

EMPLOYMENT PROPOSAL TO HELP DISABLED WORKERS ACQUIRE JOBS



The administration for President Barack Obama wants to use the government's purchasing power to increase the number of disabled people in the job force. The proposal includes requiring federal contractors to set goals for having disabled workers take up at least seven percent of the employee staff, according to [Boston.com](#) of [BostonGlobe.com](#). Officials in the workforce call this plan the greatest effort to protect the rights of disabled workers since the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 was passed. "This is really a historic moment in the civil rights movement in America," Patricia Shiu, the director of the Labor Department's Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs, said. Almost a quarter of the country's workforce is made up of federal contractors and subcontractors. If the proposal passes, it could help reduce the 13 percent unemployment rate for disabled workers in the country. This rate is close to 1.5 times the rate of people without disabilities. In the country there are close to 200,000 federal contractors bringing in close to \$700 billion in contracts each year. The new proposal would not be a quota for federal contractors. Instead, it would be a guideline that would force companies to devote more resources to recruiting and hiring disabled workers. The resources would also have to be devoted to training programs and the update of data collection. Detailed records of complying to the proposal would have to be kept by the contractors. "For nearly 40 years, the rules have said that contractors simply need to make a 'good faith' effort to recruit and hire people with disabilities," Shiu said. "Clearly, that's not working." Final approval will not be considered until next year, which will occur after the Labor Department will take comments on the new rule for 60 days. "It has been proven again and again that investing in opportunities for people with disabilities are repaid tenfold," said Lara Schwartz, spokeswoman for the American Association of People with Disabilities. "When more people have the opportunity to earn a living, pay taxes, live independently, the entire nation benefits." On the other side of things, businesses across the country have had mixed reviews of the plan. "The agency issued a number of regulations that have dramatically expanded paperwork and record-keeping requirements with real costs to contractors," said Michael Eastman, executive director for labor law policy at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. One of the reasons that some businesses are wary of this proposal is the fact that they are nervous when it comes to asking applicants to identify themselves as disabled when applying for the jobs available. Other businesses are in favor of the proposal, which they say will help to improve their staff with qualified workers. "I think providing these sorts of measurable clear steps will give contractors the guidance and the clarity they need," Shiu said.