

DRC DISABILITY RIGHTS CENTER - NH

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Disability Unscripted: 2020 Candidates on Inclusion & Accessibility Transcript of Deval Patrick: Concord, NH December 7, 2019

<https://drcnh.org/videos/deval-patrick-video-campaign-inclusion-and-accessibility/>

DRC-NH Staff: With one in five Americans experiencing a disability, what steps would you take if elected to include people with disabilities in your administration, and what would you do to help improve the employment numbers of people with disabilities across the country?

Deval Patrick: Tell me your name again?

Staff: James Ziegra

DP: James. I hope everyone knows some of the things that James is referring to. The unemployment numbers for people with disabilities are usually a multiple of what they are for the general population, and the unemployment numbers for people of color are usually higher than that for whites, but for people with disabilities, it's even higher than that. It's rarely mentioned in political discourse. I learned actually some of these realities when I was head of the Civil Rights Division because the ADA enforcement was part of our jurisdiction, and we had a marvelous team, and we had terrific advocates who brought me in and taught me about what some of the particular challenges are.

We had a strategy, actually in the Governor's Office, of employing people with disabilities, because part of the power of leadership is what you exemplify, what you model. And so the idea of being purposeful and intentional about including people with disabilities in the administration in senior roles, is something I understand and am very interested to do.

There's also the enforcement of the law, right? The ADA is, I think, sometimes mistakenly viewed by the... and ADA is just one of the relevant statutes, but I think sometimes mistakenly viewed by business as an expensive burden. Doesn't have to be. I remember one case we were dealing with where the question was access to the ballot, James, in communities in the South where you have to go frequently to the County Clerk's Office to register or to vote. And there was an old historic building in one community, I can't remember the name of it right now, where they said, "We can't possibly put in an elevator or a ramp or what have you." And we said, "Okay, come out to curbside, just come out. Call when we get there, you come out, bring the service there." And that was an accommodation, and it worked.

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The importance of being focused on the outcome, but innovative in how you achieve that outcome is something I have some experience with. I would say one more thing, kind of jump, it's not directly responsive to James, but stepping off from the unemployment point. Beware of the so-called economic indicators that tell us the economy is strong. Unemployment today is low, so long as you count both of the minimum wage jobs people have to survive. Inflation is low, so long as you don't count the cost of education, housing, or healthcare, which are the things that enable people to get onto a path of economic mobility.

So, if you are thinking about that unseen economy, if you're thinking about that, if you have an image of it, test yourself. Ask yourself whether that image includes people with disabilities, because the experience they have had is even more profound. Is that fair to say? Is even more worrisome. And there are fewer transparent strategies to get out from that persistent disadvantage for people who are living with disabilities, or I should say, who are differently abled.

Candidate video fades out to informational slide

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