**Disability Rights at the State Department, H.R. 3373, a Step in the Right Direction**

Representatives Dina Titus (D) from Nevada and Don Young (R) from Alaska have introduced [H.R. 3373](https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/3373/text?r=151&s=1), **the Office of International Disability Rights Act**. This bipartisan proposal directs the State Department to create a dedicated office to guide, inspire, and require the State Department to take into account and include actions that promote disability rights worldwide. A very good idea.

Those of us at the U.S. International Council on Disabilities, our colleagues at the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, and others have been pushing for the purpose of this legislation for a long time. There are 1 billion people with disabilities across the globe. They are denied schooling, health care, housing, employment, freedom of movement, personal choices and decision-making power because of their disabilities.

Maintaining this marginalized status of persons with disabilities drains families, public resources, and economies. The U.S., the champion of civil and disability rights for 50 plus years, needs to step up and provide blueprints and assistance to other countries, including their Disabled People Organizations, so people with disabilities are celebrated and upgraded to full participants and contributors in their communities. H.R. 3373 provides a clear catalyst for helping to do just that.

The legislation is clear and direct: 1) the office will advise on disability rights in and beyond the State Department; 2) everyone in the Department will be trained on disability rights, what inclusion means, and how to integrate both into programming, budgeting, and hiring; and 3) any policies developed and adopted by the Department will reflect the commitment to, integration and tracking of disability rights and inclusion of people with disabilities in the full scope of Department activities.

When H.R. 3373 becomes law people in U.S embassies everywhere, contractors with the Department of State, DPOs, and governments will see directly what happens when disability perspectives are reflected in local, regional, and national decision-making. The U.S. will ensure that new buildings are built accessibly or that events are held in accessible venues; that people with disabilities are identified and treated in a health programs that focus on wellness; that durable medical equipment and assistive technology are available in our sponsored and funded programs; and that education and job training programs will provide opportunities for all.

Through the new office brought about through H.R, 3373, the State Department will be a transformational force. Its actions will trigger parallel and complementary actions from others. This ripple effect will be felt worldwide. Despair will be replaced by hope. Acceptance of the status quo will be replaced with new expectations and demands for change. Ignorance will be replaced with expertise. Separate attention will be replaced by inclusive participation. All of this will come about because the State Department will no longer view disability rights as a separate program but as part of its everyday duties, tangibly benefitting the Department’s mission, goals, and judgement of its impact around the world.

I urge all Representatives to become co-sponsors. I urge the House to pass it. I urge the Senate to take up and pass the House of Representatives’ bill. I urge President Trump to sign it. With the 29th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act fast approaching on July 26th, let’s get moving!

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