



Left to right: President George HW Bush, Dick DeVoss, Allison Falleur circa 1995

As a child my meeting with George H W Bush left me with a lot to reflect on, upon his passing. Namely ....

Respect for the rule of law. Decency. Fairness. Decorum. Bipartisan agreement to the benefit of all Americans. Something happened during the presidency of George H W Bush. Namely the bipartisan effort that led to passage of the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA). This legislation has opened a whole new world to me in ways I could not understand as a ten-year-old. As a person with a disability my life changed dramatically as a result of the ADA. Buildings were made accessible. Curb cuts made mobility possible. Employment discrimination on the basis of disability was made illegal. Etc. Legislation born from the sweat and equity of disability advocates, and a struggle for recognition that spanned decades. A civil rights struggle that does not get the same billing as those of many other minorities, but one just as notable and hard fought. But in the end, all civil rights endeavors need a person wielding that mighty pen. That man, was President George HW Bush.

We still need so many other protections. We need an easier path to ensuring and enforcing equity for people with disabilities. We need a path to fully realizing the ideals of the ADA. Today even a sliver of cooperation and bipartisanship seems like a relic of a bygone era. Our country seems more divided than ever. What can be done about it? I demand an answer to that.

With the passing of Sen. John McCain I mourn the loss of bipartisan cooperation. And I mourn the passing of cooperation for the common good represented by President Bush's signing of the ADA.

I am a believer in listening to every side and to learn with purpose from that discourse. My community needs bipartisan leaders. We need compromise, equity, parity, fairness and common decency. We need voices that speak for the voiceless and empower every person to reach their greatest potential. What we do not need are voices that disparage and mock us.

May the spirit of bipartisanship be reborn. May civility and respect be reborn. New leaders grounded in the old virtues must rise, fight and win back the America we once knew. Disillusioned, tired and resigned seasoned leaders must find the strength to fight again and again until the dream of the ADA becomes an unassailable reality. All of us need to fight as never before. Fight to come to understanding. Fight for the common good.

Our lives depend on it.

Grant rest to President George HW Bush. May his bipartisan support for disability rights live on.

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