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Facing the Budget Storm

Center for Persons With Disabilities

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To paraphrase a quote from one of my favorite books, the Count of Monte Cristo:

Life is a storm. One moment we bask in the sunlight and the next we are shattered upon the rocks. What defines our character as individuals is what we do when the storm rages and pushes us into the rocks!

There is no shortage of news coverage about the current economic storm our state and nation are currently in. As advocates within the disability community, we face an uphill battle to make our voices heard above the waves of budgetary chaos crashing around our State Legislature and Congress. As individual advocates and coalition members, we have the choice to let the currents of the immediate storm take us where they may or to brace ourselves against the winds and press forward. It is often in the most difficult circumstances that individuals and movements find their strength and voice to advance their cause and bring about meaningful change.

I have been encouraged by recent examples of the Legislature listening and responding to disability advocates, as evidenced by their efforts to preserve some specific disability services and minimize cuts to other programs that support individuals with disabilities. A Legislature that is willing to listen to the voices of the disability community is vital to our advocacy efforts. I salute all of the tireless advocates throughout the state that are working so hard to make the collective voice of the disability community heard. There are still many difficult funding decisions to be made and many opportunities for advocacy during the remainder of this year’s legislative session. We must continue to press forward into the storm, be persistent in our pursuit of change, and be creative in the solutions we offer to the challenges our state and our nation face.

The men and women serving in the Utah Legislature face the daunting challenge of balancing a budget that has suffered unprecedented shortfalls over the last year. With so many worthy initiatives, projects, programs, and services to fund and so little money to fund them, what is to be done?

I think that the current budget situation is an opportunity for our statewide community to take a hard look at what we, as Utahns, value most. I believe that what a society chooses to spend money on, especially when money is tight, is one of most powerful indicators of what that society truly values.

Now, more than ever, in the midst of this budget crisis, we as advocates in the disability community, have an opportunity to educate our legislators and fellow citizens about the critical importance of disability services in supporting the rights of all Utahns to fully participate in our community in a meaningful and dignified way.

The storm is raging, what will you do?

I encourage everyone, especially those who have yet to find their advocacy voice, to get involved and make a difference. If you aren’t sure where to start, consider visiting the following websites for the most current information on Utah disability related legislative issues as well as information on how to contact your legislators and make your voice heard:

The Legislative Coalition for People with Disabilities
Utah State Legislature Homepage
League of Women Voters
Utah Health Policy Project