

Duckworth discusses state of disability rights with former Senator Tom Harkin

November 19 2018 11:20 AM

WASHINGTON, D.C. — U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) joined former U.S. Senator Tom Harkin yesterday to discuss her efforts to block the ADA Education and Reform Act, improve public transportation accessibility, make it easier for people with disabilities to become employed and much more.

Some of Sen. Duckworth's remarks are highlighted below:

- “We need to stop thinking of disability issues as a niche issue. It's a global issue that is relevant and important to all Americans. A disability issue is an issue for everybody in this country.”
- “If you can't get to work, you can't keep your job... But what I'm seeing and what really scares me and motivates me is that instead of there being momentum in this nation to make transportation more accessible, the momentum is in the opposite direction, to find ways to be excluded, exempted or to reject the ADA.”
- “One of the first things we need to do is pass the Equal Pay Act. We don't have paid family medical leave, we don't have universal parental leave, all of these will help equal that field. It's hard enough having a disability, it's even harder being a mom with a disability.”
- “What I found when I talked to my colleagues, my former colleagues in the House, was there is a real misunderstanding with what the ADA Education and Reform Act was supposed to do. They told us this was a bill to keep people from filing frivolous lawsuits against businesses being exploited. They were never told that actually you can't do that, all you can do is file for that ramp to be installed and then if they want to they can apply for a \$5,000 grant to build the ramp, and if they can justify not building the ramp because it's a historical building or not architecturally feasible then they don't have to do so. I had to explain it's not about that at all, it's just a way to fight for the civil rights of people with disabilities.”

Duckworth has led efforts to protect the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and block the misleadingly-named ADA Education and Reform Act, a Republican-led bill that would reward businesses for failing to make their facilities accessible to people with disabilities. In March, Duckworth [secured the opposition of 42 of her Senate colleagues](#), enough to block the bill from being passed in U.S. Senate. The legislation would have

guttled the ADA by eliminating incentives for businesses of any size, including the largest corporate hotel, restaurant and movie theater chains, to ensure their facilities are in compliance with the ADA.

In July, Duckworth [spoke about her efforts](#) to stop the passage of the ADA Education and Reform Act and expand disability rights at the *Beyond the ADA: Introducing Disability Justice Initiative* event hosted by the Center for American Progress (CAP). She is also a co-sponsor of U.S. Senator Chuck Schumer's (D-NY) Disability Integration Act, which would help ensure Americans with disabilities are given the option to live independent lives and access care in their communities rather than being forced into institutional care.

In this year's FAA reauthorization, Duckworth [successfully included](#) proposals requiring airlines to report the number of lost bags and broken wheelchairs, providing training to airport personnel on assisting passengers with disabilities and establishing a new Disability Advisory Committee. Duckworth also [wrote a letter](#) to U.S. Secretary of Transportation Elaine Chao calling for an explanation of why the Department of Transportation delayed implementation of a rule to protect the rights of disabled commercial air travelers.