This year marks not only the 75th observance of National Disability Employment Awareness Month, but also the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The return of Service members with disabilities from WWII raised public interest in the contributions of people with disabilities in the workplace.

During the war years of 1941 to 1945, more than 16 million people were deployed and approximately four million served in combat zones.

By September 2, 1945, when the Japanese signed the Instrument of Surrender on the USS Missouri, 16.3 million Americans had served in WWII; 407,000 had died; and 671,000 were wounded.

In 1945, Congress enacted Public Law 176 and declared the first week of October “National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week.”

In 1962, the word “physically” was removed from “National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week” to recognize the employment needs and contributions of individuals with all types of disabilities.

Congress later expanded the first week of October to the entire month of October and changed the name to National Disability Employment Awareness Month in 1988.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 extended vocational training programs and prohibited discrimination on the basis of disability by federally funded and assisted programs, federal employers, federal contractors, and programs receiving federal funding.

In 1990, President George H. W. Bush signed into law the Americans with Disabilities Act, the most comprehensive disability rights legislation in history.

Americans of all abilities have long served our nation in all walks of life. Rather than being defined by their disability they have worked to clear barriers, implement new ideas, and have proven the value of a diverse workforce.