


MEMORANDUM TO SENATOR DOLE

Date: January 21, 1995

From: Alec Vachon 

RE: GINGRICH ANNOUNCES MAJOR DISABILITY POLICY INITIATIVES
IN SPEECH AT REPUBLICAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE MEETING

- * Gingrich announced Friday that he would:
--increase money for severely disabled children--with money to come from welfare cuts, and
--create a task force to improve opportunities for the severely disabled. SPEECH EXCERPT ATTACHED.
- * Gingrich was responding to parents of children with severe disabilities--who questioned him about Children's SSI cuts at a January 7th town meeting in Marietta, Georgia. At that meeting, it was clear Gingrich didn't understand ADA. REUTERS STORY ATTACHED.
- * Gingrich's views have gotten little press attention--the news has been dominated by the "book contract", but contradict reported House proposals to cut Children's SSI.

YOUR NATIONAL COMMISSION BILL

- * Gingrich's action shows the prescience of your "National Commission on the Future of Disability" bill last session. I am reworking the bill--which might be done as a Leadership Task Force.
- * The bigger point: Disability is a new policy issue, poorly understood--and needs new solutions. Last year, the Federal government spent \$175 billion on disabled persons--\$80 billion in discretionary spending; \$95 billion in 4 entitlements--SSI, SSDI, Medicaid, Medicare. THIS IS MORE THAN THE DEFICIT, AND 70% OF THE DEFENSE BUDGET.

POLITICAL POWER OF THE DISABLED

- * Gingrich's actions are further evidence of the new disabled political power, as I have written you.
- * On flipside, still untapped positive value for Republicans. Example--on Friday, I addressed 60 State social services personnel from around the country at a conference on work incentives in Frederick, Maryland. Described your first floor speech, legislative agenda, etc.
- * As I was leaving, the Clinic Director--an ardent Democrat--said to me, "I will never think about Republicans the same way again. I am very impressed." It was not anything I said particularly--simply that most people are rarely exposed to a Republican talking about disability issues.

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**REMARKS BY HOUSE SPEAKER NEWT GINGRICH (R-GA)
AT REPUBLICAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE MEETING**

**RENAISSANCE HOTEL, WASHINGTON, DC
FRIDAY, JANUARY 20, 1995**

TRANSCRIPT BY: FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE, 620 NATIONAL PRESS BUILDING,
WASHINGTON, DC 20045

[EXCERPT BEGINS]

Now, as we're making this enormous transition, I will tell you flatly what the Democrats and the liberal establishment's going to do. They're going to lie. And I'll give you three examples. And I'm not talking here about Connie Chung. (Laughter.) The first thing -- now, these are three examples that have happened to us in the last couple weeks.

First, we had a town hall meeting two weeks ago. There were a tremendous number of children with very severe disabilities in wheelchairs at the town hall meeting because their parents had been told by their national association, which is desperate to keep power in Washington -- because otherwise they're going to have to all get on a plane and start traveling -- that we were going to cut out children who have severe disabilities.

Now, in fact, we're going to take money away from able-bodied people sitting in a free apartment who refuse to walk a block to a public library even though they're being paid to do nothing. And we're going to take some of that money, we're going to increase the money which is available for children who have severe disabilities.

Any of you who know parents who have made the voluntary choice to stay -- keep their children out of institutions, to live with them, to maximize their opportunity to live, you know that in the age of the computer -- if you see Charles Krauthammer on television, who broke his neck as a young man and is a paraplegic, but is a nationally-syndicated columnist and leads a remarkably full life given the challenges -- you know that these are children we ought to invest in to improve their lives. And so, we are establishing a task force to improve the opportunities of the severely disabled. That will not get coverage because it doesn't fit the current mode which is, "Who are the Republicans hurting today?"

[END EXCERPT]

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HEADLINE: GINGRICH PROMISES TALKS WITH THE DISABLED

BYLINE: By David Morgan

DATELINE: MARIETTA, Ga

BODY:

House Speaker Newt Gingrich pledged Saturday to listen to the parents of disabled children who fear that their families' financial security could be jeopardized by GOP spending cuts.

Appearing before a packed high school auditorium, Gingrich heard several local parents- all Republicans- ask that he protect funding for the disabled as Congress moves toward adoption of a balanced budget amendment.

The parents said they are afraid that benefits for disabled citizens will be vulnerable to cutbacks under a GOP legislative agenda that calls for higher Pentagon spending and no changes in Social Security.

Many of the programs are provided under the Americans with Disabilities Act, Medicaid and Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

Gingrich, who was hosting his first town hall meeting since being elected House speaker Wednesday, voiced sympathy for the plight of the disabled but said that less than 7 percent of the so-called welfare programs targeted for reductions include benefits for the disabled.

He also criticized national social programs as being inherently inefficient and corrupt, and said funding for the "genuinely disabled" could be found by reducing benefits for the able-bodied poor and children with marginal learning difficulties.

"I would rather eliminate SSI payments to children who are clearly at the margin of being able to learn and are literally being induced now to prove they're dumb," he said during the two-hour meetings.

"Helping the genuinely disadvantaged is something I would like to spend more on and something I would like to restructure so that it is pro-family and pro-human being and not just a bureaucratic system."

Carol Hughes, the mother of a wheelchair-bound teen, asked Gingrich to support reauthorization of the U.S. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which she said saved her son from a bleak future three years ago by providing him enough support to join a regular classroom.

"Jonathan doesn't want to be a hot-house plant. He wants to be a contributor and he has a lot to give," Mrs. Hughes said in an impassioned address.

"If children with disabilities get a regular education alongside their peers, then they will be productive and be paying taxes rather than being a drain on society."

While the 51-year-old Georgia Republican declined to commit himself to

specific programs without first reviewing the details, he promised to meet parents of disabled children to discuss government plans in detail next April or May.

"I'm prepared to look at everybody who has a genuine challenge, a genuine disability whether it be physical or mental. I'm prepared to work with every group of parents who care about those kinds of problems," Gingrich said.

But he added: "What will happen is that they're going to parade out in the national news media five people with genuine disabilities in order to protect 100,000 people who aren't in that kind of situation."

Gingrich told the audience, which greeted many of his remarks with enthusiastic applause, that national "blanket" guidelines for the handicapped and disabled are "an inherently- by definition- dumb use of resources."

"If you were to say to me, let's have a national blanket law that you have to have wheelchair access to every building, including some that are extraordinarily expensive to have to go back and retrofit," he said, "let's take the most difficult retrofit cases, give them a waiver, take the billions of dollars you save and put them into directly helping people with disabilities in a more intelligent way."

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