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Both of us have known George Bush for many years in our public and private lives. Because of our deep respect and admiration for him, it is a particular pleasure and honor for us to serve with Senator Robert Dole, Mrs. James Brady, Mrs. Richard Thornburgh and Mr. Billy Barty as Honorary Co-Chairs of the Disability Coalition supporting Vice President Bush's candidacy for the presidency.

As parents of exceptional children, we know how difficult it can be at election time to sort out the candidates' positions on various issues of social and economic policy which impact the lives of persons with disabilities and their families. The competing claims advanced to win votes in the heat of an election often provide no real assurance of the breadth and sincerity of a candidate's social vision, of his or her priorities or of the character and effectiveness of the leadership which he or she will provide.

For the last eight years George Bush has served his country unselfishly as Vice President of the United States. Because a Vice President rarely casts votes in his capacity as President of the Senate and directly administers no programs, it is sometimes difficult for those not close to the complex operations of the Executive and Legislative Branches to gauge the Vice President's effectiveness in the formulation of policy. During the past eight years, circumstances have placed us in positions where we have been able to note the priority which George Bush has given to the concerns of disabled Americans. From these vantage points we have watched the Vice President work effectively to promote the immediate and long-term well-being of persons with disabilities.

Unlike his predecessors, George Bush has demonstrated an ongoing interest in the issues affecting disabled persons and their families by establishing, at the very beginning of his tenure, a staff position focused principally on disability issues within the Office of the Vice President. This continuing oversight has enabled him to become acutely aware of the needs of disabled Americans. Indeed, Vice President Bush is personally aware of the importance of special education programs, and included in the Republican Platform is a commitment to protect the rights established under the Education for All Handicapped Children Act which mandates a free, appropriate public education for all handicapped children.

But Vice President Bush's commitment to persons with disabilities does not stop at ensuring educational opportunity. His commitment to ensuring that these programs yield outcomes of real

economic and personal independence for disabled Americans is expressed in his remarks delivered to the National Conference on Independent Living in June 1986, when he stated: "Our highest domestic priority is to assure that every American who wants a productive job in the private sector has a job. And when we say every American, we mean every American, including those Americans who happen to be disabled."

Vice President Bush is also concerned with affording people with disabilities equal rights and protections under the law. He has called for enactment of legislation to extend to people with disabilities the same basic equal opportunities and protections that are already afforded to women and minorities. At the August 10th swearing-in of Paul Hearne, the new Executive Director of the National Council on the Handicapped, he stated: "Disabled people do not have the same civil rights protections as women and minorities. However, an enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1988--legislation developed by the National Council on the Handicapped or similar legislation--would remedy this situation." The Americans with Disabilities Act is currently pending before the Congress, and will be high on the legislative agenda during the 101st Congressional session.

The Vice President also stated at the August 10th ceremony that: "We should not ignore the needs of our disabled population. We must develop programs and policies that promote independence, freedom of choice and productive involvement in the social and economic mainstream." Such statements clearly indicate the commitment George Bush will bring to the Presidency. We feel strongly that, as President, he will continue to express his long-standing advocacy for disabled Americans not only in words, but in actions. He will bring the vigorous and effective leadership necessary to remove the many barriers which currently frustrate persons with disabilities in their effort to achieve independence, productivity, integration and equal opportunity--goals which will allow them to take their rightful place as valued members of our nation.

We want to live, and we want our children to live, in the gentler and kinder America which George Bush seeks and toward which he will strive as President of the United States.

Lowell P. Weicker, Jr.

Madeleine Will