

Unfortunately, the 101st Congress will be remembered in the minds of most Americans for the Budget stalemate. However, I'd like to point out the tremendous accomplishments of the legislative session that was often overlooked by the public and so-called political pundits. For example, Congress enacted the Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency Act, the Act for Better Child Care, Health Objectives 2000 Act, and the McKinney Homelessness Assistance Act of 1990 to name a few.

Personally, my most proud moment in the 101st Congress was passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. This landmark law not only provides civil rights protections for people with disabilities, but also enables more Americans access to their communities. The ADA message is clear and simple: As a Nation, discrimination deprives us our dignity and suppresses our strength.

Strength implies empowerment -- community empowerment. The ADA provides Americans with disabilities the opportunity to access and participate -- if they so chose -- in the public life of their community. For too long, disabled individuals have been relegated to the side lines by society's antiquated attitudinal barriers. These people have tremendous amount to offer as employees, consumers, taxpayers, and as volunteers. We have a tremendous wealth of experience to share. The ADA is our invitation to be a part of the community team.

This community team is composed of children, youth, families, human service professionals, social service advocates, the elderly and people with disabilities. Together this broad coalition can significantly impact community issues such as:

- o Growth of single parent families requiring supportive services and counseling.
- o An increased aging population needing long-term health care and personal assistance services.
- o Continued expansion of an urban underclass.
- o Increased participation in the workforce by women, entailing the need more care of children and elders.
- o Support of family members with loved ones in the Gulf.

This broad coalition needs help and that's where the public and private sector come into play. Organizations such as Catholic Charities provide invaluable support to communities in their battle against issues of national importance. Advocating on behalf of the elderly, children, youth and families, the homeless

or any needy member of the community is a difficult and challenging task.

Often times legislators do not have contact with the intended beneficiaries of their social policy. But, as members of Catholic Charities you do and are working in the trenches every day. We need to bridge this gap together. You're here to learn about legislative initiatives in the 102nd Congress and I am here to learn of your concerns and how to work together more effectively. Exchanging our experiences helps to bridge the gap and enables us to fashion responsive solutions to the problems facing our Nation.

The 102nd Congress promises to be very active in the area of human services. The agenda includes to name a few subjects: poverty, strengthening support services for the Elderly through reauthorization of the Older Americans Act, personal assistance services for the disabled, and early intervention services for families experiencing disability (Education of the Handicapped Act).

Another issue on my priority list is a comprehensive approach to the needs of people with mental health conditions. These people with invisible disabilities are often overlooked, ignored and feared. I intend to see them and to respond to their needs. As we all know, many of the homeless on our nation's streets experience some form of psychiatric conditions.

One step Congress plans to take is the reauthorization of the Protection and Advocacy of Mentally Ill Persons Act. Furthermore, I hope to introduce legislation that creates a network of support services in the community for persons with mental health conditions.

Congress needs to build on the achievements of last session with regard to child mental health initiatives focusing on prevention.