



## **In Iowa's Interest:**

### **Doing Well by Doing Good – Employing People with Disabilities**

*by Senator Tom Harkin*

Improving employment outcomes for people with disabilities is one of my top priorities. In 2011, at a disability employment summit hosted by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the U.S. Business Leadership Network, I challenged the employer representatives in the room to work to increase the size of the disability workforce from under five million to six million by 2015. This goal was quickly endorsed by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

Employment is one of the most pressing issues facing the disability community today. While the recent recession has had a negative impact on most Americans, it has hit Americans with disabilities particularly hard. And while employment numbers are rising overall, people with disabilities have been slow to see the benefits of our nation's economic recovery. Moreover, workers with disabilities left the labor force during the recent recession at a rate five times the rate for workers without disabilities.

This October, as we observe National Disability Employment Awareness Month, it is time to celebrate the very real progress we have made in opening doors of opportunity thanks to laws like the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act. But it is also time to acknowledge that when a majority of people with disabilities are not employed, we still have a long way to go to ensure equal opportunity for all Americans. Individuals with disabilities represent one of the largest untapped pools of skills and talents in our country.

In July, as Chairman of the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, I released a report urging Congress, the Administration, the business community, and society at large to make the issue of disability employment a national priority. I hope that this report encourages bipartisan leadership in the public and private sectors that will bring more Americans with disabilities into competitive employment, where they can earn a good living and contribute to the economy.

This month, as we recognize that people with disabilities – like all people – have unique abilities, talents, and aptitudes, I encourage you to think about this year's theme: "A Strong Workforce is an Inclusive Workforce: What Can YOU Do?"

We must continue to expand opportunities for people with disabilities to make their mark on the world, and help employers learn the benefits of hiring these workers. Learn more about how to celebrate Disability Employment Awareness Month by visiting the Department of Labor's website: <http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/ndeam/>.