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THE ARC CONDEMNS WHITE HOUSE AIDE'S USE OF R-WORD

Washington, DC—Reports that White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel used an epithet relating to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities is both shocking and disappointing.

According to a *Wall Street Journal* story on an embattled White House, “Some attendees said they were planning to air ads attacking conservative Democrats who were balking at Mr. Obama’s health-care overhaul. ‘F—ing retarded,’ Mr. Emanuel scolded the group, according to several participants.” We hope that the Members of Congress in that meeting were equally offended.

This is the second serious verbal miscue by the Administration about people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. President Obama’s unfortunate statement last year on *The Tonight Show* with Jay Leno, equating his poor bowling performance with that of people with intellectual disabilities, sparked justifiable outrage from people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. The President subsequently apologized for his remarks and disabilities advocates saw it as a teachable moment. Mr. Emanuel’s use of hateful language would suggest that it is the White House staff that needs to be taught a lesson in respect for people with disabilities.

Statements such as these—particularly when used by someone at high level—amplifies pervasive societal attitudes that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities somehow don’t measure up—that their lives are worth less. “Using a slur about people with intellectual disabilities to criticize other people just isn’t right,” said Peter V. Berns, chief executive officer of The Arc of the United States. “For people with disabilities it is disrespectful and demeaning and only serves to marginalize a constituency that already struggles for empowerment on every front,” Berns added.

Disability rights advocates had high hopes for this Administration when the President appointed a Special Assistant to the President for Disability Policy. This was a move that the Administration called: “our first step to ensure that we have a strong advocate for people with disabilities at the highest levels of our Administration.”

The more than seven million individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families demand an apology for Mr. Emanuel’s use of language that denigrates our constituency. The White House needs to lead by example and demonstrate through words and actions that it is not acceptable to use people with disabilities as a source for ridicule. To condone this language is to deny opportunities for people with disabilities in the workplace, in the community, in school, and in every other quarter of society.

The Arc of the United States strongly supports legislation (S.2781) introduced by Sen. Barbara Mikulski of Maryland that would change the term “mental retardation” or “mentally retarded” to “intellectual disabilities.” Given the two White House incidents of inappropriate use of the term

regarding these constituencies, The Arc hopes that the Obama Administration will put its full force behind the enactment of this legislation.

The Arc of the United States promotes and protects the human rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and actively supports their full inclusion and participation in the community throughout their lifetime.