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From the Executive Director's Desk

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On January 18, 2009, the eve of Martin Luther King Day and two days before the presidential inauguration, 1,000 people celebrated at the first-ever Disability Inaugural Ball—"Disability Power & Pride." The Hearing Loss Association of America was a supporter of the ball and several members of the HLAA staff attended the event at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., along with many other representatives of consumer organizations from all disability groups.

Tony Coelho, former congressional representative from California's Central Valley, was the master of ceremonies for the event. Speakers included Senator Harkin and Representative Steny Hoyer, both champions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and Melody C. Barnes, recently appointed director of the Domestic Policy Council.

Senator Harkin (Iowa) noted the progress that people with disabilities have made since the ADA was passed, but he reminded us that there is one exception—employment. Sixty three percent of people with disabilities are still unemployed—that is shameful in a society such as ours. We know that people often retire early because of hearing loss. In this way valuable employees are lost, because stigma prevents them from being open about their hearing loss in the workplace; therefore, they do not get the help that is available to them to continue working productively.

President Barack Obama's campaign with its message of change captured the hope and imagination of many including people with disabilities. Change is linked to hope for better things and people with hearing loss are ready to work for the kind of change they need to be included in society and for a better life.

HLAA is ready to work for change in health care to ensure that hearing health is given the attention and resources that it deserves. It's time to consider hearing loss a health issue just as we do any other health condition. It should be routine to screen our hearing regularly throughout our life spans, not just at birth. We should have the freedom from stigma to allow us, if we are diagnosed with hearing loss, to confidently and without embarrassment seek the treatment we need. Through insurance coverage, whether a private or government program, everyone should have access to the hearing devices and associated services needed to treat his or her hearing loss no matter their age or economic situation.

This is the change we seek. ■■■■



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From left: Brenda Battat, Lauren and Larry Goldberg, and Christopher T. Sutton, HLAA director of development and education. Larry Goldberg is the director of The Media Access Group at WGBH in Boston. The Media Access Group produces captions and video descriptions for all media. Through its Carl and Ruth Shapiro Family National Center for Accessible Media, they conduct research and development, develop guidelines and standards, and author publications—all in an effort to make media and technology accessible to people with disabilities in their homes, schools, workplaces, and communities.