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First Study on the Political Views of People with Disabilities Shows Great Potential Impact on the American Political Landscape

Younger Americans offer strong support for champions of disability causes

WASHINGTON (July 12, 2013) – While the U.S. Census Bureau reports there are nearly 57 million Americans with disabilities—about one in five Americans—their voting patterns remain largely unexamined. To better understand the political views, advocacy trends and partisan affiliation of people with disabilities and chronic conditions, the Youth Transitions Collaborative, a membership group of organizations with a commitment to serving people with disabilities, today released findings from “Power in Numbers: A Profile of American Voters with Disabilities,” the first survey of its kind to study the political impact of this large community of people with disabilities, their families and caregivers.

The national survey also shines a spotlight on young people with disabilities and chronic conditions, finding evidence of an emerging generation of advocates and voters who may be more engaged in the political process.

Overall, the survey found that people with disabilities and chronic conditions are politically just as diverse as the general population, with voting patterns and issue rankings in line with other Americans. However, respondents overwhelmingly reported they will vote against a candidate they otherwise support if that candidate supports cuts to existing government services for people with disabilities. It also shows that the enthusiasm for holding politicians accountable to the interests of the disability community is even higher among people with disabilities in the 18-to-30 age range.

“Far too often speculation abounds about what Americans with disabilities think, feel and do, and critical gaps in accurate data hinder their full participation in the greatest privilege accorded an American citizen—voting.” said Jeff Rosen, chair of the [National Council on Disability](#), an independent federal agency. “As NCD finalizes its upcoming report on the impact of the Help America Vote Act, the information found in ‘Power in Numbers’ is the kind of resource needed to bolster the disability policy changes and recommendations the President, Congress and other federal agencies should consider. The Youth Transitions Collaborative’s survey is a tremendous service to us all by filling in critical information gaps and it honors Justin Dart, who urged us to ‘vote as if your life depends on it, because it does.’”

The [Youth Transitions Collaborative](#) brings together the collective resources of more than 45 organizations to focus on transitions-related services, research, public policy and best practices to help young people and young veterans with disabilities build paths to independence. The survey is a product of the Collaborative’s advocacy working group, which includes the [American Association of People with Disabilities](#), [Autistic Self Advocacy Network](#), [The HSC Foundation](#), [Institute for Educational Leadership](#), [National Council on Independent Living](#) and [United Cerebral Palsy](#).

“For the first time in recent memory, we have a clear picture of how key issues drive voting decisions for people with disabilities—as well as a strong affirmation that this community is a powerful group of voters,” said Jessie MacKinnon, chief operating officer of the National Youth Transitions Center, home to the Youth Transitions Collaborative.

Funded by The HSC Foundation, the combined telephone and online survey of more than 1,000 Americans was designed by [maslansky + partners](#) and conducted in part by [Research Now](#) from late May 2013 through June 2013. It included representative population samples and a mix of mental/cognitive, physical and sensory disabilities (including both vision and hearing impairments). It also incorporated responses from those who self-identified as having a disability or chronic condition, or who qualified through the series of questions the U.S. Census Bureau uses to determine disability status, as well as family members and other caregivers of people with disabilities or chronic conditions. The key findings include:

A candidate’s record is important.

The community considers a candidate’s record on supporting people with disabilities in their voting decisions, with 84 percent of respondents saying that having a record of supporting services and programs for people with disabilities is somewhat or very important.

It’s enough to change their vote...

Not only is a candidate’s record important, the community will actually vote against candidates they otherwise support if that candidate supports cuts to existing government services for people with disabilities. Eighty-seven percent of respondents said they would consider voting against a candidate they otherwise supported who was in favor of cuts to services (45% saying they definitely would).

... And enough to gain their support.

Beyond going to the polls, the community is willing to “actively support” those candidates looking to strengthen services. Eighty-five percent of respondents said they would be very likely or somewhat likely to support a candidate working to strengthen government services and supports for people with disabilities or other chronic conditions.

It’s a bipartisan community

The community is politically diverse, with party affiliation tracking closely to the general population.

Disability Community		General Population <i>(Gallup, June 1-4, 2013)</i>	
Democrat	30%	Democrat	31%
Republican	23%	Republican	26%
Independent	30%	Independent	41%

and both Democrats and Republicans will act.

When it comes to being willing to support candidates who help the community and vote against those who do not, it’s not just one party of voters who feel this way.

	TOTAL	REP	DEM	IND
Consider voting against	87%	86%	89%	88%

	TOTAL	REP	DEM	IND
Likely to support	85%	84%	90%	85%

People with disabilities are not single-issues voters.

In fact, only 39 percent rank “services and supports for people with disabilities” in their list of top five issues when determining how they’ll vote. Health care and the economy are the top two concerns—as they are with the general public. However, people with disabilities rank health care above the economy, while the general public puts the economy above health care.

Please rank the top five issues in order of importance to you in determining how you will vote in the next national election **Percent who selected each in their top five**

Health care	80%
Economy	73%
Social Security	59%
Education	52%
Taxes	50%
Government ethics and corruption	43%
National security and war on terror	40%
Services and supports for people with disabilities	39%
Immigration	27%
Energy policy	23%
Foreign policy	15%

The youth disability community feels even more strongly.

People ages 18 to 30 within the disability community will act even more strongly on these issues, and have stronger feelings when it comes to voting for a candidate working for their cause. These younger members of the community place a higher emphasis on a candidate’s record on disabilities issues and are much quicker to punish candidates not supporting these issues.

If a candidate you supported was in favor of significant cuts to existing government services for people with disabilities	TOTAL	18-30
Definitely vote against them	45%	50%
Maybe vote against them	42%	38%
Probably not vote against them	10%	12%
Definitely still vote for them	3%	2%

To learn more about the Youth Transitions Collaborative and the “Power in Numbers: A Profile of American Voters with Disabilities” survey, visit www.thenytc.org.

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About the Youth Transitions Collaborative

The [Youth Transitions Collaborative](#) is a membership group comprised of regional and national organizations with a commitment to serving youth and young veterans with disabilities. Facilitated by The HSC Foundation, the Collaborative provides direct services, expertise and guidance for the National Youth Transitions Center.

Advocates for Justice and Education, Inc.	National Health Foundation
American Association of People with Disabilities	National Youth Leadership Network
Autistic Self Advocacy Network	Physician – Parent Caregivers
Bridges from School to Work, A Marriott Foundation program	PolicyWorks
Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind	Potomac Community Resources, Inc.
DC Metro Business Leadership Network	Quality Trust for Individuals with Disabilities
District of Columbia Association for Special Education	Schooltalk, Inc.
District of Columbia Department on Disability Services	St. Luke’s House and Threshold Services United, Inc.
District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent of Education, Technical Training and Assistance	Student Veterans of America
District of Columbia Public Schools, Office of Special Education	TASH
Easter Seals	The Campbell Center
Girls Scouts Council of the Nation’s Capital	The Children’s Partnership
Goodwill of Greater Washington	The Coordinating Center
Health Services for Children with Special Needs, Inc.	The George Washington University – Graduate School of Education & Human Development
Institute for Educational Leadership	Smithsonian Institution Accessibility Program
Kids Included Together	The HSC Foundation
Latin American Youth Center	The Ivymount School
Linden Resources, Inc.	The Kingsbury School
Mind Expansion Community Services, Inc.	The Washington Center for Internships and Academic Seminars
Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation	TransCen, Inc.
National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health	Treatment and Learning Centers
National Council on Independent Living	United Cerebral Palsy
	World Team Sports
	Wounded to Work Institute
	Wounded Warrior Project