

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month

In 1945, Congress enacted a law declaring the first week of October each year “National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week.” In 1962, the word “physically” was removed to acknowledge the employment needs and contributions of individuals with all types of disabilities. In 1988, congress expanded the week to a month and changed the name to “National Disability Employment Awareness Month.”

2020 Theme: **INCREASING ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITY**

PROFILE: JUSTIN DART, Jr. “FATHER” OF THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA)



Photo: Justin Dart. Credit: Wikipedia.com

Justin Dart, Jr. (August 29, 1930 – June 22, 2002) was an American activist and advocate for people with disabilities. He helped to pass the ADA of 1990, co-founded the American Association of People with Disabilities and is regarded as the “father” of the ADA.

Dart contracted polio in 1948 before entering the University of Houston, where he earned undergraduate degrees in History and Education in 1954; however, the university refused to give him a teaching certificate because of his disability. The university is now home to the Justin Dart, Jr. Center for Students with Disabilities, a facility designed for students who have any type of temporary or permanent health impairment, physical limitation, psychiatric disorder, or learning disability.

On Capitol Hill, Dart worked closely with both Democratic and Republican Members of Congress to advance the rights of disabled people, including U.S. Congressman Major Owens of New York City, who served as Chairman of the Subcommittee on Select Education in the U.S. House of Representatives during

the late 1980s and early 1990s, as well as during the early crafting of the legislative language and the fierce debates on the ADA before its eventual passage in the House of Representatives.

The ADA of 1990 was signed into law on July 26, 1990, by President George H.W. Bush. Evan Kemp, Rev. Harold Wilke, Sandra Parrino, and Justin Dart were all present at the ceremony. Dart received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Bill Clinton in 1998. At the ceremony, Clinton said Dart had “opened the doors of opportunities to millions of our citizens by securing passage of one of the nation’s landmark civil rights laws.”

READ MORE: ADA 30 Years- <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/initiatives/ndeam>
Ability Magazine: https://abilitymagazine.com/JustinDart_remembered.html

