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GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

2 Peachtree Street, N.W. Ste 8-210
 Atlanta, GA 30303-3142
www.gcdd.org



SPECIAL EDITION VOTERS GUIDE

Making A DIFFERENCE
www.gcdd.org

DEMOCRATIC & REPUBLICAN
 CHAIRS EMBRACE GEORGIA
 VOTERS WITH DISABILITIES



Karen Murphy, Atlanta voter with
 Rep. Calvin Smyre,
 Democratic Party of Georgia Chair,
 and Ralph Reed, (right)
 Georgia Republican Party Chair.

**Special Edition
 Voters Guide**

A quarterly magazine that focuses on disability issues in Georgia

Over 117,000 Georgians with disabilities want...



*Real Jobs
Real Homes
Real Learning Experiences
& Real Choices*

Our job is to build a powerful coalition of advocates, organizations and state agencies that will work together to make it happen.

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GOVERNOR'S
COUNCIL ON
DEVELOPMENTAL
DISABILITIES

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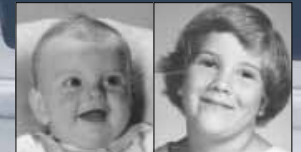
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*You should know
Wiley Nixon.
(pictured here)
Story page 22*



CAN YOU IDENTIFY THESE STATE OFFICIALS?
See page 23

HOW TO USE THE NEW VOTING MACHINES

Sign in. You will be given a small plastic voting card and directed to a voting booth. Insert the card face up into the slot on the machine to begin.

Starting with federal races, the names of candidates will appear on the screen. Select a candidate by touching the box with his/her name in it.

To change your choice, touch the box a second time then make a new selection.

Press NEXT to continue through the ballot, or PREVIOUS to go back. The machine will continue through the ballot. To skip a selection, press NEXT.

A summary screen will review all your choices. Use ▼ and ▲ to scroll up or down the summary page. If you skipped a vote, it will appear in red.

To change your vote, just touch the box on the screen when it appears.

When you have reviewed the ballot and have no additional changes, select CAST BALLOT.

Return the voter access card and be proud that you voted.

Adapted Voting:

If you are using an adapted system, you will be given earphones and a small, handheld keypad.

You will hear instructions and prompts through the headset, including a chance to identify each of the keys on the keypad. As the selections are read, you will be prompted to push a key to indicate your selection. All choices will be repeated and you will be given the chance to change your selection at any time before casting the ballot.

To schedule a demonstration or see an internet example of the new voting machines, contact Georgia Counts at 404-463-3438 / www.georgiacounts.com

BE PREPARED!

Knowing the rules makes voting easier

Election Day is Nov. 5, so there's not much time to get registered, get informed and get to the polls. Following is a general round up of the deadlines, requirements and processes involved in exercising your right to vote.

**GENERAL ELECTION
REGISTRATION
Deadline: Oct. 7, 2002
DON'T FORGET TO VOTE!
Nov. 5 - General Election**

Register!

To register to vote in the state of Georgia, you must be:

- A United States citizen
- A legal resident of Georgia and the county in which you wish to vote
- At least 18 years old by Election Day

You may not register to vote if you are currently serving a sentence for a felony conviction or have been determined by a judge to be mentally incompetent.

Three ways to register

1) Registration forms can be found at the following locations: county board of registrars' or election offices, public libraries, public assistance offices, schools and other government offices.

2) You can register when you renew or apply for your drivers' license or identification card.

3) To request a voter registration form, call your county registrar or contact the Georgia Office of the Secretary of State at (404) 656-2881, e-mail sosweb@sos.state.ga.us or go online to www.sos.state.ga.us/elections.

You will receive your voter registration card by mail soon after you register. Check it for accuracy and to determine your voting districts. If you do not receive your registration card at least two weeks before the election, call your county registrar's office.

Research!

It helps to decide in advance how you will vote. You can obtain a sample ballot at your local library or county registrar's office. You may bring your own marked up ballot or list of selected candidates into the voting booth with you.

Transportation

If you need a ride to the polls, try to request it before Election Day. Ask a friend or neighbor if you can go with him/her. Or, contact your county registrar's office, local candidates, political party or non-profit organizations such as the AARP, League of Women Voters or the NAACP. Whoever provides you with services should also be able to provide you with transportation to the polls.

At the poll

Your polling place is open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. The location is listed on your voting precinct card. Note: Due to redistricting, your polling place might have changed, and you might be in a new district. Verify your polling location before you go to the polls. For assistance or information on your voting districts, visit the SOS Web site.

Bring identification

Complete a voter's certificate with your name and residence address. In primary elections, you are asked to choose either a Democratic or Republican ballot. However, in the General Election you will vote for all candidates with a single ballot. Poll officers will check the precinct list for your name and issue you a control card for the voting machine.

In the voting booth

On Nov. 5, Georgia will introduce a new touch-screen system statewide. For an online demonstration of the new electronic voting equipment, go to:

www.georgiacounts.com

Vote!

You will be asked to choose candidates for a number of races. You are not required to vote in every race, although the system will remind you that you have not cast a vote. Poll officers are available for assistance.

If you have any questions, stay in the voting booth and call for help.

Voting assistance

A voter who cannot read or who has a disability may obtain voter assistance from family members or caregivers. For more information on voter assistance, see the SOS Web site.

From 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., voters who are 75 years of age or older or who are physically disabled may request to vote immediately without waiting in line.

Children under the age of 18 may accompany a parent into the voting booth.

Absentee ballot

You may vote by absentee ballot if: you will be away from your precinct from 7 a.m. until 7 p.m. on Election Day, are at least 75 years old, have a physical disability which prevents you from voting in person, are the constant caregiver of a person with a disability, observing a religious holiday, on duty in the precinct protecting public safety or you are an election official.

Apply to the county registrar in person, by mail or fax, between seven and 180 days before the election. Provide an address to which the ballot is to be mailed; the reason for voting by absentee ballot; sufficient information to identify you as a voter and the election in which you wish to vote.

Questions?

For detailed information about polling locations, candidates, procedures for voting and elected officials' duties, contact your county registrar or the Georgia Office of the Secretary of State at (404) 656-2881 or (800) 551-8029 (TDD) or online at www.sos.state.ga.us/elections.

(See Resources, p. 22, for more information.)

NEED HELP? WHOM TO CALL?

Plan ahead for smooth voting on Election Day

How will I get to the polls?

Ask a neighbor who is voting. Many organizations provide rides. Call your local service provider, political party offices, candidates, the League of Women Voters or your county registrar. Let them know if you need accessible transportation. If an organization offers rides, that commitment should include accessible vehicles.

What if I have problems voting?

Know the phone numbers of your county registrar's office and the Secretary of State's office. You can get that information in advance from the Secretary of State at (888) 265-1115.

VOTING CHECKLIST

SEPTEMBER

- 17 Special Election, if needed
- 28 **Quality of Life Candidates Forum**
Macon College www.qualityoflifevoter.org

OCTOBER

- 1 - 31 Attend public forums to hear candidates
- 1 - 31 Contact at least one candidate to express your concerns via · e-mail · phone · letter · face-to-face contact
- 7 LAST DAY to register to vote in the General Election
- 8 QOL Voters Forum in DeKalb County: Maloof Auditorium, 1300 Commerce Dr. Decatur Sonia Kuniaansky (404) 508-7796
- 15 QOL Voters Forum, at Warner Robbins: Middle Georgia Technical College, contact Lelia Anderson, (478) 542-2268 or landerson@hcb.net
- 20 Make sure your voter registration card has arrived. *Check it for accuracy and correct address.*
- 24 QOL Voters Forum in Monroe County: Carver Middle School. Contact Teri Womack at (770) 267-6594 or teri@walkerchamber.org
- 28 Last Day to request your absentee ballot
NOTE: Absentee ballots must be signed and received by the county board of registrars' office on or before Election Day!
- 29 Call to arrange transportation to your voting precinct.

NOVEMBER

- 1 - 5 Continue to attend candidates' forums
- 1 Obtain sample ballot from your county registrar or library. Check your voter registration card to identify in which district races you will vote.
- 4 Prepare notes to take to voting precinct.
- 5 **ELECTION DAY
DON'T FORGET YOUR
IDENTIFICATION & VOTE!!**
- 11 Veterans Day
- 26 General Runoff **VOTE!**

JANUARY 2003

- 13 Georgia General Assembly opens; Swearing in of newly elected officials

MARCH 2003

- 13 Developmental Disabilities Day at the Capitol

KNOW THE ISSUES

Disability concerns for 2002 elections

In the last decade, disability advocacy has made great strides in education, community life and services, but the issues still boil down to quality of life. Individuals still wait for service waivers, students still wait to be treated equally, potential employees wait for good jobs and families need help caring for their loved ones.

By publicizing a political agenda and informing candidates and elected officials know that they vote, the disability community will be seen as a serious constituency to be supported. Legislation and funding (appropriations) are critical means to solutions.

Know the issues

To find out how your candidates will address these concerns, you must be prepared to raise questions at forums, discuss the issues and share them with like-minded voters.

- **Unlock the Waiting Lists!** More than 11,000 Georgians with disabilities and elderly are on waiting lists for home- and community-based services (HCBS). Medicaid waivers and supports enable people to choose how and where to live.
- **Fair wages, better training and better provider services:** Improved training, increased wages, better job opportunities and service quality monitoring are needed to improve care and support services. Low wages and poor training lead to staff shortages and disruptions in critical services. These services enable people to live and independently.
- **Inclusive education for children:** 178,175 children are enrolled in special education in Georgia, but only 56 percent graduate from high school. Children with disabilities need the appropriate services and supports to succeed in the regular classroom and participate in the state's accountability and assessment system.
- **Reauthorize IDEA:** The reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act should be renewed with a commitment to

To find out how your candidates will address these concerns, be prepared to raise questions at forums, discuss the issues and share them with like-minded voters.

2003 Disability Legislative Agenda

1. Olmstead implementation & waiting lists for home- and community-based services.
2. Accessible transportation.
3. Fair wages for direct service staff.
4. Affordable, accessible and safe housing.
5. Inclusive education for children.
6. Medicaid buy-in for employed people with disabilities.

assure educational success that prepares students for life.

- **School-to-life transitions:** High school students with disabilities need programs and plans to integrate successfully to adult life.
- **Transportation:** Accessible, flexible, and services are needed across Georgia.
- **More jobs and better choices:** 78 % of Americans with disabilities are unemployed or underemployed (*National Organization on Disability*). The Department of Labor needs to strengthen employer incentives and programs to help people with disabilities obtain and maintain jobs with livable wages.
- **Medicaid buy-in:** A Medicaid Buy-in program would allow people to work and pay a premium to keep Medicaid Health Insurance, instead of staying unemployed to avoid losing benefits.
- **Supports to work and live independently:** A state Medicaid Plan Personal Care Option is needed to enable people with disabilities to enter or re-enter the work force and live independently.
- **Housing:** Affordable, accessible and safe housing is a fundamental need across Georgia, but especially in metro areas, where housing is scarce for people with disabilities and mental illness.
- **Increase per capita spending:** Georgia ranks 50th, in total per capita spending for the number of people served in all mental retardation community residential services.

It is important to let elected officials and those who want the disability vote know the issues that are important to the disability community.

Imperial Health Care resident Margaret Purdue has been an active voter for many years and continues to vote with assistance from Imperial. She is hoping for a specialized wheelchair, currently not provided by Medicaid to people in nursing facilities.



QUALITY OF LIFE PROJECT

By Eden Jackson Landow

Public forums inform candidates

Energizing voters to press candidates on the issues affecting the disability community is part of the umbrella mission of the Quality of Life Voter Education Project.

"The Quality of Life Forum effectively brought disability and aging issues to the 1998 gubernatorial agenda, and we think today's forum has done the same for the 2002 campaign," says Project Manager Dawn Randolph.

Following commitments made to forum attendees in the 1998 election cycle, Gov. Roy Barnes established the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Home- and Community-Based Services (HCBS), resulting in increased funding for waivers and services.

"This election year, we are extending the Project and Forum to address quality of life issues for all disenfranchised and under-served Georgians," adds Randolph.

In addition to the disability and aging communities, the target audiences for this year's QOL campaign include ethnic and racial minority group members, women and girls and individuals needing access to comprehensive health care.

"Our intent is to get more people out this time to vote, the

rich and the poor, the involved and the disenfranchised, the educated and the uneducated. We're trying to engage all of the people in the voting process and election activities this year," says Delois Scott, executive director, Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network.

"By encapsulating the principles of social justice that our nation was founded on, we will be able to reach more Georgians to carry the message of involvement - and that involvement does translate into improved quality of life for all Georgians," adds Randolph.

Quality of Life Forum 2002

On Sept. 28, about 500 citizens heard about how candidates for governor and lieutenant governor plan to address QOL issues. Attendees asked pointed questions and shared personal stories detailing how public policy decisions impact their lives. Candidates for Labor Commissioner, School Superintendent and Insurance Commissioner were invited to respond to the issues in writing. Responses are posted on the Web site and in the Quality of Life Voters Guide.

Get out the vote drive

Every vote counts in making a difference in the lives of Georgians. The QOL will provide incentives and technical assistance for agencies and organizations to implement voter registration drives, phone campaigns, voter education and transportation to the polls.

15 Local candidate forums

Organizing and attending local forums are effective in bringing disability issues to the political agenda of your candidates. Know the issues that impact your family's quality of life and pose them to the candidates through meetings, letters, calls and forums.

"We are providing at least 15 mini-grants at \$1,000 each so that events will have financial and technical support required to be successful. An easy-to-use candidate forum planning guide is available on the Web site," Randolph says.

Voters Guide

The project developed a guide to the issues, which include access to health care, economic sustainability, fair wages for direct service providers and independence for people with disabilities. The guide, including fact sheets and statements on electoral candidates' positions on the issues, is available at the QOL Web site and at various events.

Attend a forum, ask informed questions

It's important to know the issues, and be prepared to ask probing questions, such as these:

FUNDING ... Will you help restore funding in 2003 to provide adequate health care, education, employment and housing for persons with disabilities, their families and caregivers?

LIVING SUPPORT ... What would you do to assure access to HCBS for Georgians with and without Medicaid? What can be done to increase compensation for service providers and caregivers and to retain good caregivers?

EDUCATION ... How would you ensure that all children have access to education in the most inclusive environment possible, and that assessment and accountability includes students with disabilities?

EMPLOYMENT ... Would you support the cost of the Medicaid buy-in program in future budgets, to enable people with disabilities to work and protect benefits?

SAFE, QUALITY CARE ... Would you support more stringent reporting of nursing and personal home deaths to investigate signs of neglect or abuse?

HOUSING ... What initiatives and efforts will you promote to increase affordable, accessible and safe housing for all citizens?

QOL candidate forums are scheduled for Forsyth/Dawson/Lumpkin, Hall, Fulton (9/24), DeKalb (10/8), Cobb, Bainbridge, Douglas and Houston counties. For dates and details, visit the QOL Web site: www.qualityoflifevoter.org/forums/foschedules.html

Contact The Quality of Life Voter Education Project for info, grants and voters guide. Dawn Randolph (678) 471-3804; cdrandolph@aol.com, or log onto www.qualityoflifevoter.org



Get Out the Vote!

By Dawn Randolph, Quality of Life Forum

Getting everyone to the polls can make a difference

To be taken seriously, you must first be heard. Only about 35 percent of eligible voters with disabilities cast ballots in Georgia in 2000. Low voter turnout weakens our political voice.

The 2002 elections are our chance to turn up the volume and make sure that policymakers know the disability community counts.

Get Out the Vote (GOTV) activities can make the difference on Election Day. The object is simple — contact every voter you know and encourage them to vote. You can spearhead a corps of volunteers and mount a GOTV campaign, or you can quietly work within your own circles to raise awareness about the importance of the vote.

The goal is for each person to do something that could make a difference at the polls.

If you launch a campaign, recruit volunteers to boost its reach and success. With phone banks, direct mail, door-to-door canvassing and transportation to the polls, you can increase voter turnout in your area.

Prioritize your GOTV program. It's better to do one activity well than to scatter your efforts among many projects. Nursing home residents are often overlooked at election time, so consider concentrating your efforts at a local institution.



GOTV phone calls

Studies show the most effective voter turnout program is the Get-Out-The-Vote phone call, reminding voters to vote.

GOTV mailings

A simple postcard mailed to an organization's members urging them to vote has significant impact. The easiest method is to send a pre-printed reminder postcard with the date and hours of the polling places about 10 days before the election.

“Don't forget to contact these organizations in advance and tell them how to access wheelchair-lift vans.”

You can also e-mail all your friends, reminding them to register by Oct. 7 and vote Nov. 5! Tell them why it is important they and their family vote this year.

Transportation to the polls

No one should be prevented from voting because they lack transportation to the polls. The most effective way to get voters to their polling station is to make sure they have suitable transportation.

The National Voter Registration Act, or the “Motor Voter” law, is designed to reduce barriers to voting, making it easier to register. Federal and state funded service agencies must provide voter registration and coordinate transportation to the polls for consumers and family members.

For rides to the polls, tap existing resources. The easiest solution is to ask a neighbor. Candidates for local, state and national office, county political parties, the League of Women Voters and service centers for seniors and people with disabilities typically provide transportation to the polls. Don't forget to contact these organizations in advance and tell them how to access wheelchair-lift vans.



Recipe for a successful GOTV campaign

Find volunteers, delegate and coordinate!

- Local election law education
- Voting-machine demonstrations
- Absentee balloting
- Candidates Forum
- List development & maintenance
- Direct mail
- Telephone campaigns
- Transportation
- Voting assistance

Absentee ballot

If you know that you cannot get to the polls on Election Day, call your county registrar or the Secretary of State's office for an absentee ballot, which must be received by the registrar on or before Election Day. You may also vote at your county office 12 or more days before the election.

GOTV checklist

Start with little things... Make sure you, your family members and friends register on time to vote, form opinions about the candidates and talk to neighbors about the importance of informed voting.

Choose your own level of involvement, but remember, a successful campaign has four major components:

- GOTV phone calls
- Mailings
- Transportation to the polls
- Absentee voter assistance

If everyone does just a little bit, we could make 2002 a record voting turnout in Georgia!

Contact Grace Fricks at (706)348-6609 or fricks@alltel.net; or Dawn Randolph at (678) 471-3804 or cdrandolph@aol.com



Get Out the Vote!

Growing a GOTV phone tree

Branching out increases voter participation and visibility

Imagine a campaign where candidates discuss disability issues and make commitments to the disability community because they're an important constituency. It can happen, but not until more people with disabilities understand the importance of their voices and go to the polls.

American Alliance of People with Disabilities (AAPD) encourages citizens to recruit agencies and organizations to sponsor a volunteer Get Out the Vote (GOTV) effort. Without encouragement, many Georgians will miss this important democratic right.

Increase voter participation

Nonprofit service providers can conduct nonpartisan GOTV campaigns to increase voter participation. A call from a familiar service provider carries credibility, and potential voters will know the caller is someone they can trust.

Recruiting efforts should stress that voter turnout among people with disabilities is dismally low. A GOTV campaign can increase voter turnout and make a difference in their clients' lives. It is a non-partisan effort that does not endorse candidates.

“Imagine a campaign where candidates discuss disability issues and make commitments to the disability community because they're an important constituency”

Work the list

Successful campaigns begin with a good list of names, which should be current and compiled in an easy-to-change database. As the campaign develops, prospective voters should be updated and rated according to: “regular voter,” “needs a ride or assistance,” etc. Recruit frequent voters to help with the effort.

Begin calling nonvoters who are most likely not registered prior to the

registration deadline and encourage them to register.

Workers should be prepared to answer questions regarding the voting process. If possible, schedule volunteer training with the new voting machines so callers will be able to describe them to voters. (Contact Secretary of State's office).

Prepare the Callers

Anticipate questions and prepare volunteers with training materials and an answer guide such as:

- Scripts, which should be rehearsed (on the right);
- Instructions describing how to record information;
- Requisition forms to record who needs what services; and
- Polling information, including how and where to register, absentee voting rules and deadlines, laws that concern voting and people with disabilities, where to vote, how to get there and physical accessibility.

Make the calls

The phone campaign should begin in September. Determine if voters are registered, vote by absentee ballot, know the poll location, informed about voting laws and voting machines and if they have transportation.

A second round seven to 10 days before Election Day should determine whether the voter still intends to vote, if they need assistance getting to the polls and what time of day they plan to vote.

Plans for voter assistance should be confirmed and assigned to volunteers.

On Election Day, call registered voters and remind them. Callers and

coordinators must communicate regarding transportation and other needs so unexpected problems can be handled quickly.

For materials or information on AAPD's Disability Vote Project, call (202)955-6114 (V/TTY) or visit www.aapd.com

or the League of Women Voters at www.lwv.org or (404)874-7352

TALKING TIPS

Be Prepared ... follow up.

Hello, my name is *(your name)* and I am a volunteer for the *(name of the sponsoring agency)* Get Out The Vote Project.

Would you like to see funding for family support programs or more vigorous enforcement of the ADA? *(or substitute with a particular issue of concern to the agency's clients)*

(Wait for affirmative response)

I am calling to remind you the election is Tuesday, Nov. 5.

Do you plan to vote on Election Day?

We want every politician to know that people with disabilities vote. Do you have anyone in your home who is eligible to vote but not registered *(encourage voting)*

This election addresses issues that affect you and your life such as: *(list several issues of importance to the sponsoring agency's clients)* Do you wish to vote by absentee ballot or at the polls?

Will you need a ride to the polls or assistance voting?

Do you know where you go to vote? *(Give them the information if they don't have it)*

Thank you for your time. Please don't forget to vote.

Be prepared to offer assistance or information, make sure to follow up.



SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL CANDIDATE

By Anne Osborne with Jody Steinberg

Campaign season is ripe for influencing policies

“Advocacy is about building relationships, and what a great time to do it, during a campaign season,” says outgoing State Senator Mike Polak (D-Atlanta).

“I am forever indebted to those volunteers that helped me in my political campaigns when I needed it the most.” “Many were advocates for the causes we mutually fought for, [but] they became my friends. I would do anything in my power to help them,” he adds.

Want to win the loyalty of elected officials? Help them get elected.

Volunteer for change

Candidates need your time, talents, financial contributions and personal support to help get their message and ideas out to the voting public.

By working on a campaign, people with disabilities affirm confidence in the candidate who represents their interests. Volunteers get to know the candidate and educate him or her about the issues and concerns for which he or she will eventually make policy decisions.

“The people who volunteered on my campaign definitely give me sensitivity to the challenges they face daily,”

adds Polak, who regularly attended Developmental Disabilities Day at the Capitol. His volunteers, including those in the disability community, stayed in touch after the elections.

“When they would call me to discuss issues, I would definitely be proactive in legislation.”

Leave lasting impressions

“My volunteers walked with me door-to-door or canvassed for me. They took notes so I could have more effective follow-up with the constituents,” says Rep. Bob Snelling (D-Douglasville), whose bid for state representative included knocking on almost 3,000 doors. “They also manned the phone banks, reminding people to go to the polls and vote.”

Supporting a candidate does not mean that you have to canvass a neighborhood or log time at campaign headquarters. Polak recalls, by name, campaign volunteers with disabilities who made phone calls or sent postcards from their homes.

Gain valuable skills

You may be able to assist in many different tasks, depending on your

skills; or you may even recruit and organize volunteers for the campaign.

Develop a relationship with the campaign volunteer coordinator, who should know what you are doing. Volunteers should arrive prepared to do their jobs, use their volunteer time productively and avoid speaking directly to the issues.

The best way to be effective is to choose a specific area to help.

Whether you canvass (*go door-to-door*) in your own neighborhood, work a booth at a fair or run the phone banks or a team of canvassers. Make sure you track your activities so later on you can measure election results and their effectiveness.

“Without volunteers, my campaign would not have been as successful, because there is no way I could have made so many contacts and phone calls, knocked on so many doors or written and mailed so many postcards,” Snelling adds.

Make sure you are available to Get Out the Vote on Election Day. Don’t forget to find out about where the campaign party will be on Election Night and to pat yourself on the back for all you have done – **Volunteers do make a difference!**



THE ULTIMATE ADVOCATE

By Jody Steinberg with Fabiola Armitage

Mom runs for school board to increase disability access

A contentious effort to get Gwinnett County Schools to build ramps for her son prompted a relative newcomer to the community to run for the school board.

Fabiola Armitage moved to Georgia two years ago with her five children, including Jason, who became quadriplegic after a soccer injury and now uses a wheelchair.

Jason’s disability forced Armitage to become an advocate for her son’s special educational needs from the beginning, but she didn’t anticipate the battles she would encounter with the Gwinnett County school system when she arrived.

“I realized that the only way to change anything in my son’s school system would be to position myself within,

“In order to change society’s treatment of people with disabilities, more of us need to join in and take action.”

rather than continue my advocacy from without. It wasn’t a desire to be politically involved that led me to run for Gwinnett County School Board. It is a desire to provide access to a decent and equal education for my son Jason, my four other children and all children whose voices are not being heard in the system. I also realize that in order to change society’s treatment of people with disabilities, more of us need to join in and take action,” Armitage says.

Sixth-grader Jason was placed in a seventh-grade classroom because his assigned class, scheduled in trailers, was not accessible. Because the Americans with Disabilities Act requires that all new buildings and renovations be accessible, Armitage deemed her son’s exclusion unacceptable and asked for a ramp to be built to his assigned classroom.

Armitage challenged the county for not building ramps to all of its 1,600 trailer classrooms. The resistance she met from her school principal and Gwinnett County superintendent, J. Alvin Wilbanks, who assert that modifications are cost-prohibitive, propelled the issue and the county into the media spotlight.

Wilbanks, whom media has called “no friend of special education in Gwinnett,” stopped Jason’s county-funded school transport the last week of the school year, citing the need for an additional restraint, which Armitage refused. Responding to the outrage, private citizens and elected officials chipped in to pay a private transport company to take Jason to school.

A member of the Georgia State Advisory Panel on Special Education, Armitage has worked on statewide awareness issues. But, like other parents across the state, she has encountered opposition from her local school system and the Office of Civil Rights on issues of program accessibility.

Armitage ran for a seat on the Gwinnett County Board of Education but was defeated in the primary election August 20. However, she believes that her campaign raised public awareness and support of special education.

“Too often we spend a lot of time commiserating with each other rather than taking action. Hopefully, we can channel this new public awareness into action when the next board elections take place in two years,” she says.

“Opportunities abound, if we decide to get involved in the political process. This can be done through running for office, but even more easily by simply making sure we cast our votes for candidates, who from personal experience are aware of the needs of people with disabilities. I urge everyone to go out and vote!” Armitage adds.



SUPPORT YOUR CANDIDATE & LEARN NEW SKILLS

It takes a lot of hard work and money to help a candidate win an election. You can help in many ways.

Volunteering is a great way to learn new skills, build your resumé and make contacts that can lead to paying jobs.

Many jobs are available according to the time and ability that volunteers have to offer. Volunteers can:

- Stuff and address mailers
- Answer telephones
- Display and distribute bumper stickers and yard signs
- Deliver flyers or sign postcards to endorse a candidate
- Contact voters on behalf of the candidate
- Attend and organize gatherings to meet the candidate
- Write letters to local media for a particular candidate or issue he or she supports or opposes
- Donate and raise funds for the candidate’s campaign
- Encourage everyone to vote.



LET EVERY VOTER COUNT

by Aileen Harris Miller

Poll access – the difference between life & choice

Anil Lewis saw the light on the importance of voting when he lost his sight.

Losing his sight to a retinal eye disorder at 25 years old created a political agenda for Lewis, who had never before considered the world through the eyes of people with disabilities.

Formerly a non-voting political sideler, Lewis became a passionate voting advocate after encountering barriers at the polling place, a familiar experience for voters with disabilities able to make it to the polls. The state ombudsman joined the ongoing push to extend voting rights to all qualified Georgians.

"I realized how important the vote is," he says. "It determines the people who are put in office. They draft the legislation and statutes that develop the policies that affect the public services that we [in the disabled community] depend on every day."

Before casting his vote, Lewis independently researches each candidate's stands on issues of direct concern to him, not relying on advertisements for information. But he had to depend on others to cast a ballot.

"Here I was a grown man, and I had to take my mother with me to the polls," he recalls.

In the 2000 election, 94,000 Georgia voters indicated no choice for president, prompting Secretary of State Cathy Cox to push for an updated uniform voting system. It also prompted Lewis to share his story.

In July 2001, Lewis testified in U.S. Senate hearings, shedding light on the difficulty people with disabilities have engaging in the voting process. He asked the legislators to consider what they would do if they encountered insurmountable barriers on their next visit to the polls.

"This may seem an exaggeration," he told the senators. "But when considering the ability for a person using a wheelchair to cast an independent, private ballot, steps may as well be a 10-foot vertical leap. Narrow doorways may as well be a 5-inch clearing. And for a blind person, printed ballots may as well be written in Swahili if he or she is expected to independently cast a vote."

Lewis' testimony did not go unheeded.

Making voting accessible

"Everywhere I went, there was Cathy Cox telling them what I wanted to hear — people with disabilities had the same rights," Lewis says. Cox stressed that any voting system the state implemented had to be accessible. Legislators took note. This year, the Georgia General

"The disability community launched a concerted effort to overcome obstacles to the voting process."

— Grossman

Assembly approved \$54 million to purchase an electronic touch-screen voting system suited for adaptive use, which will be in use in every precinct in the state beginning with the November General Election.

The new voting system is a precedent-setting feat, yet some people with disabilities still face challenges to voting. Even registering can prove arduous, especially for those who live in an institution, such as a nursing facility.

"In order to register, you need to have access to your identification and access to a previous address," says Sheryl Grossman, nursing facility transition outreach coordinator for disAbility LINK, an independent living center in Decatur.

"A lot of people in institutions don't have immediate access to these, which means advanced planning and forethought is necessary just to help residents register on time." For example,

picture identification takes several weeks to obtain. The individual often must appear in person to get the card, which is difficult for someone in a nursing facility with limited transportation assistance.

According to Secretary of State Division of Elections Director Linda Beazley, checks and balances exist to prevent voting abuses. A previous address at which the voter was registered is requested. However they can use the nursing home as either a residence or mailing address.

"Our office is committed to making sure that all Georgia voters have access to the polls and are allowed to exercise their constitutional right to choose our leaders," Beazley says.

Getting to the polls on Election Day or obtaining an absentee ballot also is problematic for nursing home residents, Grossman explains, but a dedicated corps of professionals and volunteers is working to alleviate the obstacles.

Volunteers reach out

"This year, the disability community launched a concerted effort to overcome obstacles to the voting process," says Grossman. "Volunteers are being recruited and deputized per county to assist absentee voters in nursing facilities."



Nursing home resident Addie Williams wants to go home. Her life depends on being able to vote, but she needs advocate assistance to make it happen.



Lewis told the U.S. Senate that Americans with disabilities want to vote independently.

ties and to get accessible vehicles and transport voters to the polls on Election Day. It takes a lot of time and effort, but it is well worth it when it comes to ensuring someone's right to vote."

Nursing home personnel may also help, assisting as many residents as necessary when federal candidates are on the ballot.

Voting for life

Decatur Healthcare nursing facility resident Addie Williams uses a wheelchair and requires assistance for the tasks of daily living. She has her own home, but she lost her Medicaid waiver and had to move to the nursing home when she needed more care than it could provide.

Now she is back on the list for a home care waiver while her family struggles to keep her house, as her income must pay for the nursing facility. Williams wanted to vote in the August primary, but had no transportation to the polls, no one to bring her an absentee ballot and no idea where to get assistance.

Bringing attention to the issues that affect the disabled community is key, Grossman advises, to bringing about initiatives such as increasing funding for Medicaid waivers so people like Addie Williams have the resources to live, function — and vote — independently.

"The voting process for the people whose lives depend on [the outcome] is very difficult, but not impossible," says Grossman.

"We encourage all voters to call our office if they have questions about the process or need special assistance," adds Beazley.

Now president of the National Federation of the Blind of Georgia and chairman of the board of the Disability

"...the issues boil down to quality of life" --Fricks

Law and Policy Center of Georgia in Atlanta, Lewis stresses the importance of voting to the disability community.

"One of the biggest challenges is to re-energize the population of people with disabilities who have been historically disenfranchised from voting," he says. "We have to re-interest the disabled community on how important the vote is, how it directly affects them."

Grace Fricks, president of Appalachian Community Enterprises in Cleveland, agrees that citizens with disabilities must see the link between voting and having their issues addressed.

"For the disability community, the

issues boil down to quality of life," Fricks says. "Without significant improvement in services and supports and the appropriations to fund them, Georgians with disabilities will continue to be relegated to the periphery of society with limited choices."

Fricks encourages everyone to learn the issues, discuss them with like-minded voters and raise them in public arenas such as candidate forums.

"By raising awareness of political concerns and letting candidates and elected officials know that we vote, the disability community will be taken as a serious constituency," Fricks says.

Write a letter to promote disability agenda

Individually-written letters are an effective way to communicate your support or concerns for a legislative issue to candidates and elected officials. Also, when alerted by a call or letter, elected officials often help people with disabilities clear administrative hurdles. Voting, communicating and writing letters are all important parts of your relationship with your elected government.

Rep: Jane Smith
Georgia House of Representatives
State Capitol
Atlanta, GA 30334

Dear Rep. Smith,

(introduce yourself and let them know you live in their precinct)

sample: My name is Alice I. Voter. I'm 36 years old and I have always lived here in Homerville, in your district.

(state your name and your situation, what type of services you need and why.)

sample: I was born with disabilities. I live in Peach State Nursing Facility, but this is not where I want to be. I used to live in a house, and I could go places in my wheelchair. I need help getting out of bed, washing and fixing meals. But I can do other things. If I had a Medicaid waiver for home services and could find a good home care provider, I could live in an apartment on my own and be much happier. My roommate at the hospital is only here because she couldn't get help to live at home safely. She had her own apartment and she misses it. We both want to choose how we live.

It is important that you understand how critical it is for people like me to have access to quality services. Please Unlock the Waiting Lists! by increasing funding for Medicaid waivers for services. Our lives depend on it.

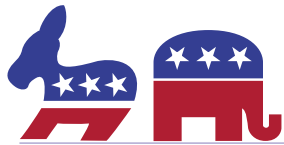
(ask for a response or action)

sample: Please tell me how you will help us if you are elected. My friends and I will vote for someone who believes in helping us live independently.

Thank you very much,
Alice I. Voter

(provide address and phone)
1234 Chestnut Street
Homerville, GA 32145
(912) 555-1212

For address information on candidates and elected officials, go to: www.dnet.org or www.vote-smart.org or Georgia House Public Information Office: (404) 656-5082 or (800) 282-5800.



JOIN THE PARTY

By Jody Steinberg

Democratic and Republican Party Chairs embrace Georgia voters with disabilities

Calvin Smyre is a career banker and steward of foundations. Ralph Reed, former fiery leader of the Christian Coalition, is an author and political consultant.

Smyre has spent decades as an elected politician, Reed, getting politicians elected.

Political Party: n – group of people who work together to effect political change through a common ideal of governance.

While Smyre's quiet demeanor belies his clout, Reed, an outspoken personality frequently seen and quoted in the media, is nationally lauded for his influence.

Smyre leads the Democrat Party of Georgia while Reed directs the Georgia Republican Party.

So, what do these opposites have in common? Each wholeheartedly embraces Georgia's diverse population, working to assure that their parties engage all citizens, including those with disabilities, in establishing policies. Both also maintain frenetic schedules, juggling professional, family, political and party responsibilities while redefining politics in Georgia.

Both agree passionately that party politics in Georgia are not just for a privileged few. They are for anyone willing to work for change, and people with disabilities have much to contribute. Bringing the agenda of the disabil-

“The single most important thing people can do to influence their government is get involved in political parties.”

— Rep. Calvin Smyre

ity community to the political realm is possible simply by joining a party and speaking up, say both Smyre and Reed.

Making A Difference

“The Georgia Republican Party works hard to provide access and opportunity to the disability community,” Reed says. “Members of the disability community can and do play a role in our efforts, from contacting elected officials to getting out the vote.” Disability advocates even introduce and promote legislation. Reed cites party member Tiffany Fleming, who successfully worked to pass a bill in the General Assembly requiring insurance companies to treat autism like other neurological disorders.

Democracy: n - government by the people, exercised directly or through elected representatives.

Pictured: Hillary Middleton, Athens voter with Smyre and Reed



Rep. Calvin Smyre Chairman Democratic Party of Georgia

Home: Columbus

Education: B.S. Business, Fort Valley State College

Profession: Banker: Executive Vice President, Corporate Affairs, Synovus Financial Corp.; Chairman & CEO, Synovus Foundation.

Political: Georgia State House of Representatives, District 136 (Columbus) 1974 - present; Elected at 26 as youngest member of the House; Exec. Comm., National Black Caucus; President, Georgia Assn. of Black Elected Officials; Democratic National Committee, 1984.

Appointments & Committees: Asst. Admin. Floor Leader & Floor Leader, 1983-1990; Chair, House Industrial Relations Comm., 1991-1993; University System Comm., 1993-present; Appropriations, Rules, Budget Responsibility Oversight Comm. & House Budget and Fiscal Affairs sub-committees.

Civic Activities: Board member: Medical College of Georgia Foundation, Atlanta University School of Social Work, Morehouse School of Medicine, Jack D. Hughston Foundation, and Fort Valley State University Foundation (Chair).

Recognition: 1980: 10 Best Georgia Legislators; 1985: National Legislator of the Year; Citizen of the Year, Columbus, twice.

Family: Divorced, one child

The mother of Connor, who has autism, Fleming is an activist for enriching the lives of people with autism. She and other citizens used political party ties, enlisting the help of Mark Burkhalter (R-Fulton) and Ben Harbin (R-Columbia) to co-sponsor House Bill 565, which strengthens insurance benefits for autism treatments.

“Their hard work paid off,” remarks Reed. Working through political connections, “one mother brought forward an issue that changed public policy.”

Smyre also believes in the power of one.

“I have always felt like we were put in this world to make a difference, and you can't do that on the sidelines. That's true in politics, it's true in life as well,” says Rep. Calvin Smyre (D-Columbus), Democratic chair.

Political influence begins locally. Identify important issues, such as the issues that affect the disability community, build coalitions and coalesce around them.

Smyre cites Decatur resident Eleanor Smith, who envisioned a world where new houses would be built with accessible features. She works the political process tirelessly to achieve her dream. Today, her Concrete Change organization works with builders to construct “visit-ABLE” homes across Georgia.

“Many issues of the disability community transcend partisan politics, but the single most important thing people can do to influence their government is get involved in political parties. Organizational influence on politicians makes public policy. You have to get involved,” Smyre says.

“When Governor Barnes appointed a bi-partisan Blue-Ribbon task force to study home-and community-based services (HCBS), he didn't have to look far for volunteers. In addition to professional experts, he already knew disability advocates who had been promoting the agenda all along through the Democratic party,” Smyre adds.

Unless candidates and elected officials have the opportunity to

continued next page



Ralph Reed Chairman Georgia Republican Party

Home: Duluth

Education: B.A. History, University of Georgia; Ph.D. American History, Emory University

Profession: Political strategist: Principal, Century Strategies; Author

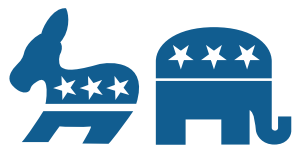
Political: Exec. Dir., College Republican National Comm. 1982-1984; Founder, Exec. Dir., Students for America; Exec Dir., Christian Coalition 1989-1997; consultant to over 25 congressional campaigns, including Sen. Jesse Helms and gubernatorial candidates in multiple states.

Civic Activities: Public Policy Award from the International Platform Association; Board of Directors of Support Technologies; Recognized for building inter-religious dialogue through Christian Coalition and broadening the legislative agenda of political conservatives to include social and welfare issues.

Recognition: Named: 50 future leaders under 40 by *Time*; 20 most influential leaders of the baby-boom generation by *Life*; Top 10 political newsmakers in the nation by *Newsweek*; Speaker, guest appearances on numerous national news talk shows; guest columnist in *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *National Review* and others; strong proponent of the influence of religion on politics.

Books: *Active Faith*; *Politically Incorrect*

Family: married, two children



JOIN THE PARTY

continued from previous page

learn the facts about an important issue, they cannot be expected to vote effectively or change systems that impact lives, both Reed and Smyre believe.

“All things start with networking,” explains Ed Thomas of Marietta. Thomas, who ran unsuccessfully his first time out this year in Cobb County for State House District 33, Post 2, joined the Cobb County Democratic Party and attended breakfasts, forums and party meetings for a year before his first bid for office.

“One person by themselves cannot do a lot, but working as part of a committee or a group, you are able to bring that human aspect to the issues. Education is primary, teaching other adults about disabilities. Being able to express your opinion to the community also is helpful,” he adds.

How policy is made

Political organizations such as the Republican, Democratic, Green, Libertarian, Reform and Independent parties involve everyday citizens to gather information and develop political platforms. Then, they select issues that represent their constituents and their theory of governance.

Citizens are encouraged to join the party that best articulates their philosophy. Involved party members are chosen as delegates to conventions where policy is decided. Sometimes, candidates are recruited by the party to run for office on the policy ideals of the party platform.

The competition between the parties assures that major issues are addressed. But for progressive, “special interests,” such as the issues confronting the disability community, to make it onto the political agenda, concerned citizens have to become involved.

“The competition forces each party to field the best candidates and put forward the most appealing agenda,” explains Reed. “Smaller parties make a difference by raising issues that the Democrats and Republicans might otherwise neglect.”

Think Global, Go Local

“Local parties and local politics are where the action is,” continues Reed. “It is actually easier to influence public policy the closer you are to elected officials. Most issues, like education, transportation and the environment are dealt with at the local level. Even Medicare, Medicaid and welfare reform ultimately are state issues, given the increasing flexibility granted to states within these federal programs.”

It’s a myth that influencing public policy is only for the rich and powerful. In reality, many conversations at conventions, party dinners and political events are mini-training sessions; people who care about a particular issue leap at the chance to fill the ear of the candidate or elected official.

Run with the PAC

Mothers Against Drunk Drivers. National Organization for Women. National Council on Independent Living. Each began with a few passionate citizens who built grass-roots networks for political action and changed public policy in ways that affect lives every day.

Organizations that work for change often establish an adjunct political action committee (PAC) to use the electoral process to advance their cause.

Georgia’s most active disability advocates have banded together to launch PeoplePAC, the state’s first PAC dedicated to supporting candidates who champion the critical issues of the disability community.

“We needed another tool to help us advance the legislative issues of people with disabilities in this state,” explains Grace Fricks, treasurer of the Cleveland-based PAC.

The bipartisan PeoplePAC made its first campaign contributions, from money contributed by Georgians interested in issues affecting a wide range of disabilities, to 14 Georgia legislators prior to the Aug. 20 primary election.

“This is historic in terms of initial activity and support for those who understand our issues,” said Stan Jones, chairman. “We hope to bring attention to these worthy candidates and to the new political action committee as well.”

Traditionally, PACs use their fiscal and human resources to promote a political agenda among decision-makers and to support the campaigns of candidates they endorse.

Citizens who support the PAC agenda contribute money and directed advocacy activities, such as letter writing and contacting legislators and the media.

Because PACs are political lobbying organizations, contributions are not tax-deductible.

For more information, contact Stan Jones, People Pac chairman at (404) 817-6133 or fricks@alltel.net.



But only by being there can they get the attention and commitment from the policymakers.

Of course, reality is that family demands, work and other commitments can interfere with our chance to become involved in local politics. Voters can communicate concerns to policymakers in other ways.

Reed recommends attending public forums and asking candidates directly about the issues or contacting them by letter, phone or e-mail, direct contact, and, of course, voting. Such tactics helped Reed, former director and driving force behind the right wing Christian Coalition, built a political powerhouse of 1.7 million voices in less than a decade and put Christian conservatism back onto the political agenda.

Increasing voter participation is a huge goal of party politics, as well as advocacy organizations.

“When only a small section of the population chooses to vote, others are left out of the decision-making process,” Smyre says.

“Voter participation makes all the difference in the world between having a democratic system of government and not,” he continues. “In order for our elected officials to truly represent our issues and our communities, we must constantly communicate our issues to them and vote... to make sure representation at all levels reflects voter values.”

“Involvement comes in many forms,” Smyre adds. “Some people talk to their neighbors about politics, others volunteer on a campaign. All it takes is an interest in the political process.”

“The right to vote is one of the birthrights of every American, a right for which our forefathers fought and died...to participate [in the electoral process] is not only to show appreciation for the gift of free citizenship, but it can make a huge difference,” Reed adds.

“It is actually easier to influence public policy the closer you are to elected officials.”

— Ralph Reed

NETWORK AT YOUR LOCAL PARTY EVENTS!

Local political parties provide the training ground for future political leaders. Becoming involved at the organizational level with policymakers can bring the educational, health care, employment, independent living and transportation issues onto the agenda.

Later, when policies must be enacted, funded and revised, the relationships you’ve formed will make your advocacy efforts more effective.

- **Go to meetings, forums and state events:** To get to know your local party leaders, candidates and activists, attend county and state committee meetings, meet party members and learn about the issues facing your community.
- **Volunteer in the party office:** Offer whatever time and talent you have to give. Begin with simple tasks and move up as opportunities arise.
- **Build your own organization:** Encourage friends and family to get involved. By building your own group of activists, campaigns will know they can call on you to mobilize volunteers or plan events.
- **Become a candidate:** Run for party offices. Find out where candidates are needed for upcoming election races. Even when the odds of winning are slight, the opportunity to speak as a panelist at forums allows the issue of developmental disabilities to be fully aired within the community.
- **Stay Informed:** Know the candidates, the issues, the constituencies and political strategy.



LESSONS LEARNED

By Jody Steinberg

Georgia revamps voting system following national election crisis

The 2000 presidential election crisis alerted Americans that the voting process in the United States needed improving. Punch ballots, cumbersome lever systems and even some computer systems proved less than reliable in the very close race. Confusing ballots and the issue of access to the polls also raised concerns.

No system is 100 percent accurate, as was found in Florida, where 572 votes changed the course of American history. Election officials were challenged to find a better method.

"I hope one of the great lessons of the presidential election of 2000 is that every vote does count," says Georgia Secretary of State Cathy Cox. "We had one state representative election with four recounts, which turned on one vote!"

Georgia took that challenge very seriously, becoming the only state in the country to pass laws requiring a uniform, "fail-safe" system of voting, according to the Secretary of State's office. Most states in America will eventually vote with computer, as they have proven to be the simplest and most accurate vehicle for collecting and tabulating votes.

Georgia raced ahead, investing \$54 million on the first statewide, uniform computerized voting system in the nation. Because it meets all federal criteria under pending Uniform Election legislation, Georgia expects to be fully reimbursed by the United States government.

Better voting

Computerized voting machines are good news for people with disabilities, says Cox, whose office recently unveiled the new Diebold Accuvote-TS, touch-screen computers.

Diebold and the Secretary of State's office included people with disabilities in user studies to ensure that voter accommodations would be included in the design and implementation of the machines. A 13-city pilot project during last year's local election and careful evalua-



Virginia Harris, executive director of BAIN Center for Independent Living, Bainbridge, signals her approval after trying the touch-screen voting machines.

You will know with confidence that your vote will be counted for the candidate of your choice.

— Cox

Voting independently

For the first time, many people with disabilities can vote independently. This rings true especially for people who are visually impaired or cannot read well. Every precinct will have a headset that attaches to the voting machine to read

tion by a committee of elected and appointed Georgians evaluated nine vendors for technical support, public education, backup, system reliability, transfer of data and physical accessibility.

"The voting machines are extremely simple to use, and you don't have to have any computer experience to use them with ease," assures Cox. "The biggest thing to overcome is the [voters'] fear of the unknown."

the ballot to the voter and a small, handheld keypad for entering votes. Each vote is repeated through the headset so the voter can push a confirmation button.

"The machines are very, very accessible to people of all abilities, backgrounds, education level. Even people who have never used a computer have probably used a touch-screen system at an information booth or exhibit," Cox adds.

Each voter has multiple opportunities to enter votes, review the options, make certain the votes have been recorded as desired and review any races that have been omitted.

"This year, all precincts will have better training and a newly-developed training manual to better serve the voter. Enabling people to cast their ballot independently when they might have required assistance in the past was one of the goals of the new machines," she adds. In the past, disabled Georgians have expressed frustration with the voting systems and lack of accessibility at the polls.

Addressing concerns

In spite of government officials' excitement about the new voting machines, past problems with voting counts continue to raise concerns.

The Republican Party of Georgia expressed concerns that local control of the voting process be balanced, that sufficient machines be in each precinct so that everyone gets to vote in a timely manner and that voters be prepared to use the machines, according to Ralph Reed, party chair.

The standalone voting machines are secure against interference, assures Cox, with votes recorded in three different places, including a removable memory disk. When polls close, a tally tape is printed from each machine and the disks are all removed and placed into the accumulator machine, which computes the totals. These can be transferred unofficially by modem to the central election office.



Forrest Lester, Voter Education Coordinator for the Secretary of State's office, demonstrates the new voting machines to Ellyn Jeager of the National Mental Health Association of Georgia.

The tally only becomes official after all the poll managers have delivered the memory cards with totals to the central election office for confirmation.

The state purchased one machine per 200 voters, 20 percent more than manufacturer recommendations, and some counties will purchase additional machines.

"We are going overboard with training, and everyone responds how simple it is," Cox says. A team of 12 trainers across the state continues to bring the machines to public

places for demonstration, including the polls at the primary elections. Over 300 Diebold staff people will be spread out across Georgia to provide technical support to the polls on Election Day.

"You will know with confidence that your vote will be counted for the candidate of your choice," Cox says.

The voting machines are extremely simple to use, and you don't have to have any computer experience to use them with ease.

— Cox

For an on-line demonstration of the new system, go to:
www.georgiacount.com/online_demo/index.html



GEORGIA ROUND-UP

By Jody Steinberg and Petula Lloyd

Every Vote Counts

Voters across the state participate in democracy

Statistics show that people with disabilities vote at a substantially lower rate than the rest of the U.S. population.

Self-advocates and other leaders in the disability community are anxious to have more citizens exercise their voting rights.

We looked around the state for voters with disabilities who have become politically active through the vote.

Here they describe in their own words why voting is an important responsibility of American citizenship.

Janson René Kirksey, 28 Vienna

"Voting makes me feel important. It gives me a chance to choose who I want to be in office, whether that person wins or loses. Your vote can make a difference. Everyone has a right to vote and should."

This month, Kirksey celebrates her fourth anniversary as a waitress at Marise Country Cooking in Vienna. Kirksey attends the First Baptist Church and lives in the Rufus County Home for Women, run by Easter Seals, Southern Georgia.

Easter Seals SWGA supports its clients in voting. Executive Director

Kirksey used a lever voting machine for the last time in the 2002 August Primary Election.



Beth English, encourages all residents who are capable to register and vote. Regional Manager Felita Bryant filled out Kirksey's voter registration form, and the agency provides transportation to the polls.

Kirksey was assisted in the voting process by her caregiver. She was very proud the first time she voted and helped elect a candidate who was also a member of her church. She enjoyed telling her friend that she had her vote.

"My vote counts and it does make a difference when I vote," Kirksey says.

Arthur Valcourt Jr., 42 Savannah

"As a person with a disability, I feel very strongly about voting for candidates who will listen to people with disabilities. I would really like to see more people with disabilities run for office. This way we would feel like they would understand where we are coming from!"

Valcourt, who is married, is a Partners in Policymaking graduate and member of People First through Coastal Center for Developmental Services in Savannah.

"It was difficult the first time I went to vote. I was very nervous. I knew who I wanted to vote for but could not read the names on the ballot. My

mom was able to help me. After I had placed my vote, I felt very important. I felt like I could be making a difference. I felt like I had a say in something."



"Only a small number of people with disabilities get a chance to vote. Many of them can't get to the polls."

The self-advocacy group, People First, which helped Valcourt and other members register to vote, is planning to host a speaker at the Coastal Center, who will demonstrate the new voting machines to its members and encourage everyone to learn about the candidates.



Judy Bearden Rossville

Judy Bearden's husband was prepared to help her vote when she went to the polls, but the location wasn't. It took 90 minutes before Bearden, who is legally blind, was finally able to vote with her husband's assistance, because pollworkers couldn't locate paperwork for him to sign.

"It was really kind of frustrating," says Bearden, of Rossville.

"They just assumed that somebody who is blind is not going to go and vote. All polls should be prepared for any situation."

Hillary Middleton, 20 Athens

"I listen to the campaigns before I go vote at the fire hall. I compare what the two sides are saying. I pick up the messages to find out who is important to me before I vote."

In the weeks leading up to the election, Middleton pays attention to what the candidates say and discusses the issues with her parents, Kent Middleton and Melissa Moog.

Middleton is interested in the environment, education, safety issues and world peace, says her dad. He and Moog often help Middleton mark a sample ballot from the newspaper so she can take it into the voting booth.

Middleton is looking forward to voting on the new machines, which she saw at the Capitol recently when she met Ralph Reed, the GOP chairman in Georgia, and Calvin Smyre, head of the Georgia Democratic Party (see cover story).

In recent weeks Middleton has been distributing flyers door-to-door for a friend of the family who is running for superior court judge.

"I would like education to be more accessible for children with disabilities," she says, although she feels that she herself had a good education at public schools in Athens.

Middleton, who has voted in several elections, considers voting an important part of being American. "I'm a U.S. citizen," she says. "I think it's important for me to vote."



Kitty & Chuck McGarity Albany

Kitty McGarity believes adults with disabilities, like her 37-year-old son Chuck, should vote — and that parents should ensure it happens.

McGarity is glad Albany ARC Director Annette Bowling encourages clients like Chuck, who has Down syndrome, to register and vote. Every vote counts, and the disability community needs to support those who support our issues, she says.

McGarity encourages other parents to register their children with disabilities and vote together.

"Their votes count. It is important to cast those votes so the candidates who care about our children's future win. Those who have made it their business to find out about people with disabilities understand that they deserve an equal chance to prove themselves."

Chuck, who lives in his own apartment, may not understand everything about the voting process, but he seems to have a sixth sense about sincerity, McGarity says. "Since he was a boy, he could tell pretty quickly who was interested in him and his well-being... and I can tell now, too."

Through voting, "We can promote the person who has shown a strong interest in helping us [create] a better environment, better housing, research, etc."



"I have seen the second-rate school buildings and fought for group homes in residential sections when people in my own church were against [it]," she explains. "I have fought harder for their rights than anything else in my life, in spite of my quiet, peace-loving nature," McGarity says.



Capitolist proves loyalty pays off

By Tonya Harris



Wiley T. Nixon

Not since the old days of Georgia Secretary of State Ben Fortson has there been a fixture at the State Capitol as central, respected and depended upon as Wiley T. Nixon.

Nixon, whose career dedication stems from his love of politics, rose through the ranks over 35 years from legislative page for then future governor Lester Maddox to General Assembly Postmaster and Special Assistant to legislators under the Gold Dome.

"This is one of the best jobs in the world, working with some of the most wonderful people in the world," Nixon says. Through the years, Nixon has built relationships in the Capitol and on the campaign trail.

He has campaigned for Sen. Herman Talmadge; Presidents Jimmy Carter and Richard Nixon and many others.

Nixon recalls flying to Washington or walking down to the governor's office, requesting assistance on behalf of "people with problems" from officials he helped get elected. He even leveraged his relationship with President Nixon to help over 2,000 Vietnam draftees obtain hardship discharges.

From Governor Barnes to student interns to the Capitol Hill security detail, everyone has a kind tribute to Nixon.

Though he commutes daily from Cartersville, until this last extended legislative session, he never missed a day of work during the legislature in 35 years of state government.

"Wiley is an important part of our team, we are grateful to have such a conscientious and dedicated state employee in his position," says Governor Barnes.

"He is trusted and depended upon by everyone here at the state capitol. He is a wonderful man and is greatly valued"

At home, Nixon, a licensed collector and agent specializing in patriotic paraphernalia, runs his own business trading collectables.

"Newly wed" for just four years, Nixon previously served as commander-in-chief of the Junior Forest Rangers of Georgia and is listed in the Bicentennial Edition of Patriotic and Outstanding Americans. He has received the General Douglas MacArthur Duty Honor and Country Award and a Certificate of Appreciation from the U.S. Army.

Nixon even leveraged his relationship with President Nixon to help over 2000 Vietnam draftees obtain hardship discharges

VOTING RIGHTS

By Eden Jackson Landow

Civil rights ensure access, assistance for all voters

After centuries of sanctioned exclusion, citizens with disabilities fought hard for civil rights. Today, many take for granted the right to physical accessibility, the right to inclusion in education, the right to independent living — and the right to vote. Many others still struggle to have their rights enforced.

Nationwide, the disability community has pushed for greater inclusion in the voting system, voicing complaints about obstacles to individuals' constitutional right to vote.

Federal civil rights laws, legislative mandates and Georgia voting laws guarantee poll access and expand voting rights for persons with disabilities, with one exclusion: "No person who has been judicially determined to be mentally incompetent may register, remain registered or vote unless the disability has been removed."

Voting access is a civil right

Laws require that voting precincts be permanently or temporarily accessible to voters, and that voters with disabilities have the right to voting assistance.

Georgia employers are required to grant workers up to two hours to vote on Election Day, but they may also designate the specific hours for voting time.

Election reform lobbyists, including the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD), say local and state voting protections are insufficient. They are lobbying Congress and state elections commissions to increase voter accessibility requirements and hire more pollworkers with disabilities.

Washington-based AAPD, citing a U.S. General Accounting Office report (10/2001), estimates 35 million eligible voters have disabilities, but 84% of the nation's polling places had one or more physical barriers prohibiting them from casting a private ballot.

The U.S. Justice Department is responsible for protecting individuals' rights, and the Georgia Secretary of State, Elections Division, provides oversight at the local level for the duties of the county election officials.

If you have any problems, such as physical access or inability to understand at the polls, call a poll manager or county election superintendent (or the county registrar's office). If they cannot help, contact the Secretary of State's office at 404-656-2871 or 888-295-1115.



QUIZ TIME

QUIZ TIME

DO YOU KNOW YOUR STATE OFFICIALS?

When they were younger.



Your Georgia state officials now.



1. Sonny Perdue
Candidate for Gov
2. Calvin Smyre
Democratic Party Chair
3. Cathy Cox
Secretary of State
4. Tommy Irvin
Comm of Agriculture
5. Mark Taylor
Lt. Governor
6. Barbara Christmas
Candidate Schools Supt.
7. Eric Jacobson
Exec. Director, GCDD
8. David Scott
Senate Rules Chair

Answers: 1/n/a 2/F 3/A 4/H 5/D 6/G/E 7/B 8/C
1. False (p. 22) 2. False (p. 22) 3. False (p. 4) 4. False (p. 14) 5. True (p. 14) 6. False (p. 18) 7. True (p. 18) 8. True (p. 18) 9. True (p. 18) 10. C (p. 5)

Voting Quiz

Test your Voter Knowledge
True or False? T or F

- 1) T or F? People with cognitive disabilities do not have the right to vote.
 - 2) T or F? Poll sites on private property or those were built before 1940 do not have to meet Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility requirements.
 - 3) T or F? You cannot bring a sample ballot into the poll.
 - 4) T or F? Voters can register to vote at the poll on Election Day.
 - 5) T or F? Voters are permitted to take an aide with them to the voting booth to assist them.
 - 6) T or F? Only candidates, elective officials and their staff can belong to a political party.
 - 7) T or F? Get Out the Vote organizations that offer rides to the polls must also offer accessible transportation for persons with disabilities (but they need time to plan).
 - 8) T or F? Elections are never determined by a single voter?
 - 9) T or F? Your group can request a demonstration of the new touch-screen voting machines being introduced by the state of Georgia by calling the Secretary of State.
 - 10) If voters have problems at their polling site, they should:
 - a) leave
 - b) call the U.S. Justice Department
 - c) contact the poll manager
- BONUS Challenge:**
Name five candidates that will be on the ballot at your polls and what offices they are seeking.

A quarterly
magazine of the



The Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities collaborates with Georgia's citizens, public and private advocacy organizations and policymakers to positively influence public policies that enhance the quality of life for people with disabilities and their families. The Council provides this through education and advocacy activities, program implementation and funding, and public policy analysis and research.

Lynnette Bragg, Chairperson
lynnettebragg@aol.com

Eric E. Jacobson, Executive Director
eejacobson@dhr.state.ga.us

2 Peachtree Street, N.W., Suite 8-210
Atlanta, GA 30303-3142
Voice (404) 657-2126 · Fax (404) 657-2132
Toll free: (888) 275-4233
TDD: (404) 657-2132
www.gcdd.org

Making A DIFFERENCE EDITORIAL TEAM

Yao Seidu, Editor in Chief
yaseidu@dhr.state.ga.us

Janice Nodvin, Executive Editor
May South Inc.

Jody Steinberg, Managing Editor
Stone Mountain Public Relations
Eden Landow, Assistant Editor

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Digital Technologies Inc.

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It is the policy of Making A Difference to publish readers' letters and editorial cartoons. Content does not necessarily reflect the opinions of the GCDD, the editors or state government. Send your opinions to makingadifference@gcdd.org or call (404) 657-2127 fax to (404) 657-2132.



Voting is powerful

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate, but that we are powerful," says Nelson Mandela.

On Nov. 5, we have the opportunity and power to elect local, state and federal policymakers. From the U.S. Senate to your local school board, the candidates that we choose to support will decide policy and how to use tax dollars for the next decade.

By voting them into office, we charge those elected officials with power to make critical decisions that affect our lives from inclusive education in our classrooms to making sure that adults with disabilities receive the necessary supports in their homes.



I often hear from and meet with people affected by decisions made by local as well as statewide policy-makers. Parents frequently complain that local school boards are not responsive to the needs of their children with disabilities. As our conversation ends in frustration, I often remind them of an important responsibility.

People with disabilities and their family members are beginning to understand that elections are a time to get friends, family members and others to vote for candidates who have the right values that support their families.

This means we have to ask candidates where they stand on issues. If they do not have the right answers, we need to educate them. If they have the wrong values, we vote for someone else.

We must remember that if we do not exercise our rights as American citizens and vote, then we have little right to complain about the decisions made by elected officials.

We have the power to change policy in Georgia. It begins on Tuesday, Nov. 5, when we vote.

Eric E. Jacobson,
Executive Director, Governor's Council
on Developmental Disabilities



It's out with the old and in with the new as Georgians with disabilities and their families vote in record numbers Nov. 5.

How To Reach US

Making A Difference

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

■ Letters should include the writer's full name, address, phone number, and may be edited for purpose of clarity and space.

■ email us at makingadifference@gcdd.org

■ fax us at (404) 657-2132

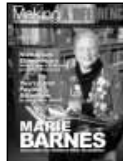
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Every eligible citizen should vote

When parents discuss long-range goals, objectives and expectations for their children with disabilities, most will say they want their child to be as independent as possible.

We believe that an important part of individual independence includes learning about and actively participating in the election process, voting.

We encourage every family to make it a goal this election season to become 100 percent involved in future elections. Involve young children early by taking them with you to the voting precinct.

By the time our children are in high school, teachers, parents and counselors need to add basic voting procedures as part of the student's Individual Education Program (IEP).

Voting registration should be an integral part of every student's transition plan. Today, we know more than ever before that every vote counts and it's critically important for every eligible voter to participate in every election.

This special edition of Making A Difference magazine is designed to guide all citizens to the voting process in Georgia.

First-time voters, experienced voters, voters with disabilities, those that enjoy speaking their mind as well as persons who are not quite as outspoken will find our Voters Guide useful. From registering to vote to selecting candidates, increasing political involvement to making sure that polling places are fully accessible to all eligible voters, it takes informed voters for democracy to work.

All Americans, not just those with developmental disabilities, function at varying levels of ability. We continue to urge family members and caregivers to assure that every eligible voter in the household who is qualified casts a vote.

Please use this magazine as a tool not only for this election cycle, but as a resource for on-going advocacy for Georgians with disabilities. As always, we welcome and encourage your comments.

Making A Difference Editorial Team



Everyone Is Equal In The Voting Booth

I have voted since I was 18 years old, but until I had a child with a disability, I never realized that my voice mattered, that my vote matters. I thought that the people running for office were more than adequately qualified.

Now I know that is not always true. Now, I know that the candidates and elected officials rely on me, the constituent, to let them know what our communities need. Now, I am much more vocal when I don't agree with them, or if I feel they need to be educated on a certain issue.



I see myself more now as an educator than an observer.

People with disabilities represent an important part of our communities and their voice an important part of the electoral process. Society needs to see that people with disabilities have an equal voice in this country's political process.

I'm currently volunteering in a candidate's campaign. I want to know where he stands, that he believes in what I believe. I am also going to meet with his opponent to find where he stands on issues important to me, and I'm planning to attend forums during this election period.

I have talked with other candidates' offices to learn how their platforms address issues related to people with disabilities.

When my children are old enough, I will teach them about the importance of voting, about their right to vote and truly be equal in the decision-making process of our government. Everyone is equal at the voting booth, but our collective voice is not as strong if we do not exercise our equality.

Kathy Dillon
Partners in Policymaking Class of 2002

Figure it Out — And Vote

- About 1.5 million Georgians, or 19.7 % of the population, have one or more disabilities.
- 464,975, or 35%, of eligible Georgians with disabilities voted in 2000.
- 863,525, more than 60%, of eligible Georgians with disabilities did not vote in 2000.
- 40.9% of the more than 35 million eligible Americans with disabilities voted in the 2000 elections.
- 70% of people with disabilities are unemployed. Persons with disabilities who are employed vote at the same rate as their non-disabled peers.

Source: National Institute of Disability www.nod.org for more Statistics, log onto the Fair Vote Web Site — www.fairvote.org/turnout

LETTERS

No Vote... No Complaints



Voting is a family affair

Should people with disabilities vote? Absolutely! If a person understands right from wrong, good from bad, helpful from unhelpful, then they should be encouraged and assisted to vote. Voting is my daughter's right, granted in the Constitution, and even encouraged through the federal "Motor Voter" law. Few things have made me feel prouder than when I first took Natalie to the Voter Registration Office and she voted using the absentee ballot (she can't physically use the voting booth).

Some might wonder if Natalie, who is functionally non-verbal and uses a communication device, understands what she is doing, but some will always "wonder" about Natalie!



Natalie & Beth Tumlin

Voting is a family affair. I know that Natalie forms definite opinions about what and whom she likes and doesn't like. She understands the importance of voting and it is important to her.

It is my responsibility to help her get information to make her own decisions. Do I think I influence her? Probably, but maybe no more than my other children.

Before the elections, we learn about the different candidates. Some I may know personally or have heard of, for others we read the papers! I tell Natalie what I know and think about the candidates and if they seem to support the issues that are important to us. We also ask Dad and her sisters. On voting day, I read her the choices and remind her about each of them.

Voting has never been easier. Those who can should go to the polls, where the new voting machines will make the booths more accessible. I know I always feel proud when in the voting booth. It's also easy to vote by absentee ballot. Go online to www.sos.state.ga.us, or call (404) 657-2881 for an application and it will be mailed to your home. Complete it at home and mail it back. It can't be any easier than that! There has never been a better time for everyone to vote.

Beth Tumlin, Chair
Unlock the Waiting Lists! Campaign



VOTING RESOURCES

DISABILITY ADVOCACY

Alliance for Justice:
Election Year Legal Guide for Nonprofit
202-822-6070 HNS866@handsnet.org

American Association of People with Disabilities
Voter registration, polling access, etc.
www.aapd.com

AAMR
Info on disability issues, advocacy
www.aamr.org/Policies/policy_issues.shtml
202-387-1968 or 800-424-3688

The ARC
For people with mental retardation & related disabilities and their families
www.thearcink.org

Atlanta Alliance on Developmental Disabilities
www.aadd.org
404-881-9777

Georgia Advocacy Office
Legal resource for voter discrimination/accessibility issues
www.thegao.org
404-885-1234 or 800-537-2329

Georgia ARC Network
www.arcga.org or 404-634-5512

Georgia Rural Urban Summit
www.garus.org
404-522-GRUS

Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities
www.gccd.org
404-657-2122 or 888-275-4233

National Organization on Disability
Voter access and registration information
www.nod.org or 202-293-5960

People First of Georgia
jmanders@arches.uga.edu
706-542-3457

Quality of Life Voter Education Project
Dawn Randolph
www.qualityoflifevoter.org
678-471-3804

Self Advocates Becoming Empowered
Voter registration and education
www.sabeusa.org

State Independent Living Council
silcga@mindspring.com
or www.georgiasilc.org
770-270-6860

Important Note: Current information is critical in the election process. The Internet enables candidates, organizations and media to maintain up-to-the-minute information and comparative databases. If you do not have Internet access, please consider accessing computers at your local library for research.

GENERAL VOTING

Action alerts, commentary and resources
www.accessman.com

ADAWatch
www.adawatch.org/index.asp

Ballot Access News
www.ballot-access.org/

Center for Voting and Democracy
www.fairvote.org

Civil Rights Information
www.civilrights.org/issues/voting/

DemocracyNet
Nationwide directory of elections and candidate info
www.dnet.org

Information for national, state and local races.
www.politics1.com

Empowerment Zone
Link to political sources including voter registration and accessibility
www.empowermentzone.com

Enable America
www.enableamerica.org

Federal Elections Commission
Information on elections and voting
www.fec.gov/elections.html

The League of Women Voters
Comprehensive voting/advocacy Web site with links, issues and candidate information
www.lwv.org
404-874-7352

Official site for U.S. Government info, services, transactions, forms
www.firstgov.gov

Vote Smart Program
Find your candidates, issues and all your local information
www.vote-smart.org
888-868-3762

STATE OF GEORGIA

Comprehensive Guide to Georgia Government
www.georgia.gov/gta/cda/front_door

Elections Division
Office of Secretary of State
www.georgiaelections.org
404-656-2871 or 888-265-1115

Georgia Voter Education
Voting machine demonstrations and information
www.georgiacounts.org

Voter registration and information
sosweb@sos.state.ga.us
www.fec.gov/votregis/vr.htm
888-265-1115

Statewide Voter Education Coordinator
Alison Bracewell-McCullick
abmccullick@sos.state.ga.us
404-660-1832

POLITICAL PARTIES

American Independent Party
www.aipca.org

Democratic Party of Georgia
www.georgiaparty.com
www.democrats.org
1100 Spring St., Ste. 710
Atlanta, GA 30309
404-885-1998

Green Party
Link to political sources including voter registration and accessibility
www.empowermentzone.com
Atlanta, GA 31107
ggp@greens.org
www.greens.org

Libertarian Party
1874 Piedmont Road Ste.590-E
Atlanta, GA 30324
www.lp.org/organization/GA/
www.lp.org
404-888-9468

Reform National Committee
www.reformparty.org
877-467-3367

Georgia Republican Party
5600 Roswell Rd.
E. Bldg. Ste. 200
Atlanta, GA 30342
www.gagop.org or www.rnc.org
404-257-5559

YOUNG VOTERS

MTV encourages involvement
www.rockthevote.org

Young Politicians of America
www.ypa.org

Young Voters Project
www.stateofthevote.org

Freedom's Answer
www.freedomanswer.net
202-785-5920