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Miller's legislation recognizing disability advocate Ed Roberts passes House

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Legislation expresses support of national Ed Roberts Day in honor of the Bay Area advocate

WASHINGTON- Disability rights advocate Ed Roberts, renowned in the Bay Area, nationally and internationally, was honored by Congress today, thirty-three years after he and Rep. George Miller (D-Martinez) both advocated for civil rights for people with disabilities at protests in San Francisco.

Miller introduced H Res 1759 to declare the support of the House of Representatives of a national "Ed Roberts Day." The bill passed the House today by a vote of 386 to 8.

"Ed's lifetime of advocacy was critical in the struggle for civil rights for people with disabilities," Miller said after the resolution passed the House. "Ed's commitment remains a tremendous inspiration and I'm honored to sponsor this resolution recognizing his work.

"Having known Ed and being able to call him a friend was an honor and a gift for me - as was working with him back in 1977 at the protests in San Francisco," Miller continued, referring to the 1977 disabled rights protest, and the subsequent Congressional meetings, both held at the Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) building in San Francisco.

In addition to supporting the establishment of Ed Roberts Day, Miller's legislation acknowledges the accomplishments Roberts made in helping reduce barriers, increase access and improve lives for persons with disabilities.

Roberts, who passed away in 1995, was a long time disability rights advocate and California resident. After contracting polio as a teenager, Roberts relied on a respirator to breathe. He became the first student with significant disabilities to attend UC Berkeley, where he began advocacy efforts and helped found the campus' Physically Disabled Students Program.

In 1975, Roberts was named the Director of the California Department of Rehabilitation and played an important role in the sit-in at the HEW building in San Francisco. Protesters with disabilities had staged the sit-in to call for the implementation of new regulations which would establish certain rights for people with disabilities. Roberts and other advocates worked with Miller and then-Representative Phillip Burton to hold ad hoc Congressional hearings in the building to discuss the issue at hand – the implementation of a federal regulation that prohibited exclusion or discrimination in a federal program based solely on a handicap. Twenty years later, Miller's and Roberts' actions were noted in a compiled retrospective of the protests:

On April 15, 1977, Congressmen George Miller and Phillip Burton held an ad hoc meeting of the House Education and Labor Committee to take testimony from disability activists and HEW official Gene Eiderberg who floated a "separate but equal" trial balloon and 18 issues that would be reviewed before passage could occur. Ed Roberts, Director of the California Department of Rehabilitation, said that Califano's proposed changes were "a blueprint for segregation." Representative Miller said that as far as he was concerned "the goddamn thing is not negotiable."

Roberts later co-founded and became the President of the World Institute on Disability.

The full text of H Res 1759 is [here](#). The resolution was cosponsored by Representatives Sam Farr, Rush Holt, Barbara Lee and James Langevin.