

# *the* Independent

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## Make an Informed Choice

By Chuck Stebbins, systems change  
advocate

This fine Fall edition of the Independent is primarily an election/voting issue. The election November 7 will prove to be a major turning point for this country, or it will not. The following pages have interviews from candidates seeking key decision-making positions on both sides of the Red River. We set out to get 10 interviews, and got six. We got over 50 percent of what we went for, so we figured we did ok considering the time element and the jammed packed schedules of the candidates. We asked four disability-related questions.

One concerned whether or not they would support legislation that would move people with disabilities out of institutions and into more home and community settings. Another asked what they would do to improve the employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Another question was on health care; and finally, we asked them what their vision was for people with disabilities.

We will pose the question, and following that will be the candidates' response. Amy Klobuchar's response will not be in the same format as the others we received, but in a health care policy statement that she sent to us to expedite things due to time constraints.

Freedom would like to thank Amy Klobuchar, Dwight Grotberg, Mike Barrett, Kent Conrad, Earl Pomeroy, and Matt Mechtel, for taking the time and energy to answer our questions. We attempted to solicit interviews from Tim Pawlenty, Mike Hatch, Collin Peterson, and Mark Kennedy, but after numerous attempts, were not successful. We have provided on the back page of the newsletter a list of all the candidates' web sites for further information.

We hope that these interviews will be helpful for you to better understand where these people stand on these four particular disability issues. But most of all we hope that they give you a bit of a push to get to the polls and vote if you were wavering on whether or not to go. If you're a person with a disability and have not voted in the past, and any of

these four issues affect you, you really need to examine why you don't vote, and then consider the social responsibility and the civic duty that is yours as a citizen of these United States of America. Your vote is your voice (someone else made that one up). You really need to express it.

Remember  
to  
Vote  
November 7

### What's Inside

- What's Wrong With This Picture?
- Legislative Candidates Questions & Answers
- Annual Meeting Highlights

# What's Wrong with this Picture?



**Nothing! This is an accessible voting machine. There should be one at your precinct. No more excuses.**

## Freedom Holds its Annual Meeting



Guest Speaker Dick Beardsley

Freedom held its annual meeting on September 19<sup>th</sup> at the Fargo Holiday Inn. The evening started with MC Brian Arett telling jokes to the 100 people in attendance. Entertainment was guest speaker, Dick Beardsley, a marathon champion, seminar speaker, expert fishing guide, and "survivor." His compelling story showed how one can overcome what life deals to them by setting goals and working towards them. Dick has had several back injuries and has been addicted to pain medications. Despite all of this he is still a top marathon runner. In 2002, Dick received the Minnesota Meeting & Events Association "Best Speaker Award." Awards were also given to: Steve Skauge, retiring board member; Chuck Stebbins, five years of service; Nate Aalgaard, 10 years of service; Don Brunette, Advocate of the Year; Matt Solin, Youth Advocate of the Year; and Penny Cameron, Volunteer of the Year.

Congratulations to all the winners. To wrap up the evening, the raffle took place, with Roger Wheeling of Minot winning the grand prize of an HD television.



L to R: Don Brunette, Advocate of the Year; Matt Solin, Youth Advocate of the Year; Penny Cameron, Volunteer of the Year



Board President, Brad Arett gives Nate Aalgaard his 10 years of service recognition award.



Chuck Stebbins, 5 years of service

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# Home and Community Based Services

Under the present system consumers with disabilities have little choice regarding where they want to live when reliant on Medicare and Medicaid funding. In addition to institutional options, aging Americans and those with disabilities should be provided with opportunities to live independently and participate in their communities.

**Q:** Long term care has become an ever increasing portion of states' budgets, with a high percentage going to institutions and nursing homes. Would you support legislation to move people with disabilities and the elderly from institutional settings into more home and community based settings?

## **ND Senate Race**

**(D) Kent Conrad**

I have always supported home and community-based care. Seniors and people with disabilities should be able to receive care in the setting that best suits them. This not only gives them freedom to remain in their homes and communities, but also saves them and the taxpayer money by avoiding expensive stays in hospitals and nursing homes.

**(R) Dwight Grotberg**

Yes, I would be in favor of that. If I understood your question correctly, would I be in favor of moving those in long term institutional settings into more of a home community type setting. Yes, I would be in favor of that. I think that it fits in the healing [process].

## **ND House of Representative Race**

**(R) Matt Mechtel**

I would support legislation that provides the opportunity to move people with disabilities and elderly people into home and community based settings. Where possible, such moves can provide a better setting for recovery and peace of mind. Community standards, health and safety regulations, and legal requirements will need to be adhered to, but, I believe a move away from institutionalized care, can be beneficial for everyone.

**(D) Earl Pomeroy**

I favor supportive programs that allow people with disabilities and the elderly to live independently if they so choose and if it is practical for their lives. I have also been a strong supporter of Medicare funding for home healthcare needs, a valuable resource for people who choose to live in either a home or community based setting.

## **MN House of Representative Race**

**(R) Mike Barrett**

First some background, I am the director of pharmacy and work for Memorial Hospital and Nursing Home. I have worked a large chunk of my thirty-year career with Hospice and home care, so, yes; I firmly support a more of a home-like environment for everybody especially for people who are disabled. I think they are much more functional. I think they have a much better outlook on life when they are out of an institutional setting. I believe institutional setting should be used fully as a last resort when all other options fail. It's much more cost effective to take care of people in their home or perhaps in an assisted living or some other type of care community based thing, even like adult foster care. People are taken care of better, their attitude; a lot of this has to do with the attitudes of people. What we need to do is find ways to keep people from getting depressed because of the situation they find themselves in and I think with disabled people that they are much more susceptible to this than the normal population anyway.

# Remember to Vote November 7th

Freedom Resource Center and/or its Board of Directors do not necessarily endorse or support any of the views expressed within the personal testimonies contained in this newsletter, unless approval is specifically mentioned.

# Employment

Among adults with disabilities of working age (18 to 64), three out of ten (35%) work full or part-time, compared to eight out of ten (78%) of those without disabilities, a gap of forty-nine percentage points (N.O.D./Harris, 2004). The more severe the disability, the less likely a person is to be employed. Over the past fourteen years, the percentage of people who say they are unable to work has risen steadily from 29% to 43%. When looking at only the people who say they are able to work, fully 56% of people with disabilities are working, up from 46% in 1986, and the gap between people with and without disabilities shrinks from 49 percentage points to 25 percentage points (N.O.D./Harris 2000).

**Q: In a recent HARRIS POLL, 35% of people with disabilities report being employed part or full time, as opposed to 78% of the non-disabled population. What do you see needs to be done to improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities?**

## **MN House of Representative Race**

**(R) Mike Barrett**

Well, first of all, a good theme of mine is a statement from Ronald Reagan. I believe in the purpose of the federal government to protect its citizens, not run their lives, and when I say protect citizens I also mean protecting them in their daily lives for those opportunities. And I think it's a role of the federal government to help not only just promote the training of people with disabilities, but also to educate the employers, that there are many many many jobs that people with disabilities can do just as well as people who do not have disabilities. So, it kind of creates a glass ceiling. You think of a person with a disability who cannot do a job; that is absolutely untrue. As a matter of fact, in our nursing home we have disabled people that we hire, they are called Productive Alternatives, and they work out very well. When we find jobs that they can do, they are actually some of the best people for that job, so I think that what we have to do is, the federal government needs to make sure that people are getting the proper training. Secondly, we need to make sure that the employers are educated as to the actual abilities of people with disabilities; and third, I think we also need to make sure that we are enforcing ADA requirements so that we have equal access and opportunity for everybody.

## **ND Senate Race**

**(R) Dwight Grotberg**

Yes, well I do have a little bit of experience with a friend of mine who had a brain stem stroke and he is now actually living in Minnesota. The problem he was facing was that his disability payments were being limited for his long term care unless he got employment. Then the state of Minnesota, I'm just trying to remember how this works, but the state of Minnesota, if he was employed, would help pick up some of his long term care. I don't think that North Dakota has that same benefit, but he got a job working actually doing some work on his computer and he is paralyzed from his top lip down so is very limited. (Editor's note: We believe that Mr. Grotberg is referring to a Medicaid buy-in program, which North Dakota also has. It's a relatively new program).

I would say, anything we can do to encourage employment out of the home like that would first of all be a great move and I think providing that help (Medicaid buy-in) if someone can get employed like Minnesota does would be a good move for a state like North Dakota. In favor of that I think that depending on the level of disability, I think most people that I've known since I've been disabled—had been disabled in that accident—most people that I have met since then, they're certainly eager and they are desiring to, most of them that I know are desiring to be employed, to do something to keep themselves busy. So anything to encourage that would be on my priority list.

**(D) Kent Conrad**

I believe we must eliminate the disincentives for Americans with disabilities. As you know, the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999, which I supported, took steps to allow people with disabilities to return to work while still receiving needed assistance, like disability benefits and medical care. In addition, the lack of support services like transportation and training often makes it difficult for some to return to work. More attention should be placed on providing these types of services.

Finally, it is vitally important that people with disabilities have access to education that helps prepare everyone for work. That is why I have been a strong supporter of adequate funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

## ND House of Representative Race

(D) Earl Pomeroy

To enhance employment opportunities for people with disabilities, I believe we need to ensure that transportation options are available to allow people with disabilities adequate access to workplaces. Additionally, I strongly support funding that would go toward cutting edge technologies to assist people with disabilities in the workplace.

(R) Matt Mechtel

A growing, vibrant economy is the absolute bottom line when it comes to providing opportunities for all people, including those with disabilities. A stagnant economy allows little, if any, opportunity for employment. The provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act dealing with hiring and employing those with disabilities need to be enforced, vigorously. Also, incentives, such as tax credits where applicable, can be helpful, in this area.

## Healthcare

Historically, people with disabilities have been served by a fragmented system that increases their risk for poor health and results in higher health care costs and lower quality of life. All should have access to quality health care integrated as a system, informed by medical need, inclusive of trained personnel responsive to people with disabilities, and funded adequately.

**Q: The biggest problem facing a lot of people today, is being able to pay the bills. With the ever increasing cost of health care, such as higher deductibles, and higher co-pays, what steps would you take to address this issue?**

## ND House of Representative Race

(R) Matt Mechtel

One solution is to increase competition among insurance providers to lower the cost. Tax incentives to health insurance providers to help lower insurance costs to disabled people can be helpful. Also, tax credits should be available to those who must provide their own coverage.

(D) Earl Pomeroy

As a Member of the Ways and Means Committee, I will continue to look for ways to increase the affordability of health insurance. I have also fought for legislation to encourage the purchase of long term care insurance so that individuals can have access to the health care services they need. Additionally, families who choose to care for their elderly parents or disabled loved ones at home deserve the same kind of tax relief. To that end, I will continue to advocate for legislation that provides a tax deduction to help families pay for long-term care. It is this type of common sense approach to healthcare policy I hope to continue.

## MN House of Representative Race

(R) Mike Barrett

Well, first of all I think there is a lot of reform necessary in the health care delivery system. As a pharmacist I think that while import/re-importation of drugs has become a necessity, we are getting a lot of counterfeit drugs in. So I think that at a federal level we need to amend the Prescription Drug Marketing Act to allow local pharmacies to re-import these drugs from the FDA inspected and certified overseas shippers so we have a safe medicine supply that your local pharmacy can sell it to you at re-imported prices. And third, we preserve that pharmacist/patient relationship, which is so vital in taking drugs that don't do damage to each other. It's specifically, and not all cases, do people with disabilities can they self-finance their health care or can they get good private insurances. And when that happens, I think it is important that the federal government use Medicaid funding and other sources to make sure that we have health coverage for people with disabilities. Because what I firmly believe in is the safety net. I think we can find ways where we are wasting untold billions of dollars on people who shouldn't be on government programs. We need to redirect that to people, like people with disabilities, who do actually need these safety nets. Even if they are private insurances they have excessive co-pay. The government should find a way, like they do with Medicare D. They help solve the crunch with these co-pays and other things.

## ND Senate Race

(D) Kent Conrad

We need to find ways to make the health care system more efficient without threatening access to care for the most vulnerable. There's an interesting statistic that shows 5 percent of Medicare beneficiaries account for roughly 50 percent of all Medicare spending. These costs are largely attributed to poor coordination of care for those with multiple illnesses. For example, different doctors are prescribing different medicines that are dispensed at different pharmacies. Often, these drugs produce adverse interactions that make the patients sicker, resulting in hospitalizations that could have been avoided. This poor coordination hurts patients. It also results in increased costs throughout the health care system. That is why I helped enact a Medicare chronic care management demonstration project to test providing coordinated care to Medicare beneficiaries. It is my hope that this could be expanded to other areas of health care to reduce overall costs.

In addition, we need to review the incentives that often reward quantity, not quality. Because we have a fee-for-service system, providers get paid when they provide a service, encouraging them to do more tests, see a patient more frequently, and do more procedures. While these services may be necessary in some instances, the overuse of health care leads to increased costs to consumers. We need to restructure our system to reward quality instead of quantity.

Finally, both the government and private payers should do more to encourage preventive care. We should do more to encourage all Americans to lead healthy lives and catch serious medical conditions early. By doing this, we can save money and improve the quality of life of every American.

(R) Dwight Grotberg

The high cost of health care is something that affects me as a farmer. I am a self-employed farmer and the health care premiums were just taking a bigger and bigger chunk out of my budget. One thing that I did as a business owner was switch to a health savings account, and I don't think that that's the full answer. I think it's a good start. The options are good in it, but the present deductibles are still quite high. I think we need to be able to lower those deductibles in those health savings accounts minus 10,000 dollars. And that's just too much for a lot of people and I think we could do that. I think we need to encourage a consumer-driven health care market to deregulate some of these things that are keeping healthcare up so high. I know there are a lot of plans out there. I think even legislation has been proposed to do this. I think that's the answer personally, as opposed to a national healthcare system. I would certainly be in favor of encouraging a market-driven approach. I think in the end we will have better healthcare because of competition. Because we have so much regulation in the healthcare industry I think that's the best route that would serve all of America.

## MN Senate Race

(D) Amy Klobuchar, Statement on healthcare

Minnesotans with disabilities know all too well that the debate on health care in Washington has been dominated by the drug companies and the insurance companies for way too long. I experienced the result of an industry-driven health care policy first-hand when our daughter was born and she was very sick. The insurance company kicked me out of the hospital after 24 hours even though our daughter was in intensive care. I went to the legislature and got one of the first laws passed in the country guaranteeing new moms and their babies a 48-hour hospital stay.

When our health care policies are written for the drug companies instead of America's families, we get things like Medicare Part D. Over 230,000 Minnesotans have been denied Part D benefits until 2007, simply because they couldn't navigate Part D's complex enrollment procedures. Congress should acknowledge Part D's bureaucratic failures, immediately pass legislation to extend the enrollment deadline and eliminate financial penalties.

Fifty-four million Americans suffer from mental illnesses. Today, HMOs continue to discriminate in providing health coverage to individuals seeking treatment for mental illnesses. We must end the disparity in health coverage for Americans afflicted with mental health issues. Twenty three states, including Minnesota, have already taken steps to do so.

Four years after President Bush endorsed mental health parity and pledged to work with Congressional leaders to end restrictions on mental health related coverage, no progress has been made. It is time to end the unjust bias preventing coverage for Americans seeking mental health care by passing the Senator Paul Wellstone Mental Health Equitable Treatment Act of 2003, which would provide for equal coverage of mental health benefits.

Coming from a state that is home to the Mayo Clinic and the University of Minnesota, I believe in science and the promise of stem cell research — the pathway for the next generation of life-saving cures. I also support setting rules for how this research can be done. By investing in cures and prevention, we have the possibility of reducing the costs of millions of dollars in care. I support bi-partisan legislation, recently vetoed by President Bush, which expands federal funding of stem cell research.

# Independence

"We proclaim to America and the world that people with disabilities are fully human; that paternalistic, discriminatory, segregationist attitudes are no longer acceptable; and that henceforth people with disabilities must be accorded the same personal respect and the same social and economic opportunities as other people."  
(Justin Dart, Jr., was a longtime advocate for the rights of people with disabilities.)

Q: What is your vision for people with disabilities?

## MN House of Representative Race

(R) Mike Barrett

I believe that eventually if we work hard enough and put enough effort into it, we can have what I call a "seamless society" where it doesn't matter who you are or what you are, that everyone has equal access and equal opportunity and I think that is a goal we should all strive for because after all we are all people.

I guess the last thing is for people to understand is that I have a large knowledge of healthcare and what needs to be done to make sure people get the needed services. Also because I have worked for 30 years with people of disabilities and with home care and the institutional settings versus the home caring stuff, that I'm going to hit the ground and have an immediate understanding of all the concerns of people with disabilities.

And I will be a very strong advocate. You can count on that.

## ND Senate Race

(R) Dwight Grotberg

You know, when I was paralyzed myself in the recovery room in Fargo, Meritcare, I envisioned something that where somebody with a bi-level injury—this is before I knew I would be able to walk again—could stand with some support and move around and then now technology is here. Because of the parade routes in the state I didn't know there were so many parades first of all, but some of the parade routes were over four miles long. I really wanted to get out and meet the people rather than just riding in a vehicle. I bought a Segway, and a Segway with some adaptation can really be a benefit to that. But as far as long term solutions in research and that sort of thing I tell you what; I am all for stem cell research, but the stem cell research that I would support is the stem cell research that the private sector has put all its money behind, is the adult stem cell research. There is a lot more promise in there than in embryonic controversial stem cell research. I think we could do a lot in that area of funding in the adult stem cell research to find cures for spinal cord injuries and many other diseases and disabling factors.

I'm running for United States Senate here in North Dakota and I think it's a great opportunity. I am very grateful to be able to walk again. I would love to say to anyone who is needing assistance, whether it is a wheelchair or anything else, that go for your dreams, you know. To me, I wouldn't let anything stop you or anybody stop you from going ahead with what is really in your heart. I'll just put it this way is that this friend of mine who has had that brain stem stroke. He is paralyzed from the top lip down and can't talk, but he is completely there and he is able to work at a computer with a little bit of a joy stick. The amazing thing about him is that most able body people I talk to say I would rather not live and be in that situation. But I know him and I know his heart, as much as I can, and I know that it is a joy for him to be alive even though he is in that frustrated place. And to me, life is worth living, and anything that we can do together to work for more independence in the whole realm of the disability world that I just, well, like I say I had that glimpse into it and I still carry a little bit of it with me and a serious constant reminder. Like one guy said, "If you live long enough, you'll be in a wheelchair someday."

(D) Kent Conrad

It is my hope that one day we no longer isolate and discriminate against people with disabilities. These individuals should have access to the same quality of life that every American has the right to enjoy. These Americans should be able to rely on the services provided by their federal, state and local governments to meet their unique needs. I envision an America where people with disabilities have full and equal access to employment, health care, transportation, housing and voting.

## ND House of Representative Race

(D) Earl Pomeroy

I believe that people with disabilities should have access to all of the care and support they need to fill active roles in the workplace and society. Again, thank you for the opportunity to respond to these issues.

(R) Matt Mechtel

I see an America where all people have opportunities to grow and prosper. Employment and opportunity should be based on merit and qualification, not on other so-called limiting factors. Thus, those with disabilities will be able to compete with everyone else for opportunities in employment and growth. I see an America that has limitless possibilities for those who have disabilities, as well for others.



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**RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED**

The Mission of Freedom Resource Center for Independent Living is to work toward equality and inclusion for people with disabilities through programs of empowerment, community education and systems change.

We envision a society where ALL individuals are valued, respected and have equal opportunity, access, responsibility, and freedom of choice in all aspects of life.

Amy Klobuchar and Mark Kennedy are running for the US Senate seat that Mark Dayton is vacating in Minnesota.

Tim Pawlenty and Mike Hatch are running for the governor's chair in Minnesota.

Dwight Grotberg and Kent Conrad are running for the US Senate seat in North Dakota.

Earl Pomeroy and Matt Mechtel are running for the US House of Representative seat in North Dakota.

If you wish to know more about these candidates and the ones that we never had a chance to interview, you can go to following websites for more information:

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|---|-----------------|
| <a href="http://www.amyklobuchar.com/">http://www.amyklobuchar.com/</a>                 | Amy Klobuchar   |
| <a href="http://www.markkenedy06.com/">http://www.markkenedy06.com/</a>                 | Mark Kennedy    |
| <a href="http://www.timpawlenty.com/">http://www.timpawlenty.com/</a>                   | Tim Pawlenty    |
| <a href="http://www.hatch2006.org/">http://www.hatch2006.org/</a>                       | Mike Hatch      |
| <a href="http://www.petersonforcongress.com/">http://www.petersonforcongress.com/</a>   | Collin Peterson |
| <a href="http://www.barrettforcongress06.com/">http://www.barrettforcongress06.com/</a> | Mike Barrett    |
| <a href="http://www.kent-conrad.com/">http://www.kent-conrad.com/</a>                   | Kent Conrad     |
| <a href="http://www.dwightgrotberg.com/">http://www.dwightgrotberg.com/</a>             | Dwight Grotberg |
| <a href="http://www.pomeroyforcongress.com/">http://www.pomeroyforcongress.com/</a>     | Earl Pomeroy    |
| <a href="http://www.mattmechtel.com/">http://www.mattmechtel.com/</a>                   | Matt Mechtel    |