass a strong enforceable patients' bill of rights that includes critical patient protections for people with disabilities, including access to the specialists they need, and an independent external appeals process to address grievances with health plans.

Today's announcements build on the Administration's longstanding commitment to addressing issues that keep people with disabilities from finding and keeping jobs, including difficulties with getting adequate health care coverage. These efforts include: fighting for the Health Insurance Accountability Act of 1996, which helps people with disabilities keep health insurance by limiting preexisting condition exclusions; advocating for the Mental Health Parity Act of 1996, which took steps to end discrimination based on mental illnesses; and working for a new state option in the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 to allow people with disabilities to purchase Medicaid when they return to work. This year, the Administration worked hard to pass the Workforce Incentives Act of 1998 in the budget negotiations.