People With Disabilities Have Big Potential as a Voting Bloc

Center for Persons With Disabilities

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PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES HAVE BIG POTENTIAL AS A VOTING BLOC

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While the media speculates at what group will 'decide' the 2012 election, the public would do well to remember the power of one of the largest and often ignored voting bloc: people with disabilities.

The U.S. Census Bureau data indicates that there are 57 million people with disabilities, or about 19 percent of the population. This group also includes veterans, a group that is increasing. One in four veterans returning from Iraq or Afghanistan has acquired a disability. Factor in the aging population, which it is estimated that one in three seniors has a disability, and it is clear the power people with disabilities hold.

Cherissa Aldredge is the region one coordinator for Utah GAP (Grassroots Advocacy Partnership), which covers Box, Cache and Rich counties. She has a visual impairment, and works to get the disability community voter-mobilized.

She said, "If people with disabilities, including in Utah, would unify as a voting bloc, the potential is significant."

Unification on the disability front is a problem in Utah, Aldredge said. While many issues that Americans with disabilities face are nonpartisan, the disagreement comes over where and how to fund organizations that serve the population.

"How can we find areas where we align, so that when we go to the legislative sessions next year we can show our power in numbers?" Aldredge said. "There's a finite pot of money from the government to give to disability organizations, and while increasing services for people is generally agreed upon, how and who gets the pie is where we compete against each other."

Aldredge, along with Jeff Sheen of the Center for Persons with Disabilities, and Logan OPTIONS for Independence are working to change that – at least in Cache Valley.

"Getting together is the first step of progress, next is realizing our power in numbers," Aldredge said. "There's merit in having a unified front, and we need to focus on similarities rather than our differences so we can educate those unfamiliar with disability to advocate for us in the legislative process."

No voting inaccessibility issues in Utah have arisen yet, Aldredge said. But if voters encounter issues with polling accessibility, they should report to the Disability Law Center.

"If individuals in Cache Valley can organize, they have a potential to make their voices heard with the Utah legislature so that they understand needs of people with disabilities," said Aldredge.

For those who need transportation to the polls, the Cache Valley Transit District will have buses going to the polls. Also, people with disabilities can contact Logan OPTIONS for Independence at 435-753-5353 for alternative transportation options.