

AAPD/NCIL 2012 Presidential Candidate Questionnaire

Dear Presidential Candidate:

Almost 15 million people with disabilities voted in the 2008 presidential election.¹

As people with disabilities, we want to live independent lives and contribute our talent and energy to the future success of our great nation. According to the Census, we are 54 million strong and comprise almost 19 percent of the population.² Like most Americans, we want to work hard, play by the rules, and pay our fair share along the way.

Here are some facts about America's largest minority:

- The employment rate of working-age people (ages 21-64) with disabilities in the U.S. was 36 percent as opposed to 77 percent for people without disabilities.
- The median annual income of households with working age people with disabilities was \$37,200 compared to \$60,000 for households without people with disabilities.
- The poverty rate of working age people with disabilities was 26 percent compared to 11 percent for people without disabilities.
- 34 percent of working age people with disabilities have only a high school diploma or equivalent.
- 30 percent of us have some college or an associate degree, and only 12 percent of us have a bachelor's degree or higher.
- The percentage of working age people with disabilities receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments was 19 percent.
- The 2010 census reports that the race prevalence of disability for Asians and Pacific Islanders is 6 percent, 16 percent among Native Americans, 13 percent among Whites, 14 percent among Blacks, 8 percent among Hispanics, and 11 percent among those who identified as multiracial.^{2 3}

In an effort to inform the disability community and our members of your policy priorities and concerns, the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) and the National Council on Independent Living (NCIL) have developed this presidential candidate's questionnaire. Our questionnaire addresses many of the issues that we believe are the most important to individuals with disabilities, our families, and supporters.

¹ "[Fact sheet: Disability and Voter Turnout in the 2008 Elections](#)," by Lisa Schur and Douglas Kruse, July 2009.

² <http://www.disabilitystatistics.org/>

³

http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_10_1YR_S1810&prodType=table

AAPD is the nation's largest -disability membership organization. We promote equal opportunity, economic power, independent living, and political participation for people with disabilities. Our members, including people with disabilities and our family, friends, and supporters, represent a powerful force for change.

NCIL is the longest-running national cross-disability, grassroots organization run by and for people with disabilities. Founded in 1982, NCIL represents thousands of organizations and individuals including: Centers for Independent Living (CILs), Statewide Independent Living Councils (SILCs), individuals with disabilities, and other organizations that advocate for the human and civil rights of people with disabilities throughout the United States.

We look forward to sharing your responses!

CANDIDATE QUESTIONS

1. LEADERSHIP

Both Republican and Democratic Presidents have appointed special advisers on disability policy and individuals with disabilities to key executive branch positions.

- a. Will you appoint (or reappoint) a Special Assistant to the President for Disability Policy at the White House?
- b. What are you doing to make sure qualified people with disabilities will be a part of your political team and, if elected, as part of your administration?

2. REDUCING UNEMPLOYMENT

People with disabilities experience one of the highest rates of unemployment of any minority group. In 2010, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that the annual unemployment rate for people with disabilities was 14.8 percent.⁴ Furthermore, some economists have suggested that one way to increase employment is through small businesses and entrepreneurship. The Small Business Administration has helped in this regard by providing business education programs that create opportunities for these ventures to be successful.

- a. What will you do to reduce the persistent high unemployment rate of people with disabilities?
- b. What employment and training efforts will you initiate for Americans with disabilities?
- c. What would you do to ensure the Small Business Administration devotes more resources to entrepreneurs who are persons with disabilities?

⁴ <http://data.bls.gov/pdq/SurveyOutputServlet>

3. ENSURING EMPLOYMENT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE

According to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, people with disabilities comprise less than one percent of the federal workforce. That equates to 23,933 of a total 2.15 million federal employees. Both Republican and Democratic Presidents have set goals and methods for federal agencies to hire more people with disabilities.

- a. Will you set goals and standards regarding the employment of people with disabilities in the Executive Branch?
- b. What steps would you take to ensure accountability by agency and division heads in implementing a significant increase in the employment of people with disabilities in the federal workforce?
- c. One of the factors in the high unemployment of people with disabilities is that federal contractors do not hire people with disabilities. The regulations implementing section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 regarding contractors with the federal government do not mirror the employment regulations for women and racial minorities. Do you support revising the regulations to include goals and timetables?

4. ENSURING APPROPRIATE FLEXIBILITY IN PUBLIC PROGRAMS TO SUPPORT PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN THE WORKFORCE

Of the federal and state expenditures combined for working age people with disabilities, 41 percent is spent on income benefits (e.g., SSI and SSDI) and 55 percent on health care (Medicaid and Medicare). A paltry 1.2 percent of federal and state expenditures go to educating, training and employment programs for people with disabilities.⁵

- a. With 4.4 million people with disabilities on Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and 8.4 million people on Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), how would you reform these federal income support programs so that people with disabilities can move into employment, or return to employment sooner?
- b. Eligibility requirements for Medicaid programs that support valuable independent living tools for people with disabilities – such as personal care attendants, battery-powered wheelchairs, and other rehabilitation devices and services, home and community based waivers, medical supplies and therapies – include income limits that create barriers for individuals with disabilities seeking to enter or return to the workplace. For instance, recent news stories have shown how Jimmy Curran, a college graduate, cannot afford to start a job he has been offered as he would have to abandon some Medicaid supports that enable him to live independently.⁶ Do you support initiatives that allow workers with disabilities to carry their Medicaid benefits into private employment settings? How would you work with the private sector to address the critical independent living supports that many private insurance programs do not cover for people with disabilities?

⁵ <http://www.DisabilityPolicyResearch.org>

⁶ <http://temple-news.com/2011/10/03/health-care-insurance-limits-independence/>

5. LONG TERM SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

Many Americans with disabilities – including America’s aging population -- benefit from in-home and community based services that enable them to live independently in their communities. In many cases, such supports assist people with disabilities to maintain and secure some employment. These services not only provide a good quality of life, they are often far less expensive than nursing homes. However, states often cap the number of people who can receive home or community based services, availability of such services, or otherwise limit access. In some states, waiting lists continue to grow. For instance, Florida has over 20,000 people waiting for the opportunity to receive services at home, which will save taxpayer dollars.

- a. How would you address America's increasing need for in-home services and home and community-based long-term services and supports (such as personal assistance services, respite care, and similar support)?

6. TRANSPORTATION

While many people with disabilities do not have the means or the option to drive cars, available, affordable, and accessible public transportation is essential to applying for, securing, and maintaining employment. Also, transportation is essential to the inclusion of people with disabilities in civic activities like voting, socializing, attending college, and otherwise participating in the full range of activities enjoyed by most citizens.

- a. What would you do to expand access to affordable and accessible transportation for people with disabilities, especially in rural areas?

7. TECHNOLOGY

Accessible mainstream communication and information technologies, as well as assistive and adaptive technologies, often allow people with disabilities to secure and maintain employment, participate in educational activities, and experience entertainment like everyone else.

- a. In 2010, the U.S. Congress enacted the 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act (CVAA) that modernized the nation’s Communications Act to ensure that Internet-enabled TV and phone services are also accessible and usable by people with disabilities. As new consumer electronics arrive in the market place, do you support these devices being accessible to people with disabilities? And what would you do to ensure enforcement of the 21st CVAA?
- b. The U.S. Congress enacted section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act in 1973, a statute that requires the federal government to purchase information technology that is accessible to and usable by employees with disabilities in the federal government and by customers with disabilities accessing federal government services online. Despite this longstanding requirement, many federal websites and online government services remain inaccessible to users who are blind, people with low vision, people with intellectual disabilities and others. Would you make it a priority to ensure federal agencies make their websites and all other information technology accessible? How will you implement this?

8. EDUCATION

Due to the enactment and implementation of a key civil rights law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, or the “special education” law), school graduation rates for people with disabilities have increased 45 percent since 1995, with an associated decrease in dropout rates for students with disabilities. Similarly, enrollment in college has doubled for students with disabilities. Nevertheless, students with disabilities seeking a higher education continue to face enormous barriers to success.

- a. Do you support IDEA and funding it at higher levels to ensure more students with disabilities complete high school?
- b. What would you do to ensure more college graduates with disabilities secure employment and are hired by the private sector?
- c. Bullying of students with disabilities is a long-standing problem. Do you support amending the Elementary Schools Education Act to protect young people with disabilities from bullying and to require school systems to report bullying data and offer anti-bullying programs?

9. VOTING

Voters with disabilities have a number of unique concerns during elections, including availability of transportation, accessibility of voting sites and voting equipment, and other barriers to civic participation.

- a. Will you support funding to ensure accessible voting sites and voting equipment for people with disabilities?
- b. Some states have failed to implement section 7 of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993, which requires disability service providers to offer voter registration opportunities to their clients. Will you direct the Department of Justice to investigate and take action against those states?
- c. Do you support disability service agencies offering voter registration opportunities?