

MEMORANDUM TO SENATOR DOLE

DA: June 23, 1995
FR: Alec Vachon 
RE: ARTICLE FOR WASHINGTON POST SUPPLEMENT ON ADA

You agreed to contribute a short article to a Washington Post supplement on ADA (5th anniversary is July 26, 1995) sponsored by the National Organization on Disability. Brock Brower, a former speechwriter for Dick Thornburgh, is editing the supplement. His invitation to you is attached.

The article is principally directed to people with disabilities. It makes two points: (1) that debate about ADA is healthy--apropos of some of your recent comments; and (2) that we are making real progress in improving the lives of people with disabilities.

~~DO YOU APPROVE THE ATTACHED ARTICLE?~~

YES _____ NO _____

"PROMISES TO KEEP--DISABILITY POLICY PAST AND FUTURE"

As we approach the fifth birthday of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the future has never been brighter for people with disabilities. As a nation, we are increasingly committed to an accessible society--not only our buildings and our environment, but our hearts and minds as well.

ADA is an important part of our nation's commitment to the full participation of people with disabilities. I know many in the disability community are worried about criticism of ADA. There have been some crazy stories in the press, but some fair concerns as well. In my view, thoughtful debate is always healthy--it means that people are paying attention. In 1973, Congress passed the Rehabilitation Act, which required that Federally funded programs be accessible. But for many years little happened. No one can say that's the case with ADA.

Let us remember ADA asks something of most Americans--usually not a lot, but sometimes a great deal. We should expect questions and concerns will be raised. We must make it our job to make ADA work for both people with and without disabilities.

A quick tour of disability policy past and future will show how far we have come, and the distance we have yet to go.

First Senate Speech

Twenty-six years ago, I was elected to the U.S. Senate. After several months of careful thought, on April 14, 1969, I rose on the Senate floor to give my first speech. I spoke not just about disability policy, but as a person with a disability.

During World War II, on another April 14th, I joined the disability community.

I talked about values in disability policy--of independence, dignity, and security. And how society had shut out people with disabilities: "As a minority, [people with disabilities have] always known exclusion--maybe not exclusion from the front of the bus, but perhaps from even climbing aboard it; maybe not exclusion from pursuing advanced education, but perhaps from experiencing any formal education; maybe not exclusion from day-to-day life itself, but perhaps from an adequate opportunity to develop and contribute to his or her fullest capacity."

Big Changes--and New Issues

Since that first speech, there have been big changes. Congress has passed over a dozen laws to help promote the full participation of people with disabilities--culminating with ADA.

But many gains have come from the hard work of people with disabilities themselves. Today, across America there are hundreds of independent living centers and advocacy groups serving people with disabilities.

But the issues are changing, and are, in some ways, tougher. For example, this year marks the 20th anniversary of the Federal special education law--the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. It was needed, and I was proud to vote for it. It was unconscionable that thousands of children with disabilities were barred at the schoolhouse door.

Although access in education remains a fundamental issue,

new and more complicated issues often dominate the debate--school violence, competing demands on school budgets, and even allegations that students are mislabeled as disabled for financial or other reasons. Such complex problems often require careful analyses and good data to address them.

Unemployment among people with disabilities remains a big problem. Despite billions spent by the Federal government over the past decade, the job outlook for many has not improved, and is maybe even worse. In my first Senate speech I also said, "We in America are far from the half-way point of assuring that every [person with a disability] can become as active and useful as his abilities will allow." I believe we will reach that point only when employment among the disabled is at least half that of people without disabilities.

The Promise of Technology

Perhaps the most exciting avenue for progress is technology. On June 15, the Senate passed a sweeping telecommunications bill that will deregulate markets and spur innovation. We did not forget people with disabilities. We asked that all equipment and services consider the needs of those with disabilities. In my view, no group may benefit more from this legislation.

Disability Future

The poet Archibald MacLeish once wrote, "America was always promises." There is still much work to be done, but never have America's promises been within closer reach for people with disabilities.

3201 C Sutton Place, N.W.
Washington. D.C. 20016

March 6, 1995

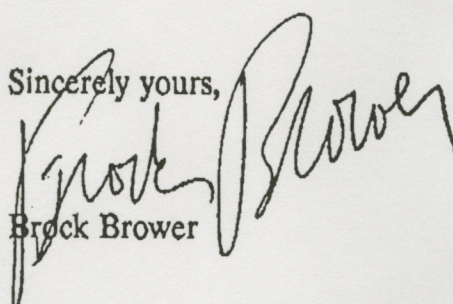
Dear Senator Dole:

I have been asked by the Washington Post to edit a supplement on the Americans with Disabilities Act, to be published in June before the fifth anniversary of that law, and this is to invite you to contribute an article of 600 words on the future course of the ADA.

I look forward to hearing your present views on the ADA, since you were one of the original sponsors of the legislation. The deadline for final copy is May 1, 1995. Please call upon me, either personally or through Dr. Alexander Vachon, if you wish any further information about this undertaking.

I am grateful for any consideration you can give this request, and remain,

Sincerely yours,



Brock Brower

Senator Robert Dole
141 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510



TELECOPIER TRANSMITTAL

DATE: 6/23/95

TO: Brook Brower

Fax: 775-3190

FROM: Alexander Vachon

Office of Senator Bob Dole
141 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

(202) 224-6521

NUMBER OF PAGES TO FOLLOW: 3

SUBJ: _____