

West Wing Receptionist Leah Katz-Hernandez narrates a tour of the West Wing in American Sign Language, visiting the West Wing Lobby, the West Colonnade, the Rose Garden, the White House Press Briefing Room, the Cabinet Room, the Oval Office, and more.

WASHINGTON, D.C. - My name is Leah Katz-Hernandez and I say the word "welcome" hundreds of times per day.

It gives me the greatest pride and joy to do that because when I say "welcome" in the West Wing of the White House, as the President's receptionist, I know that this special place is truly accessible for all. As someone who is deaf, I know that truth deep down in my heart.

Will you allow me the privilege of showing you around?

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When the moment came for me to start my own career as a 21-year-old, I was not afraid to jump onto a campaign to elect "a skinny kid with a funny name." I am deaf and my deafness was not a barrier to my career. Instead, it was a spur to public service. Here's why:

As a toddler, my life changed on July 26, 1990, when the Americans with Disabilities Act was signed into law by President George H. W. Bush. This civil rights legislation helped increase equality for people with disabilities by making discrimination against them based on their

disabilities illegal. The Americans with Disabilities Act helped make people with disabilities more visible. It helped make America -- and the American way of life -- more accessible.

And it is with this understanding of my own humanity that I grew up -- with a powerful sense of dignity. I knew that I was not less than another person, just because I am deaf.

I am part of the "ADA Generation" -- the generation that has grown up under the protections of the Americans with Disabilities Act. I am grateful to the advocates who fought so hard to make this civil rights law a reality, improving the lives of millions.

I care deeply about ensuring that everyone's experience at the White House is as accessible and welcoming as mine. I also know the importance of making disability visible everywhere, whether it's on the streets at curb cuts or here at the White House. That's why it means so much to me when I see people from all walks of life come in to see the President -- be it a world leader, a school principal, or a service member.

At more than 56 million, we with disabilities make up 19 percent of the American population and are embedded deeply into the fabric of the American society. Our contributions are everywhere, including at the White House. The West Wing is filled with interesting tidbits of disability contributions throughout its history.

The White House is the "People's House" and I'm proud to say that it is accessible to me and you. So, I hope you'll check out this video and join me on a tour of this special place, and learn more about disability contributions in the West Wing.

Thank you, and welcome,

Leah

Leah Katz-Hernandez

West Wing Receptionist
The White House