

MEMORANDUM

Date: January 12, 1995

To: Senator Dole

From: Alec Vachon *AV*

Re: SENATOR FRIST/CHAIRMAN, DISABILITY POLICY SUBCOMMITTEE

* Senator Frist is the new Chairman of the Subcommittee on Disability Policy of the Labor Committee. I called Tom Perdue, his Chief of Staff, this morning to see if I could be helpful in any way. Frist faces several hazards:

1. The disability groups are lining up for appointments to hear his views--because Frist is new to this issue, he can easily make missteps. The groups will likely test Frist right away. (As you know, they can be a handful. I heard from one group that objected to a physician as head of Disability Policy--a view not likely to make a friend of the new Chairman. Recall how the groups treated Gorton on the school violence issue.)
2. The Subcommittee's first assignment promises to be contentious--reauthorization of the special ed law, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
3. If Frist wants to exercise real leadership, he will have to establish his stature and deal w/Harkin. This is not partisan--on the Labor Committee, Democratic members--and many Republicans as well--have little interest or expertise in disability issues and have been happy to follow Harkin's lead.

* At this point, Frist's people aren't focused on the Subcommittee. Perdue was unaware of the special ed reauthorization, a voc rehab piece in Kassebaum's job training consolidation proposal, etc. Perdue asked the Director of the Georgia Department of Vocational Rehabilitation to suggest some priorities--whom he had appointed. Odd choice--if this is to be a Congress of change, we won't get new ideas from State Directors of VR.

* Incidentally, I asked Perdue how it happened Frist became Chairman of Disability Policy. He said that all the advice that he and Frist received warned them away from the Labor Committee: controversial and often peripheral issues, can't raise PAC money, thankless assignment, etc. He said his boss didn't need PAC money, and being a contrarian, he wanted his boss on the Committee everybody warned them about. Interesting strategy.

*cc: Sheila
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* I will be meeting with Frist's LD next week--to brief him on the Subcommittee's history, background on disability issues in the Senate, the special ed reauthorization and other likely matters within the purview of the Subcommittee, etc.

cc: S. Burke