

A Letter from Hugh Gallagher to Mike Deland and Alan Reich

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Mr. Mike Deland
Mr. Alan Reich
National Organization on Disability
910 16th Street, NW #600
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Dear Alan and Mike:

Congratulations on obtaining the appropriation for the FDR Memorial! The odds were all against you; but you prevailed and won. You two deserve much credit and so too does Jim Dixon. Jim worked the Hill with shrewd determination and a winning, personable manner. Jim knows how to lobby -- and I say that as an old-time lobbyist.

Thanks to your work, NOD is the only fully staffed organization, the only well-connected group in Washington representing the shared, common interests of the disability community. Of course, there are the social policy groups and the disease groups and the disability industry associations -- but only NOD speaks with the voice of all disabled persons. ADAPT and DREDF may come and go, but they A have other interests and they lack the identity, goodwill, respect, and general savvy that NOD has built up over the years.

I say this because I believe NOD should take a greater role in Washington policy making. FDR in a wheelchair would never have been funded without NOD. NOD could be equally effective on other issues. Here for example are two present challenges:

I am a member of the Advisory Board of the National Center for Rehabilitative Medicine Research, under the National Institute of Child Health & Development. NICHD has a group called the "Friends of NICHD" which lobbies the Hill for funds for its favorite projects. As a result, NICHD receives hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars, whereas NCMRR without a voice in "Friends of NICHD" or on the Hill, receives but \$27 million a year. I don't say that NOD should turn into a "Friends of NCMRR", but it could join the NICHD Friends, attend their meetings, speak up for NCMRR needs, make sure NCMRR is included in NICHD strategy and that it gets its share of NICHD cookies. This would involve Hill testimony, getting to know Hill staff members, etc.

There is no effective Washington clearing house for information on disability rights and legislation. Justice for All and ADAPT send out alerts and action bulletins on email but they do not explain what is

going on, what are the troublesome details or roadblocks to effective legislation. They can bring protestors to the streets, but they are not in the conference rooms when it counts. They see things in black and white. Heros and villains. In Washington there are no heros or villains, only folks in offices with whom one must work to get things done. And in Washington the truth lies in the details. For example, in the case of the recent Work Incentives Act, everyone congratulated everyone else for passing a bill — but the bill lacks the money authorization necessary to make the measure effective.

I suggest a role for NOD in such legislative matters: informing and representing the views of the disability community members. NOD would work with Hill staff and Members, testify before committees, and always do so in a careful, responsible, and informed manner. In time, Hill members and staff will come to turn to NOD for advice they can trust.

I suggest that NOD enlarge its area of activity on the Hill and around town. It should become a more active player in matters related to people with disabilities. How about giving Jim Dixon authority to develop the Hill connections he has established on the FDR statue? How about sending him out to participate in the policy strategy sessions of the civil rights and health coalitions. How about letting Jim find out who is effective and who is not. Policy and legislation is usually the product of a relatively few effective people: let Jim develop a network of such people and establish a working relationship with them.

I know there is a 20% of budget cap on what can be spent in lobbying activities. I doubt if the costs of the project I propose would exceed that amount. As I remember from my years as Washington Representative of British Petroleum Ltd., the law is rather specific about what constitutes lobbying. Lobbying is advocating passage of certain legislation. I do not believe that providing information or networking with interested parties and Hill members counts as lobbying.

You could give the project a year trial period. If at the end of the year, NOD finds it has not become a more influential, consequential player on the Washington scene, then, so be it. Nothing will have been lost and NOD will be able to continue its other important work.

With best holiday wishes to you both and to all of NOD,

Sincerely,

Hugh

Hugh Gregory Gallagher