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## Happy 20th Anniversary, ADA! Or...Is It?

Brian Doherty | July 26, 2010

*Reason* Contributing Editor Walter Olson questions the inherent goodness of the Americans for Disabilities Act, on the occasion of its 20th anniversary. After listing a few of the more notorious silly legal outcomes from lawsuits under the Act, Olson notes:

One reason for the law's immunity from criticism is that it is defended as a matter of identity politics: if you're against it, then you must be against the people it protects. So it is treated as rude, not merely provocative, to bring up the failure of the original ADA premise that the new law would "pay for itself" by increasing the labor force participation of the disabled (the ratedeclined instead). Or to question the law's "all for one, one for all" extension of the disability label to cover alcoholics, the mentally ill, and the mentally retarded, groups whose problems have historically been seen as quite different from those of the blind, deaf or paraplegic. Or to mention the money-driven ADA "filing mills" in California, Florida and other states under which complainants roam the land filing hundreds of similar complaints against local businesses which their lawyers then convert into assembly-line cash settlements.

The *Detroit Free Press* has one of the more standard and expected "it makes darn good sense and has improved many people's lives" features marking the anniversary, though even it has a curious focus on improved attitudes rather than justifiable and reasonable improved outcomes.

I surveyed the world of the ADA in its early days, in a 1995 *Reason* magazine cover feature.