



Dear Republican and Democratic Party Chairs,

My name is Maria Town, and I serve as the CEO and President of the [American Association of People with Disabilities \(AAPD\)](#). AAPD is a national, nonpartisan, and disability-led organization that advocates for full civil rights for more than 60 million Americans with disabilities. Since 1995, AAPD has done this by promoting equal opportunity, economic power, independent living, and political participation for disabled Americans.

I am reaching out to you today to call your attention to concerning rhetoric being used in the 2024 presidential campaigns.

Disabled Americans constitute a significant and powerful voting bloc, with more than 40 million eligible voters with disabilities. The disability community has a diverse range of backgrounds and political beliefs – in other words, our community is your constituency.

AAPD is requesting your leadership to condemn ableist language in this election, and make efforts to keep our election cycles free of language that perpetuates harmful stereotypes and prejudices against disabled people. We are making this request of both the Republican National Committee and the Democratic National Committee as this is a widespread problem for both parties.

Ableism is defined as discrimination against or prejudice towards disabled people. When people use disability as a punchline in an attempt to get a cheap laugh, or call into question a candidate's capabilities based on their disability, that is ableism.

When ableism comes from candidates for President with massive national platforms, ableist tropes can simultaneously cause substantial harm to Americans with disabilities and deter disabled voters from your party's nominee. We have already witnessed one candidate mock another by imitating a stutter. We have seen another candidate use their opponent's flubs as proof of cognitive disability. These are just two of the many examples we have seen in the presidential election. We could cite many more examples for down ballot races in both parties.

We expect disagreements between candidates. We anticipate candidates to critique one another on the basis of their policy positions, their leadership, and their past decisions. Candidates making fun of one another on the basis of disability or on the perception of disability is unacceptable, and voters expect better.

In addition to ableist jokes and comments, we have seen a disturbing trend of misinformation related to disability policy, specifically allegations of "massive fraud" or "fakery" by disabled people who receive Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) or other benefits. Not only are these claims not factual and based on harmful myths, but they belie the rigorous process

disabled people have to go through to get and keep benefits that help them survive. As a group of eight Social Security Administrators appointed by Presidents of both parties [said in 2013](#), fraudulent applications for disability benefits are exceedingly rare, and the standards for receiving these benefits are extremely high.


When touted by presidential candidates, mocking disabilities or perpetuating negative disability myths could have serious and devastating impacts for the millions of Americans with disabilities who need and deserve dignity, respect, and opportunity. Not only does ableism have serious [mental health impacts](#) on voters with disabilities, ableism can also impact other outcomes. For example, ableism leads to fewer people with disabilities in the workforce, more living in poverty, fewer completing post-secondary education, more disabled people in jails and prisons, and increased risk of being killed or harmed by police.

Ableist language and attacks should not be tolerated by leadership of any political party. Outdated myths that perpetuate ableist policy should not be touted or reified by the parties or in the party platform. We are calling on your organization to condemn such language in campaigns and to call on the candidates of your party to do better.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with party officials to discuss this further and are open to providing support and guidance to parties and campaigns on engaging with the disability community. We are also linking resources below to support your teams and the candidate campaign teams in learning about and discussing disability.

Thank you, and please let us know if we can be of any help.

Sincerely,



Maria Town
President and CEO
American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD)

Disability Resources

- [REV UP Voting Issues Guide: A Tool for Voters and Candidates to Understand Key Issues Impacting People with Disabilities](#)
- [AAPD's 2024 Disability Presidential Candidate Questionnaire](#)
- [Center for Journalism and Disability](#)
- [Disability Etiquette Guide](#)
- [Center for Disability Rights Media Guide](#)
- [Americans with Disabilities Act National Network Guidelines for Writing About People With Disabilities](#)