



ADA Live!

Episode 83: The ADA Then and Now: Celebrate ADA 30th Anniversary with the Honorable Tony Coelho

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Speaker: Tony Coelho

Host: Eve Hill - Partner at the law firm of Brown Goldstein & Levy

Tony Coelho: Hi. I'm Tony Coelho, and you're listening to ADA Live.

4 Wheel City: (rapping)

Pamela Williamson: Good day, everyone. On behalf of the Southeast ADA Center, the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University, and the ADA National Network, welcome to ADA Live. I am Pam Williamson, the Assistant Director of the Southeast ADA Center. Listening audience, you may submit your questions about the Americans with Disabilities Act at any time, at adalive.org.

I am very excited today to introduce our guest host, Eve Hill, and our guest speaker, former Congressman Tony Coelho. From 2009 to 2011, I had the pleasure of working with Eve in her role as the Senior Vice President at Burton Blatt Institute of Syracuse University. During that time, she was my supervisor and mentor. She was responsible for the Burton Blatt Institute's work on the Americans with Disabilities Act, disability civil rights, and communications issues. To this day, Eve's quote that resonates in my mind is, "At the end of the day, all I want is justice."

Our guest for today is former Congressman Tony Coelho. Mr. Coelho has been a lifelong advocate of people with disabilities, and authored the Americans with Disabilities Act during his time in the House of Representatives. The ADA is considered the most important piece of civil rights legislation in the past 30 years. As we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, or ADA, it is my honor and privilege to turn over today's episode to Eve Hill, as she interviews former Congressman Coelho, the primary sponsor of the ADA in the House of Representatives. Eve and Tony, welcome.

Tony Coelho: Thank you.

Eve Hill: Thank you, Pam. This is great. I'm so excited. July marks the 30th anniversary of the signing of the ADA, Americans with Disabilities Act, and June 22nd marked the 20th anniversary of the Supreme Court's Olmstead decision. So, in recognition of these anniversaries, we are so honored to have former Congressman Tony Coelho as today's guest. Welcome, Tony. So happy to be talking with you.

Tony Coelho: Thank you, Eve. Thank you, Eve. It's great to be here with you.

Eve Hill: Prior to the ADA becoming law, there was widespread, systemic, inhumane discrimination against people with disabilities in every aspect of American life. Unequal or denied public education. Inability to physically access public spaces. Being denied the right to vote. Employment discrimination. Being denied the right to choose where to live. And the list goes on and on. So, addressing this vast context of discrimination required really strong advocacy and thoughtfulness. You've been a lifelong advocate for the rights of people with disabilities, Tony, and you've faced discrimination in your own life. How did your experiences shape your advocacy?

Tony Coelho: Well, Eve, it's great to be here on the program with you. But I started off when I was 16, 17 years, when I had an automobile accident and hit my head. Nothing happened at that time, but a year later I was in the barn milking cows... We had a dairy farm... and the next thing I knew, I was in bed at home, and I had just had a grand mal seizure. The doctors told my parents, but they didn't like it, because as Portuguese-Americans and devout Catholics, they felt that if you had epilepsy, that you were

possessed by the devil, and that you would have public seizures, and the community would think that something was wrong with this family.

I didn't know any of that. I just knew I'd had a seizure, or a passing out spell, as I called it. I continued to have them. I went to more doctors. They told my parents the same thing. Neither the doctors or my parents told me anything about it. Then I went to witch doctors. I went to three different witch doctors, and they did the hocus pocus and so forth. As a 17 year old, it was a little scary, and not comfortable, but I went through it. And after the third one I said, "I'm not doing that anymore," which caused me problems with my family.

But then I graduated, and wanted to get away from my home because of all this. My high school superintendent became like my dad, and he urged me to go on to go to Los Angeles, get away from central California. And so I went there, and it was great being there. I continued having these passing out spells, but you know, what the heck. After it was over with, I got up and did what I was doing. Then I decided, in my senior year, that instead of being a trial lawyer, I wanted to be a Catholic priest.

Eve Hill: Those were your choices?

Tony Coelho: That was my choices. One to the other, right? Well, it was because of John Kennedy's assassination, and I decided that if he could give up his life for public service, why did I want to go make money? And so, I decided that I could do a lot of good as a priest. And so, I announced that I was joining the priesthood. I was student body president, so it was a big issue. So I went for my physical, and the doctor afterwards said, "Have you ever heard of the word epilepsy?" And I said no, and he said, "Well, it's something that you have." He said, "The good news is, 1964, you're 4F, and you can't serve in Vietnam."

Eve Hill: Wow.

Tony Coelho: "The bad news is that the Catholic church, in 400 A.D., changed canon law to say that individuals with epilepsy are possessed by the devil. Could not be a Catholic priest."

Eve Hill: Wow.

Tony Coelho: So, I was denied entry. It didn't really bother me that much, because I had a lot of job offers. And I knew my parents would probably be happy that I wasn't becoming a priest, because they didn't want that. So I called them, and they said, "No son of ours has epilepsy," and that continued the deterioration of the relationship with my family.

Eve Hill: Wow.

Tony Coelho: But I left the doctor's office. I had a prescription to take care of the severity of the seizures and so forth. Not a cure, but I could live with it. And I started calling the opportunities, the applications, the job offers that had come in. I went and I filled out the application, but I never got a visit. Nobody ever interviewed me, because there was a box on that application that said epilepsy, and I marked it. After a while, I realized what was going on. I started drinking. Was drunk by 2:00 in the afternoon. Very depressed. Was always doing it in Griffith Park, which had hills. Being drunk, I thought they were mountains.

But anyway, I was there one day when I was going to do the dirty deed, and all the sudden I heard a voice that said to me, "You're going to be just like little kids. You're not going to let anybody or anything stop you from doing what you wanted to do." That voice, I can still hear it, and I don't know what it was. I don't know anything about it, except I heard it, and I've never gotten drunk since then.

Eve Hill: Wow.

Tony Coelho: I've never been depressed. I do drink, but never getting drunk. I am never depressed. And I just, my whole life changed. I ended up going back to the school. It was in the summer, and I was living there, and this priest friend of mine said, "You know what? I have an opportunity for you. You can go live with the Bob Hope family, and so forth." So I did. It was exciting. I lived with him, traveled with him to Bob Hope Chrysler Comedy Hour and so forth. Had meals. The whole bit. It was great.

One day he says to me... As we're alone driving in the car, he says to me, "Tony, you feel that you have a ministry, and it only can be practiced in the church. But truth is, is that a ministry is practiced in sports, entertainment, business, government, but you belong in politics." Now, coming back later, he was a very conservative Republican, and then I wrote a letter to my Congressman who was a Democrat, and got the job, and he said, "Why'd you go with him?" But anyway, I left with a commitment to Mr. Hope I would never take advantage of our relationship, and I never did.

But my Congressman became like my father. He was tremendous. He accepted my seizures. I still have them. 60 years later, I'm still having my seizures. Just had a grand mal seizure not long ago. But to me, they're passing out spells. They can be severe. I understand that. They are when it happens to me. But I just really believe that I thank God for my epilepsy, because it's made me a stronger person. It's made me understand myself. I preach to those in the disability community, "You've got to end up loving yourself or believing in yourself, in order to do what you want to do. And you've got to do that, because if you don't do that, others won't as well." And so, that helped me become the person I am. For good or bad, but the person that I am. And it gave me my drive, then.

When I got elected to Congress, before I got elected, my opponent, my Republican opponent, one night said to a dinner crowd that, "I don't know if you know it or not, but Tony's a very sick man. He has epilepsy. And what would you think if he went to the White House to argue a critical issue for us, such as water, and had a seizure?" And people who were at that dinner called me that night after, and were very upset with his comments. A reporter called me the next day and said, "I understand last night your opponent said X. What's your reaction?" Well, I'm not that clever, but God was with me at that time, and I said, "You know, in the 13 years I'm a staffer in Washington, I know a lot of people who went to the White House and had fits. At least I'd have an excuse." And nobody's ever taken advantage of my epilepsy again politically. [crosstalk 00:11:44].

But when I was in Congress, I would try to offer amendments on housing or transportation and so forth, and I realized it didn't do any good, because we didn't have our basic civil rights. And I didn't really understand that, realize that, and once I did, I was determined to

make a change. I started working on legislation. Little did I know at the time, that this was grassroots community all over the country, working on the same thing.

Eve Hill: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Tony Coelho: And Reagan, President Reagan, had a group that was on the disability consult working on legislation. The chairwoman from... She was from the northeast, and the vice chair was a woman from Colorado. She and her husband were very close friends of mine. So, the two of them came to me and said, "We have legislation that we want to do something about disabilities," and I was excited. "Okay. I'm working on it. They're working on it. Grassroots is working on it." So, I put together legislation and introduced it.

The fascinating thing, Jill, is when I sent out a dear colleague letter asking for people to co-sponsor the legislation, I couldn't believe the number of members who came up to me and said, "Tony, we want to be on your bill." They hadn't read anything, even the letter, I'm sure. But they said, "We want to be on your bill, because I don't like the way that my wife, my husband, my son, my daughter, my next door neighbor, my grandparents, whatever, have been treated with their disability. I want to be on it." And we got, as I remember it now, we got probably 100 or more people as co-sponsors. That was at the end of the session. And the next year when we put it in, got over 200 people who were co-sponsors. People really believed that our community was being mistreated, and wanted to do something about it.

And so, that's how I got involved. I thank God for getting involved, because that, as you would expect, has meant so much to me. That we could really make a difference. The exciting thing is that it's now the law of the land in 52 different countries. It's not exactly like ours, but it's still 52 different countries recognized that those with disabilities in their country are being mistreated. So that's how I got involved, and I thank God for it.

Eve Hill: Yeah. Thank you for sharing that story. One of the things that strikes me from that is you had a lot of people sort of trying to put shame on you for your disability.

Tony Coelho: Yes. Yes.

Eve Hill: And you just didn't buy it. And at the same time, this grassroots movement was also coming up, and saying, "No pity. No shame. Nothing about us without us. We can do everything you think we can't do, and we shouldn't feel less than because of your misguided attitudes, society." And you've previously said about passing the ADA, "Congress passed one of our most important civil rights laws, improving access to the American dream for millions of people, via ADA. This accomplishment was made possible through the brave activism of many disabled activists, and a bipartisan agreement among members of Congress." Now, you were the primary sponsor of the ADA in the House. How did the idea of the ADA come about?

Tony Coelho: Well, I decided that in order to get something done, it had to be bipartisan, and it had to be bicameral, meaning House and Senate. That was the only way we could do it. So, Senator Weicker from Connecticut, went to him. He had a child with a disability. And he was very anxious to do the same thing. So, we put in legislation on the same day, the House and the Senate, and we got co-sponsors and so forth. On the Senate side, we had Senator Bob Dole, a majority leader. We had Ted Kennedy. We had Tom Harkin. We had Senator Orrin Hatch. They were all aggressively involved in trying to make a difference.

And then on the House side, as I told you, we got 100 folks that wanted to go on it. But getting it to be bipartisan... And what people have to understand is, it's not true in the last couple years, but prior to that, every disability piece of legislation was bipartisan and bicameral. I insisted upon it. That, to me, was what our community is all about. We are both parties in everything else, and we needed to have that relationship. In the last two years, that has changed. But the point is, is we came together.

The House... The Senate. Excuse me... it was a little easier there, because they had such a strong leadership position, and it got through fairly easy. On the House side, the Speaker came to me one day, and he said, "You know, this legislation is massive, and I think that the public will react negatively, because it's so broad and so forth, and I wish that you would pull it, so that we can have extended hearings and consideration." And I said to the Speaker, "I'm sorry, I won't pull it. It's exactly what needs to be done. I don't

believe the public will react negatively, but it has to be done. We have to do it, and I'm going to push it." And he said, "Okay." He was not happy, but we pushed it anyway.

When I left the Congress, I asked Congressman Steny Hoyer to lead the effort, and he did, brilliantly. At the time, the Majority Whip in the house was Newt Gingrich, and I went to Newt and asked him to be supportive. He appointed Steve Bartlett from Dallas, Texas, the Congressman there, to be the Republican lead. So we had Steve Bartlett, Republican side, Steny Hoyer on the Democratic side, who led the effort, and came together and amended the bill and everything, to get the right votes to be part of that. And so, it was a massive effort on both sides.

We had trouble in getting adopted. Our biggest problem was the Public Works Committee. The other committees, we had some problems, but we worked it out and so forth. But we strategically did it by the easiest subcommittee, and then to the hardest one. The Speaker had put it in five different committees and several different subcommittees, to sort of slow it down. You know? But strategically we worked it out, so we can move it along. Public Works was the last one. The Chairman of the Public Works Committee was Glenn Anderson of California. Chairman of the Subcommittee on Transportation was Norm Mineta of California, and there was a problem there. Now, when I was Whip, I was involved in legislation that Norm Mineta had introduced. It was the Japanese Reparations Act.

Eve Hill: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Tony Coelho: And the speaker at the time, a different speaker at the time, was scheduled on the floor on a Thursday, and on Wednesday, the speaker went to Norm and said, "I think we have to pull the bill because there is opposition to it, and I'm not sure we have the votes." So, Norm came to me and said, "The speaker just told me that we may not have the votes on the Reparation Act. What's your position?" I said, "We have the votes, and don't agree to pull it. I guarantee you, we have the votes." So we did. We got it and we passed it.

So, when we were having trouble in the Transportation Subcommittee, I called Norm, and I said, "Norm, remember the Japanese Reparations Act?" And he said, "Yes." And I said, "Remember the trouble we had in getting it through?" "Yes." I said, "I just want you to know that the ADA Act is my Reparations Act, and I need your support." And he said, "I understand." And we got it through, 21 to 20. Barely got it through. But that roadblock, once we got to the House floor, it was overwhelming, and I knew it would be. But that was some of the problems we had. The votes were always there, I believe, but the motorbus owners and some others really tried to stop it. But we prevailed, thank God.

Eve Hill: Right. Do you think the ADA could pass today?

Tony Coelho: No.

Eve Hill: Why not?

Tony Coelho: The problem that we got is that when Senator Cruz got elected to the Senate... Not as a member of the Senate yet, but it was in a lame duck session... we were trying to push through the International Treaty for People with Disabilities. And there's only two countries who haven't signed it.

Eve Hill: Ironic.

Tony Coelho: Ironically. And so, he came to the Senate Republican luncheon that day, and said how bad this treaty was. The UN could take away your disabled children, and so forth and so on. Of course, none of it true. But scared, in effect, the Republicans in the Senate. Bob Dole was on the Senate floor, former Senator, former leader. Elizabeth Dole, former Senator from North Carolina. Were both on the Senate floor, and had gotten commitments from their former colleagues. But as they came from that luncheon and the vote took place, we lost it by two votes, from people that had committed to be with us. It was a sad day. But right now, I doubt that we could get it passed.

Eve Hill: Yeah. Well, all right. Let's switch gears a little, into some more happy news.

Tony Coelho: Yes.

Eve Hill: What makes the ADA unique when compared to the other disabilities laws that had existed before, like the Rehabilitation Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the Fair Housing Act?

Tony Coelho: Well, those were specific laws, right? And they made it possible for us, those laws, to apply to those of us with disabilities. But we didn't have our basic civil rights. You know, that you could go to court and take somebody on who was discriminating against you while you work, or whatever it is. Plus, the Justice Department, as a result... You were part of it... The Justice Department could enforce the compliance with the ADA, could take action against a city or a state, a company, whatever, when there was a practice of discrimination. And so, all of a sudden, once the bill was enacted, then we had a right to go to court, like every other civil rights group did... Women, gays, individuals of color... so that we then got put in that civil rights class, that we had a right to take action.

There's nothing in the ADA that says, "X number of people need to be employed." That's not a civil rights act. Nothing in it on the specific programs. Those bills that were adopted before are the specifics. The ADA gave us our rights as individuals, to go to court and say, "You're discriminating. We're suing you." That's the basic difference. And so, no law, no law is any good if it isn't enforced. Right?

Eve Hill: Right. Right? Without a remedy.

Tony Coelho: Yeah. And so, the big issue for us, as people with disabilities, is that we want to make sure whoever is elected to the presidency has a Justice Department that will enforce the ADA that's been on the books for 30 years, that will enforce it. And that's the key. That's the key difference between these other pieces of legislation. You're a lawyer. You know better than I do if that's right or wrong.

Eve Hill: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Tony Coelho: But that's the key to what we need.

Eve Hill: Great. Thanks, Tony. So, ADA Live listening audience, if you have questions about this topic or any of the other ADA Live topics, you can submit your questions online at www.adalive.org, or call the Southeast ADA center at 1-404-541-9001. Now let's take a pause for a word about the Thanks to the ADA campaign.

Commercial: #Share your Thanks to the ADA moment. Celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act with the ADA National Network. We are asking everyone to share a moment in their lives when they were thankful for the ADA. On a social media platform of your choosing, use the hashtag #thankstotheada to share what the ADA means to you. This will look different for everyone, so have fun and be creative. Share any media of your choosing, such as video, images, written word, or anything else that you want, and include #thankstotheada. For examples from the ADA's 29th anniversary, visit our ADA 29, #thankstotheada Twitter moment.

Eve Hill: Back to Tony, because I have more questions. It may never end. They may have to cut me off, get the hook. So, the ADA is built on these four pillars or ideas. Full participation, independent living, equal opportunity, and economic self-sufficiency. In your opinion, how has the ADA changed our culture in those four areas?

Tony Coelho: Well, I think the best way to answer that is to say there are two groups of people. One of those that were born prior to 1990, and secondly, the group that was born after 1990. Or, those who had a disability prior to 1990, or those adults, because of accident or whatever, developed a disability after 1990. And for those of us prior, the ADA has answered all of our concerns of... You know, I wake up every morning wondering if I'm going to have a seizure that day, and where I would be, and making sure that I'm not in a situation where I'd hurt myself or hurt somebody else.

People that went through this prior to ADA, we faced, like I did, people who could openly discriminate against us, say right to your face, "We're not going to hire you because of your disability." Now they can't. So that, in my view, is the biggest change, is the law is now with us. People can't openly say... As they did to women, as they did to gays, as they did to people of color, as they did to those of us with disabilities... that, "You're not equal.

You don't have rights, and we can discriminate against you, and you can't do anything about it." Now we can.

So, to me, that's the biggest change. And if you talk to people pre-'90, they will tell you that. If you talk to people post-'90, they don't know what the heck you're talking about, because they have their rights, and they don't realize that 30 years ago, that's when it happened. And young people... I love it. Young people today are demanding more, and really don't appreciate what happened 30 years ago. And that's the way it should be. I don't have any trouble with that.

Eve Hill: That's right.

Tony Coelho: I think it's great that they don't worry about what happened. They just know they have rights. And that's excellent. As we saw in the demonstration on the Affordable Care Act, when there was an attempt to do away with preexisting conditions, who went there and demonstrated it? It wasn't ordinary, quote/unquote, "Americans." It was those of us with disabilities had to be drug out of the chamber, had to be taken out of their wheelchairs, and so forth, screaming about... And that changed the whole thing. They lost the fight against us, and we won the fight on ACA. So, those are the absolute changes, and that's exciting to me. That's it.

Eve Hill: Yeah, it is. And it's raised our expectations again for people with disabilities.

Tony Coelho: Right, and we want more. Now we want to be able to vote.

Eve Hill: Right.

Tony Coelho: But we need access to voting in order to vote. Some of it has to be mail in ballots, but other times they want to be there in person, so the voting has to be accessible to those who have to... That's how they have to be, to go there and vote personally. So, we want that, and we should have it. Why shouldn't we be able to vote? I think the thing that people need to understand is that those who disclose are 25% of our national population. Now, if you take our loved ones, just one of our loved ones, with us, that's 50% of our population. So, we're one of the largest communities in the country today.

What we need to do as a disability community is to understand how powerful we can be, and work together by voting, by getting involved in the political process, understanding it, and make a difference. Because if we do, we can dictate policy. If we don't, somebody else is going to dictate policy.

Eve Hill: Right.

Tony Coelho: So, we have to come to the table organized, get rid of the silos... There's all kinds of silos. If you have this disability or this disability, you work on your own disability, as opposed to saying, "We're all in it together." And if we work together, we can become very powerful.

Eve Hill: Yeah, and that siloing is important if you're just doing disability rights in transportation, or just in housing, or just in education. The great thing about with the ADA is it went across all of them.

Tony Coelho: Right.

Eve Hill: Like you said, it said, "This is the basics." It covers everything, and these principles apply everywhere.

Tony Coelho: We had a hard time knocking down those silos when we did the ADA, but we got there. And when the Supreme Court ruled against us, and said ADA only covered those people with identifiable disabilities, basically they were telling me that I was stupid. Because when I drafted it and so forth, that I basically made a mistake, and didn't include people with intellectual disabilities, or disabilities like I have, and so forth. You know? So, what we did is we immediately went back and amended the ADA, as you know, and it was interesting. It was overwhelming in the House and the Senate, and that's not usual. You, as a lawyer, a distinguished lawyer, know that generally Congress doesn't reverse a Supreme Court decision.

Eve Hill: Right.

Tony Coelho: And we did it quickly. We not only did it, but we turned it around, and quickly reversed the Supreme Court decision. That told us just how impactful we as a community could be, when we want to be.

Eve Hill: Yeah, and it really made the point. You know, prior to the ADA, a lot of thought about disability issues was about charity.

Tony Coelho: Right.

Eve Hill: It was like, "This is the stuff we'll give to those poor people." And that's sort of what led the Supreme Court to say, "Oh, it should be limited to those people we think of as having a disability."

Tony Coelho: Yeah, right. And they were all-

Eve Hill: [crosstalk 00:32:57] only them.

Tony Coelho: All the Court was of a certain age, I would say, and they understood just what you were said, how they were raised. I always call it the Jerry Lewis syndrome.

Eve Hill: Yeah.

Tony Coelho: You know, Jerry Lewis would take somebody in a wheelchair, pat them on the head, say, "Go back in the corner. We'll take care of you."

Eve Hill: Right.

Tony Coelho: We in the disability community don't want to be taken care of.

Eve Hill: No pity.

Tony Coelho: There's no pity, you know? I take the view is, I want an opportunity to fail. If you give me the opportunity to fail, then I can succeed. If you don't give me the opportunity to fail, I can't succeed. And so, we have a different attitude today than in the past. I tell people all the time, there are things I can't do. I can't drive an ambulance. I can't drive a police car. I can't own a gun. I can't fly an airplane. But you know what?

There are a lot of things I can do, and I've done things probably better than a lot of people who don't have a disability.

Eve Hill: Right.

Tony Coelho: And so, give me a chance. Just give me a chance. That's what we in the disability community want.

Eve Hill: Yup. So, June 22nd was the 20th anniversary of the Supreme Court's decision in Olmstead versus L.C., which made clear that the ADA basically meant what it said when it said services for people with disabilities have to be integrated. What do you see as the impact of the ADA's integration mandate?

Tony Coelho: Well, I think it's great, right? I think basically it takes people out of a sheltered situation, where you don't deal with everybody else in society. You're put aside. And basically now you'd be integrated into society, like everybody else.

Eve Hill: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Tony Coelho: A very critical decision. And what we need to do is more. There's more legislation that needs to be passed in regards to this. It's trying to go through the Congress at this point. Hopefully in the next Congress, we can deal with it. But the issue is, is that basically giving these individuals a right to participate like everybody else, and not to be shoved away and put in an institution, in effect. That's the significance of it. It's a basic right. I happen to totally agree, obviously. But that was important. The ADA permitted it to be possible, and of course it was. Now, the next issue for us is the internet.

Eve Hill: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Oh, I'm all over the internet.

Tony Coelho: Basically, people... You know, corporations and others... don't make their sites accessible. Well, in my view, that's in violation of the ADA.

Eve Hill: Right.

Tony Coelho: Now, corporations take the view, "Well, the ADA was passed prior to the internet being developed." Well, you know what? The ADA is not a stagnant piece of legislation. The ADA applies forever, as long as it's on the books. And in my view, the internet is like our national highway. How do you get somewhere if you're in a car? You get on our interstate highway and our system. You can go all over the country. Well, today the national highway is in the internet. And so, when we passed the ADA, it's basically covered that this internet is the international highway now, and you've got to include it.

The good news is that this case went all the way to the Supreme Court, and the Supreme Court ruled against the pizza company, and basically said... There was a charge. The Supreme Court lower courts said it is part of the ADA, and the Supreme Court refused to take it, which in effect means the Supreme Court agreed that the internet is covered by the ADA. That's a huge, huge decision. And now it's, what happens? Enforcement. If we don't get enforcement, it doesn't do any good to have that Supreme Court decision. So, that's one of the things that we are now pursuing. I'm aggressively involved in a company that's involved in this, and I am aggressively out speaking on this, is that companies need to comply, need to be involved in permitting those of us with disabilities to be accessible.

I applaud Apple. Apple, in all its products, include in the design stage those of us with disabilities. They don't brag about it. It's just there. If you do it as an accommodation after you've designed it and produce it, then it's much more costly, and it's much harder to do. Where, when you're designing something, just make sure that you understand the ADA is there, and your facilities, your products, need to be accessible. And so, that's one of the next big fights, is to make sure that that issue of the internet being under the ADA is enforced. That's a big fight for us.

Eve Hill: Yeah, absolutely. So, we talked about the folks who developed disabilities after 1990, or who were born after 1990, the ADA generation. If you had just one thought for them, what would it be?

Tony Coelho: For those that-

Eve Hill: The new guys, the new ADA generation.

Tony Coelho: I would say welcome to our family. And I would also say, you know what? The ADA became your insurance policy. It's there when you develop a disability or you're born with a disability. That insurance policy guarantees you the right to be treated like everybody else. And so I'd say to them, welcome to our family.

Eve Hill: That's great. So, as we get ready to close, we've been asking people to share their thanks to the ADA moment, of what the ADA means to them. What's your thanks to the ADA moment in your life, when you were thankful for the ADA?

Tony Coelho: Well, I love the fact of being able to do something, particularly for young people with disabilities. To be born into a society that, by law, protects them. To me, that's what it's all about. Those of us... I'm 78. You know, others and so forth, we have been helped by the ADA. I understand that. But the most important thing to me is that young people, or people as soon as they're born, they're covered by the ADA from the day they're born, until the day they die. To me, that's what's exciting. To me, that's what ADA has done. That's what I'm so thankful about. That's what I take great pride in, that that difference has been made.

Eve Hill: That's great. So, I'm going to share you my thanks to the ADA moment, too. Because, you know. My microphone, man.

Tony Coelho: Yup. And you have one. And you have one, too. I know what it is.

Eve Hill: Oh, I have a lot of them. My whole career is thanks to the ADA, but what I'm really thankful for is this difference the ADA's made in the broader community. When I started out, people would routinely say, "Well, I don't know any people with disabilities." Because people with disabilities were trapped in institutions and special schools and special workplaces, and the workplace wasn't accessible, and they weren't with the people with disabilities. Now, people with disabilities are everywhere.

Tony Coelho: Yeah.

Eve Hill: They're in everything. And our society's expectations about what people with disabilities can do have been blown out of the water, and now I think younger people miss it if people with disabilities aren't around. They're used to it. It would be weird. They would say, "Wait, you claim to be a diverse workforce, and yet there are no people with disabilities here. What's your problem?" So, my thanks to the ADA moment is every day, being thankful for the people with disabilities that I get to know and work with and appreciate.

Tony Coelho: One comment I'd make is that I think what has happened now, and it's great, is that every candidate running for president this time on the Democratic side, for the first time, all have a disability policy. And it started with Hillary Clinton, when she ran. She had a disability policy that was extremely strong. Everybody who spoke at that convention in 2016 talked about disabilities. Now, if you're running for national office or state office, you better have a disability policy. That's exciting to me.

Eve Hill: That's right.

Tony Coelho: And it has changed the whole thing politically, and we have come of age. ADA gave us rights, but politically, we have come of age in the last five years. We'd been voting and so forth, but now people that are getting elected to office know they better talk to us. They better listen to us, in order to be elected. That's exciting. That's a great ADA moment.

Eve Hill: Yeah, it really is. So, Tony, it's been my honor and my pleasure as always to talk with you today. I really appreciate it. Thank you for your advocacy, your leadership, your dedication, that made the ADA possible. Really, really appreciate it.

Tony Coelho: Thank you, Eve. I love you, and thank you for everything.

Pamela Williamson: This is Pam Williamson again. I want to thank Eve Hill and Congressman Tony Coelho for sharing about the ADA today, and celebrating 30 years with us. I'm so excited, because I started early in my career with the ADA, so I've actually watched it grow up. So, I'm excited that we're to this point. Now, ADA Live listeners, we also thank you for joining us for today's episode, and you may submit your questions and

comments on this podcast online, at adalive.org. You may also access all ADA Live episodes on our website, at adalive.org, and every episode is archived with streamed audio, accessible transcript, and resources. You may also listen to the SoundCloud ADA Live channel at soundcloud.com/adalive. And you can download the ADA Live on your mobile device podcast icon, by searching for ADA Live.

We encourage you to celebrate, learn, and share about the 30th anniversary of the ADA on July 26th, 2020, and throughout the year. Check out the ADA anniversary toolkit at www.adaanniversary.org. The toolkit is a product of the Southeast ADA Center, and the ADA National Network. It features logos, social media posts, monthly themes, and other resources to keep the celebration going.

Also, on the social media platform of your choosing, use hashtag #thankstotheada to share what the ADA means to you, that moment in your life when you were thankful for the ADA. Share with #thankstotheada. As a reminder, if you have any questions about the Americans with Disabilities Act, you can submit your questions anytime online at adalive.org, or contact your regional ADA center at 1-800-949-4232. Remember, all calls are free and confidential.

ADA Live is a program of the Southeast ADA Center. Our producer is Celestia Ohrazda, with Beth Harrison, Mary Morder, Emily Reeve, Marsha Schwanke, and Barry Whaley. Our music is from Four Wheel City, the movement for improvement. We look forward to seeing you on the next episode, and wish you well.

4 Wheel City: (rapping)

[End of Transcript]

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Contact for More Information or Assistance:

Southeast ADA Center

Email: ADAsoutheast@law.syr.edu

Phone: 404-541-9001