

**Remarks of Patricia Morrissey**  
**President**  
**US INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON DISABILITIES**  
**Annual Gala**  
**December 3, 2019**  
**ATT Forum**  
**Washington, D.C.**

Aloha. I wish I were with you, but unfortunately, I am stuck in Paradise, a.k.a. Honolulu, Hawaii. Nonetheless, I welcome you to the U.S. International Council on Disabilities fifth fundraising gala. We greatly appreciate your support.

It has been a busy year. We have structured things around the pillars of our strategic plan – advocacy, training, convening, and representation. Through our executive director, Isabel Hodge, we have been able to make contributions in Mozambique in inclusive education; chair a regional Disabled Persons’ International regional meeting in the Caribbean; assist in Hungary on personal assistance services; brainstorm with other disability advocates in Sweden on disability rights issues, and just a few weeks ago, work with multinational companies in Geneva at the ILO on employment issues.

I will spend a few minutes outlining some things we can do together now and in 2020.

First, help secure the passage of H.R. 3373 in the House sponsored by Representative Dina Titus (Nevada) and Don Young (Alaska), and secure a companion bill in the Senate. I believe Senator Casey is considering taking the lead there. Like many of you, I am a political junkie, but it is not healthy to focus singularly on activities in the House Intelligence Committee! We need to spend time advocating for a senior disability policy adviser in the U.S. Department of State, the purpose of H.R. 3373.

Why? Around the world children with disabilities are being denied in education; children with disabilities, without parents, are being raised in segregated institutions; young people with disabilities are being denied training or higher education and access to a job; healthcare decisions are be made for people with disabilities without their input; communities lack accessibility and the capacity to provide inclusion; and policymakers, who should understand disability rights, do not.

These are facts. A disability policy adviser in the U.S. State Department is just the catalyst we need to reach out through our embassies and federal agencies to bring hope, pressure, and solutions to others in developing countries, who have the will, but not necessarily the resources or the expertise to bring about needed change.

When I had the opportunity to work on Capitol Hill from 1980 to 2000, a disability issue was a bipartisan issue, a disability-related solution was a bipartisan solution. We must breathe new

life into bipartisanship through the disability lens again. Representatives Titus and Young have demonstrated bipartisanship through H. 3373

We can provide you with the facts about H.R. 3373. Promise me that you will share these facts with your elected representatives before Christmas.

Second, we are engaged in outreach to and training of corporations in foreign economic development to incorporate the disability perspective and potential contributions from individuals with disabilities into their projects. Who do you know in economic development? Would you pass along our willingness to partner on some training initiatives?

Third, we have partnered with many organizations and individuals on a \$100 million proposal, which we submitted to the MacArthur Foundation. Its purpose would be to assist Disabled Persons Organizations, especially in Mexico, Ethiopia, and Vietnam to become players at decision making tables, so their societies would be more inclusive. Do you have interest in these countries, and experiences and contacts you could share?

Although we are proud of what we are doing, we could do so much more with additional support:

- Make our digital library on disability rights and strategies on inclusion available to people with no internet access
- Create an expert exchange service to help people with disability-expertise connect with those that need it
- Develop online training on the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, accessible everywhere in multiple languages
- Provide internship and fellowship exchange opportunities for individuals with disabilities so they can see how government and organizations work to address the needs of persons with disabilities
- Convene diverse stakeholders to explore issues and develop common sense, common ground solutions to everyday challenges faced by people with disabilities in any country
- Expand our advocacy efforts within the U.S. Government.

In addition to being President of the U.S. International Council on Disabilities, I am also the Director of the Center on Disability Studies at the University of Hawaii, Manoa. We have an annual operating budget of about \$5.5 million, 30 grants and contracts, and 100 employees. We do applied research in many areas, education, employment, housing and other areas. We help build capacity and bring about system change. We partner with individuals with disabilities, parents, educators, rehabilitation counselors and employers to make Hawaiian communities more inclusive. We share what we learn throughout the state, with outer Pacific Island nations, and countries in Asia. Every year we hold PacRim, an international conference on Disability and Diversity. In 2020 it will be March 2nd-3<sup>rd</sup>, in Honolulu. Please consider attending. Visit [www.pacrim.hawaii.edu](http://www.pacrim.hawaii.edu).

What I have learned in 50 years is that if you listen well you end up helping in the right way. If you ask questions respectfully, you get honest answers. If you realize solutions emerge from dialogue you can build sustainable partnerships.

In conclusion, I thank Isabel Hodge, our tireless Executive Director, our outstanding board, our stellar volunteers, and especially our new and returning sponsors, for helping us pull off a great gala, where I know new ideas, collaborations, and memorable moments will flourish.

Thank you.

Aloha.