

Independent Perspective 1868

Disability Advocacy during the Trump Administration

Transcript

00:00:00 Speaker 1

Welcome to Independent Perspective, a public affairs presentation of Western New York Independent Living (WNYIL). Our guest today is retired CEO Douglas Usiak of WNYIL and I'm your host Ernie Churchwell. Welcome back to the program, Doug.

00:00:17 Speaker 2

Hey, it's my pleasure to be here, Ernie.

00:00:18 Speaker 1

And I believe you have some salient thoughts on what may be happening to programs for people with disabilities thanks to the actions of the current administration.

What do you think is best for disability advocates to do at this point in time?

00:00:39 Speaker 2

Well, I do have concerns about what we're seeing coming out of the federal administration and what they are referring to as cutting the waste out of government, is that we have seen the attempt and yet not yet the result of the federal administration focusing on the Department of Energy.

00:01:01 And identifying that the law that governs the accessibility of federal buildings, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, otherwise known as a Non-Discrimination Act for people with disabilities for federally funded programs, that it's too costly to make these buildings accessible. I mean, this is 35 years later.

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The building codes throughout the entire country have already established, adopted and or enforcing the various codes on accessibility such as ramps and rail on elevators and large print and

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the use of assistant listening devices, and it's somewhat confusing to think that a department within the federal government would not make its buildings accessible for the American people. We're talking about disabled veterans. We're talking about people with disabilities.

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When you look at ramps, you're talking about mothers with strollers, people with walkers, a good part of America benefits from this.

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And the fact that we're saying 35 years after a law has been passed, the States and local governments and everybody have pushed hard to make sure that everybody can enjoy the buildings have been built for people, is very concerning for people with disabilities.

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It seems like there's an effort to even marginalize more of our population, such as people with disabilities, to stop people with disabilities from being part of our, a community. The whole reason for these accessibility issues

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were to advance people with disabilities and employment. You know, you get rid of the stairs, a person in a wheelchair can get in. You put a couple Braille numbers in a few places; the blind person can work. The mind is still there, especially with the technology we have. People can work regardless of various functional limitations

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on their in their body. So, we need to be very vigil on that, and we need to make sure that the proposed pullbacks don't happen.

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Because in the government's way that if they can focus on the Department of Energy, a small department that people with disability, you know, a lot of people in mainstream public, I mean don't interact with directly. If that gets through, then that can open up to the bigger programs like Health and Human services.

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Transportation and it would be very concerning.

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That making people with disabilities, putting them back into the closets and back into the attics.

00:03:50 Speaker 1

So, would you suggest that people contact their elected representatives to encourage them to hold the line on disability accommodation?

00:03:59 Speaker 2

Well, if people have a feeling one way or the other, they definitely should contact their congressman or their congressional senators and let them know that eliminating the codes that offer people access to the community, to programs, to services

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to be able to advance people's contributions back to the community as taxpayers, you know, everybody knows if that person with a disability is working, they're paying taxes, and that's the whole aspect that we don't need the warehouse, people with disabilities, we need to put them to work like anybody else.

00:04:32 Speaker 1

We're totally out of time. If people have questions, how can they reach you?

00:04:37 Speaker 2

They can contact me by calling the agency at 716-836-0822.

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Or they can email me directly at djusiak@wnyil.org

00:04:54 Speaker 1

Thanks for being with us, Doug.

00:04:55 Speaker 2

My pleasure.

00:04:56 Speaker 1

You've been listening to Independent Perspective, a public affairs presentation of WNYIL. Our guest today has been Douglas Usiak, retired CEO of WNYIL, and I have been your host, Ernie Churchwell.