

Memorandum

Date: May 6, 1993

To: Senator Dole

From: Alec Vachon *AV*

Re: Invitation from ADAPT

You have received an invitation to attend a memorial service for Rev. Wade Blank, to be held at the West Front of the Capitol on Sunday, May 9th, at 12:30 p.m. (attached). Wade was a widely respected and charismatic disability advocate, and co-founder of a disability rights group, named "ADAPT." He died tragically in a swimming accident -- trying to save his son caught in an undertow (the boy also died). The memorial service will kick off a march to the White House demanding personal assistance services (PAS).

ADAPT was founded in the mid 1970s to promote accessible transportation for people with disabilities, but in recent years has focused on PAS. ADAPT tactics often center on boisterous demonstrations and civil disobedience. The attached newspaper article provides further background on Rev. Blank and ADAPT.

Regarding Sunday's event, I recommend that this matter be handled in a low-key manner: that the attached condolence note be sent directly to Rev. Blank's wife, Mrs. Molly Blank. In that case, I will endeavor to attend the service and report back.

Options:

- Send condolence note to Mrs. Blank.
- Will attend Memorial Service.
- No action at all.

cc: D. Stanley



BOB DOLE  
UNITED STATES SENATE

May 10, 1993

Dear Mrs. Blank,

I regret I was unable to attend the memorial service for your husband on May 9th at the Capitol, but I wanted you to know that you and your family were in my thoughts. I was shocked by the deaths of Wade and your son, but the courage that Wade displayed was so very typical of him.

Wade was an inspiring advocate for the independence of people with disabilities. He will be sorely missed, and we will try to carry on his good work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bob Dole", written in a cursive style. The signature is positioned above the printed name "BOB DOLE".

BOB DOLE

Mrs. Molly Blank  
1123 Adams Street  
Denver, Colorado 80206



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# ADAPT

## FREE OUR PEOPLE

Honorable Robert Dole  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510-1601

March 11, 1993

Dear Senator Dole:

ADAPT, American Disabled for Attendant Programs Today is a grassroots disability rights organization actively working to change the long term services system in the United States.

The U.S. currently warehouses over 1.6 million people in nursing homes and other large institutions because of their age and/or disability. We spend approximately 6 times as much money to fund this system as we do to keep people in their own homes. This has occurred because of the greed of the nursing home lobby, the American Health Care Association.

The time for a change in this system is now!

We demand a National Attendant Services Program funded by redirecting 25% of the Medicaid money that now goes to nursing homes.

ADAPT will be in Washington, DC in early May to send a message to the new administration that people with disabilities will no longer tolerate being incarcerated in nursing homes and other large institutions.

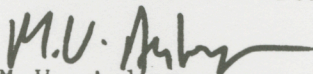
We invite you to join us at noon on May 9, 1993 at the Lincoln Memorial to remember the founder of ADAPT, Reverend Wade Blank who recently drown trying to save his eight year old son Lincoln.

This gathering will celebrate the accomplishments of a civil rights leader who not only paved the way for the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act but who empowered people to leave institutions and to fight for their civil rights as people with disabilities.

Your attendance will show your commitment to the struggle of people with disabilities to break the chains that keep us locked away in institutions.

We wait for your timely response.

For An Institution Free America,

  
M.W. Auberger  
Organizer

# Wade Blank, advocate for disabled, drowns

Minister who led Denver bus demonstrations and spurred U.S. laws dies as effort to save son fails

By Katlo Korwin

Rocky Mountain News Staff Writer

Wade Blank, who carried the fight for disabled Americans from Denver buses to the halls of Congress, died Monday in Mexico as he tried to save his drowning child.

#### DEDICATED

Blank put unusual life and passion into cause. 17

Violent waves and a powerful undertow claimed them both as Blank's wife, Molly, and daughter, Caitlin, 6, watched from the shore. Their other daughter, Heather, 22, was in Denver.

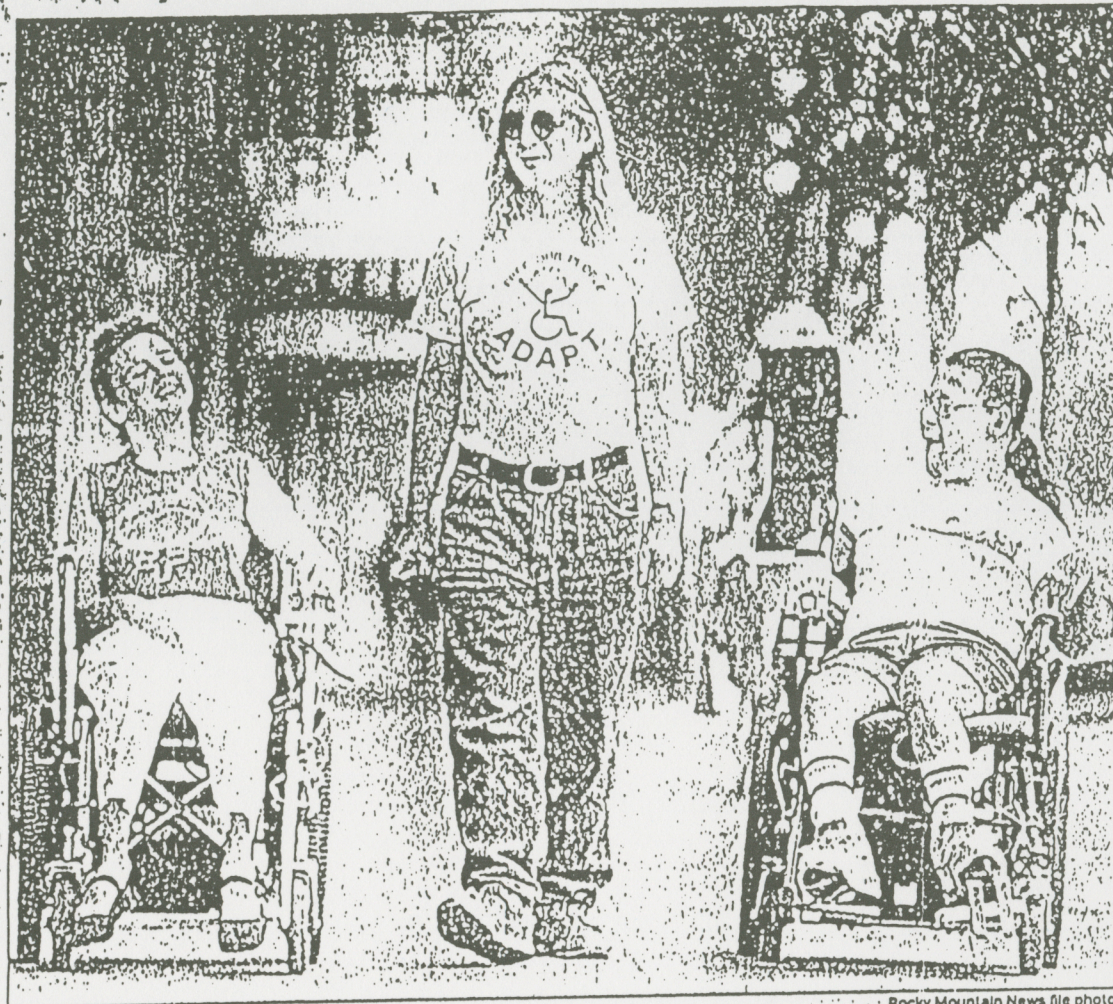
Blank was 52. His son, Lincoln, was 8.

Co-director of the Denver-based Atlantis Community and a Presbyterian minister, Blank is credited with spurring groundbreaking state and national legislation guaranteeing rights to disabled Americans.

Although he was not disabled, Blank was inspired to improve living conditions for the disabled after working in a Denver nursing home in the mid-1970s.

"The Americans With Disabilities Act would not have passed without his leadership," said Justin Dart, chairman of the President's Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities.

"Wade Blank was a great moral person—a great loving human being," Dart said. "He marched in the footsteps of the great moral leaders who have used civil disobedience combined with loving leadership to change the world. Presi-



Rocky Mountain News file photo

Wade Blank, center, and Atlantis Community co-workers Robin Stephens and Ken Herd head down South Broadway near the headquarters of the organization, which aids the disabled, in 1991.

dent Clinton and the 43 million Americans with disabilities would join me in celebrating the life of this great soldier of justice and extending our most profound sympathy to his family and colleagues."

Blank, his wife and children were vacationing in Todos Santos, Baja California, Mexico. He had been there since Feb. 9. The village, about 50 miles north of Cabo

San Lucas, was a favorite getaway for the family.

"Lincoln was out swimming and was pulled in by the undertow, and Wade went out to get him. They were both pulled in by the undertow," said Mike Auberger, co-president of the Atlantis Community.

Molly Blank tried to summon help. "It was just too quick. The area has real rough water. It hap-

pens, and it happens quick," Auberger said.

Blank's wife and daughter returned to Denver late Tuesday. They brought Blank's body home, but Lincoln's body has not yet been recovered. Funeral plans have not been determined.

A demonstration planned for May in Washington, D.C., will become a tribute to Blank, Auberger said.

Just last week Blank and the Atlantis Community filed formal complaints with the Department of Justice protesting the lack of wheelchair access to taxis in Denver.

It was just the latest chapter in a long civil-rights battle.

Blank called the disabled "the most powerless people in our society."

"I fight the notion they should just be Jerry's kids. I want them to have control," he once said.

Blank grew up in Canton, Ohio, went to an all-white high school and college, and supported Barry Goldwater and Richard Nixon for president. A black friend dared him to go to Selma, Ala., to march with Martin Luther-King Jr.

Blank became pastor of a church in Kent, Ohio, which became an underground meeting place for the Students for a Democratic Society.

After the killings of Kent State students by national guardsmen during a war protest, he went back to McCormick Theological Seminary for a master's degree.

He moved to Denver and worked as an orderly in a nursing home.

In 1975, Blank co-founded the Atlantis Community to teach the disabled how to live outside institutions and, soon after, he began attacking the barriers to independent living with confrontational, non-violent protests.

In 1978, Atlantis members made national headlines when they surrounded two RTD buses with wheelchairs at Colfax Avenue and Broadway because RTD would not install wheelchair lifts. Today, all RTD buses have lifts, making Denver the first city in the nation with 100% accessible public transportation.

Staff writer Kerri Smith and the Associated Press contributed to this report.

# D.C. ADAPT ACTION

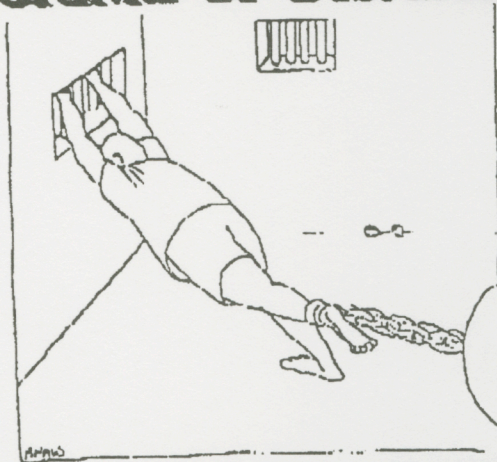
(American Disabled for Attendant Programs Today)  
**May 9-11, 1993**

ADAPT believes all people have the civil right to be free from institutionalization. Current policies favor institutions and nursing homes over in-home attendant services.

**ADAPT DEMANDS  
 A NATIONAL ATTENDANT SERVICES PROGRAM!**

ADAPT's style is "takin' it to the streets"! We confront, in vocal and dramatic ways, the powers that control nursing homes. We demand **FREEDOM FOR OUR PEOPLE**, using both legal protests and civil disobedience to make our point.

## **THE CRIME OF DISABILITY**



If being old and disabled isn't a crime,  
 why are more than three million of us locked up?

The demonstrations will begin with...

*A Tribute to ADAPT Founder Wade Blank (1940-1993),  
 and March to the White House*

**May 9, 1993 at 12:30 p.m.  
 West steps of the U.S. Capitol**

Call (303) 733-9324 or Jim Dickson (202) 832-6564