

*Journal of
Rehabilitation*

October/November/December 1983



Weicker Addresses Conference

The Senator's Complete Text on Page 9

Weicker Headlines '83 NRA Conference

The Text of His Message

[Senator Lowell P. Weicker, Jr., of Connecticut, delivered a stirring address at the 1983 NRA National Conference at the Sheraton-Boston on Monday, August 15, 1983, following the presentation of the NRA Legislative Award to him by Jack Duncan, NRA General Counsel. Following is the complete text of his speech. Bold face type for emphasis has been added by the Journal of Rehabilitation editor]

It's a very great pleasure for me to join you this afternoon in Boston, one of my favorite cities and one that has long been the vanguard of the rehabilitation movement. It is my understanding that Boston has the distinction, along with Berkeley, of pioneering the first independent living centers in the United States.

When we talk about pioneers in political advocacy by and for handicapped Americans, we cannot fail to talk about the National Rehabilitation Association (NRA). I want to thank NRA President Marvin Spears for inviting me to take part in your convention today and General Counsel Jack Duncan for working out the logistics. And thanks to each and every



one of you for honoring me with your Legislative Service Award. I am well aware that the legislative victories of the last few years were not the work of a single Senator. Far from it. To begin with, they owe a great debt to the firm foundation laid by earlier exponents of this movement. Before I was born, the NRA was already on the front lines, fighting for a consistent and compassionate Federal response to the very real needs of disabled Americans for education and rehabilitation. For far too long our Bill of Rights, the pursuit of happiness referred to in our Declaration of Independence, and the opportunities opened up by public education were not deemed to apply to our handicapped citizens. American socie-

ty itself was in need of rehabilitation. It still is. As a recent article in *Scientific American* notes in its discussion of the independent-living movement, "the pathology is not in the individual, as the medical model would suggest, but rather in the physical, social, political, and economic environment that has...limited the choices available to people with disabilities." It took great courage and tenacity to convince Congress and the executive branch to break new legislative ground on their behalf. But it happened. The first nonmilitary vocational rehabilitation legislation, commonly known as the Smith-Fess Act, became law on June 2, 1920. Major revisions were adopted in 1943 and in 1954. Then came the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, a total legislative revamping of the Federal-state rehabilitation program. During 62 years of existence, the vocational rehabilitation program has developed into a national network of services which has successfully rehabilitated 6.4 million disabled Americans. In 1982 alone, it is estimated that some 225,000 people were rehabilitated, of which 129,000, or 57 percent, were severely disabled. Whether we are talking about vocational rehabilitation or special education or the removal of architectural barriers, it must be recognized that every one of these achievements has taken time and hard work on the part of disabled Americans and their advocates.

The task that fell to those of us carrying the fight in the 80s was dictated by the political dynamic of our day, one construed by many in this Administration to be as time of tearing down. Thus, we who believe in these programs have been cast as preservationists first, and pioneers second. Out of necessity, ours has been a holding action rather than a gaining of ground. And the evidence of the last 2½ years is testimony to the fact that our defensive line did, in fact, hold.

First came the proposals to block grant -- i.e., repeal -- all the major legislative initiatives serving the handicapped, and cut their budgets by 25 percent. Then came the contemplated regulatory rewrites of special education and building access requirements, followed by further rounds of proposed budget cuts. But, in large measure, these proposals failed to become law. Why? Because the disabled people in this country and their advocates shattered a long-held cliché that they did not comprise a political constituency, or at least not a coherent one. It was assumed that in the rough and tumble world of Reaganomics they could not hold their own as a voting block or as advocates for their cause. But that assumption was blown to bits in the budget and policy deliberations of 1981, 1982, and again in 1983.



Senator Weicker addresses the NRA Conference

I've said this before but it bears repeating: I would be hard pressed to name another group within the human services spectrum which has not only survived the policies of this Administration but also defeated them as consistently and as convincingly as has the disabled community. What is the secret to its success? I believe it to be good old-fashioned political legwork -- long hours of letter-writing and lobbying, testifying before committees and buttonholing legislators one-on-one.

Tomorrow's victories will require more of the same. The article by Marvin Spears in the June issue of your **Journal of Rehabilitation** was aptly entitled "On Political Action -- High Gear" for no other gear will do. No longer can we be satisfied with simply securing the status quo. The time has come to build on the legislative foundation, to strengthen and perfect the laws and institutions disabled Americans look to in order to increase their capacities for self-reliance.

Two bills which I originated and which passed the Senate this summer attempt to do just that. One is the Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1983, S.1341. In addition to extending the life of the discretionary programs under the Act of three years, the legislation expands the age range of children served. Provisions are made for intervention beginning at birth under the preschool incentive program. Post-secondary programs are broadened to include all disabilities. S.1341 establishes a new demonstration activity dealing with the critical transition from school to employment and emphasizes the need to train parents to participate in their children's special education. Federal data collection and evaluation responsibilities are strengthened by it and provisions for reporting to Congress are improved. S.1341 also increases the 1984 funding ceiling for Public Law 94-142 basic state grants by about \$54 million.

The companion piece of legislation which may be of more direct interest to the NRA is S.1340, the Rehabilitation Amendments of 1983. The focus of these amendments is on continuing and improving services to the individual handicapped client. The basic state grant program providing vocational rehabilitation services to nearly one million disabled Americans annually is a crucial Federal responsibility. S.1340 provides for a three-year extension of this program at

authorized funding levels to account for inflation. The bill provides for a new and independent role for client assistance programs, mandating that they be independent of service providers in every state. The bill gives the National Council on the Handicapped, the Federal government's own established voice for handicapped persons, an expanded role and greater independence in reviewing and evaluating all policies, programs and activities within the executive branch and the Congress that concern disabled citizens. Other client-centered provisions include training rehabilitation counselors in the provisions of Section 504 as they apply to the vocational rehabilitation client and new demonstration programs to help prepare mentally retarded persons and handicapped youth to enter the workforce. S.1340 provides the necessary authority to the National Institute of Handicapped Research to support education and training activities in research, thus enabling young people interested in research in the rehabilitation field to become qualified researchers. Also contained within this institute's reauthorization is the mandate that research and training centers focusing on pediatric rehabilitation and the unique rehabilitation needs of the Pacific Basin be established.



Earlier, NRA General Counsel Jack Duncan (left) presented the NRA Legislative Award to Senator Weicker. NRA President Marvin Sparks is on the right.

As I indicated earlier, both of these bills have passed the Senate. Two further hurdles remain: the House of Representatives and the White House. The House has its own set of Rehabilitation Amendments which OMB Director (David) Stockman has indicated would be in line for a Presidential veto. And back in June, Education Secretary Bell wrote to the Labor and Human Resources Committee, expressing Administration objections to most of the major provisions of the Senate bill. The Administration opposes the 5.3 percent increase in authorized state grant fundings as "excessive" and objects to required evaluations of Projects with Industry and Independent Living Center programs on the grounds that the Department "must have the administrative flexibility to assess (its) information needs and establish (its) evaluation priorities accordingly." Independent client assistance programs in all states are opposed as "an unnecessary expenditure of Federal

WEICKER continued page 79