

Wed, Apr 9, 2008 HLAGR

A Day at the Capitol for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People Wednesday, May 21, 2008

Presented by Vic Krause, former State Representative

Chris Jacques: Tonight's program is in two parts. Vic Krause is going to talk about the Day at the Capitol and the legislation that is going on. After that is completed, we want to show a bit of information on the Walk4Hearing on June 21 and give orientation. We want to encourage you to get your friends involved or volunteer or donate to the walk. Any or all of those options are available. I want to introduce to you Vic Krause.

Vic Krause: Thank you, Chris. Good evening everyone. We will talk about a planned Day at the Capitol that is available for all of you and for anyone else that you know that is interested in going to Lansing for a day. I will tell you about what we will do there. There is no cost. It's our third annual Day at the Capitol. We started with about 150 people from across the state that first year to advocate for specific issues with hearing loss. I will briefly talk about that and when finished I will give you the Citizen's Guide to State Government and a registration form if you think you will be interested.

Just briefly I want to explain to you that because there is no cost to the people who participate in this. We do have sponsors who pay for breakfast, lunch and printed materials. The HLA-MI, MDA, DODHH, MADHH, MAA, Henry Ford Health System Division of Audiology and Hearing Aid Centers, Elder's Helpers, EHDI, CART provided by Screenline, Oticon, and the Lions Club .

You can see that we have some major organizations that support what we are trying to do here: that is trying to advocate our positions on issues related to hearing loss. The mission statement of HLAA is to open the world of communication to people with hearing loss by providing information, education, support and advocacy. What we do here is provide education to you. We also promote advocacy. Our advocacy efforts involve testifying before state, local and federal governments. I met with Debbie Stabenow last month and her chief of state. My purpose of going to Washington was not particularly for that meeting—we took our granddaughter there—but Debbie agreed to cosponsor one of our bills.

We help implement laws which benefit people with hearing loss. We also advocate for hearing loops in public places. We also have two legislators, Representative Sak and Senator Cherry, who sponsor these resolutions. Hearing Loss Awareness month is May and it's trying to create awareness about hearing loss with our state legislators.

These issues will be introduced there. Here are the issues. I will have additional slides to explain the issues. Right now I will list the issues. (*reading legislative issues:*

hearing aid assistance tax credit; insurance coverage for hearing aids; Medicaid funding for hearing aids; senior citizens' hearing loss and dementia; newborn hearing and screening; school age hearing and vision screening; looping the Michigan House and Senate Chambers and galleries) Those are all really important issues and I will explain them to you in detail. There is one more, looping the chambers.

The first is the hearing aid assistance tax credit act. It's House Resolution 2329 sponsored by Vern Ehlers. He is a good friend of mine who also wears hearing aids. He has had hearing loss as long as I have. He is the sponsor of this legislation. There is an identical bill in the Senate and that is the bill that Senators Clinton and Stabenow have agreed to sponsor. Senator Clinton has cosponsored the bill.

Here is what the bill does: It provides a tax credit of up to \$500 toward hearing aids available once every five years towards the purchase of such hearing aid available to: 1) individuals age 55 or over, and 2) those purchasing a hearing aid for a dependent, including families with children. Someone asked me one time why we don't do it for everyone. The reality is that it's hard to get any bill like this passed in Congress right now. We want to start with seniors and children. It's at least a start. This is about the fifth year we have kept bringing this to attention.

Guest: is that over and above the \$500 tax deduction for Medicare?

Vic Krause: That is not under Medicare. They don't cover the cost of hearing aids.

Chris Jacques: There is a difference between a tax credit and a tax deduction. If you had a tax deduction, you could claim the hearing aids as an expense but with a tax credit you can deduct that amount right off your taxes.

Guest: I thought they would reimburse you like a regular claim.

Vic Krause: You thought that the audiologist would file a claim and you would get money back? No sir, there is no Medicare coverage for hearing aids. That is why this is important. The way this would work is that when you fill out your income tax return each year and submit an invoice along with it for the cost of hearing aids you can take a credit off the income tax return of up to \$500. That is how this would work. If anyone else has questions about this, let me know.

What we are doing in Lansing is that we have asked Senator Hunter and Representative Sak who sponsored the bills to urge Congress to pass this. Last year we went to testify and stressed the importance of getting this passed. They passed the resolution on the last day of session. It was sent to other state's legislators that Michigan supports this. Trying to get bills passed is like growing grass...it takes forever sometimes.

Insurance coverage for hearing aids. There are about 11 states that provide some type of insurance for hearing aids. Only one state provides this for all people. There are some insurance carriers that will pay for a part of the hearing aids. I will show what we will do here. The Wisconsin Senate just passed a bill in December 2007 requiring insurance coverage of hearing aids and cochlear implants for children through age 11.

I met with Senator Sak two weeks ago and he is going to request this type of bill draft

here in Michigan. You know what the cost of hearing aids is today. Anything we can do through this or the federal legislation we will do. Medicaid as most of you probably know provides coverage for low income people and people who primarily qualify for Medicaid on an income standard. For the past several years this funding has been threatened by budget cuts. What we want to say is don't cut hearing aid monies. Some audiologists won't even take Medicaid patients. Hospitals can't do that but independent audiologists can. We want that kind of funding built in.

Dementia is difficult to diagnose. The importance of ruling out hearing loss prior to diagnosis is generally underestimated. Representative Sak's bill mandates hearing screening. I cannot give you data on it, but on some occasions people are given a verbal dementia exam and fail it. They are diagnosed with dementia and are put in Alzheimer's units but later it comes out that they simply could not hear the questions. I had a good friend who is an attorney [*with a large Grand Rapids' firm*] and this happened to her mother. She was on that kind of unit only because she could not answer the question in a dementia diagnosis. We will see what we can do with this bill.

Newborn hearing screening. All Michigan hospitals including MetroHealth Hospital presently voluntarily screen newborn hearing. But we have two bills introduced that mandate that all hospitals, health facilities and health professionals that are licensed to provide birthing services shall administer or choose to be administered a hearing screening.

We are having trouble with this one too. It is not mandated, but recommended. We will look at the wording on this next bill [*SB 987 and HB 5596*] to make sure the newborns get the audiological evaluation.

Guest: You still have to give parents a measure of autonomy.

Vic Krause: Right now if the newborn fails the test, they tell the parents or guardians that this has happened. They also provide a list of all audiologists in the area on how to get the evaluation. The purpose of the bill is ensuring all people do this. We want to mandate this hearing screening.

Hearing loss can occur at any age. In fiscal year 2004-2005, 534,009 children were screened for hearing in Michigan schools. The current budget is now \$5.15 million. Legislators are urged to maintain this level of funding for the upcoming year. Budgets are under such scrutiny right now because of the lack of revenue. This did get reduced one time but we got it back to cover all school age kids.

Many public places are now installing hearing aid compatible loop systems. The next big one is the Gerald R. Ford International airport. It is supposed to be completely installed in about 2 weeks. Once we know that it works properly we will have a special event to celebrate this, the first in the country. We had the funds for it and they are doing it.

Proposals were submitted to the Michigan House and Senate business offices in 2005 to install hearing loops systems in both chambers and galleries. Here is the agenda. I won't go through each item, but anyone that registers for the Day at the Capitol will get a lot more information. You will meet with representatives and have a guided tour of the Capitol. The last two years when we were up in the galleries we were recognized. Representative Sak will do that this year too. He will introduce us and the reason we are there. It has been very emotional.

We will have a sign language interpreter and a captionist. The first time we did this it was the first time in the history of the state of Michigan that these accommodations were in place. Why we did not do this before I don't know, but now when the governor gets up to speak on the State of the State she has a sign language interpreter. We will have some exhibits and we will give the legislators an opportunity to check their hearing. Some people joke about that: "they might hear, but they don't hear what we are saying." The registration cost is free; the only cost is transportation and parking. A charter bus may be available. Complimentary continental breakfast and lunch will be provided to all attendees. The deadline for registration is May 3.

Attendees last year rated the program and thought it was highly valuable. I will show you the issue facts sheet. I will also give you copies of the Michigan Citizen's Guide. If you don't know who your representatives or senators are, you can find it online. How many have been to the state Capitol?

[Showing photographs from last year's Day at the Capitol] Here was the check in. We have a display for the Day at the Capitol. We had an overflow crowd that day. We had captioning and an interpreter. Here is one of our state representatives here in his office. We were able to go into the House and Senate and do captioning. There is a great view on the House of Representatives. I sat right there back in 1983-1990. As you can see, for people in the gallery we had captioning up there.

There you are. I will give you all one of these. Everyone have one? I have a few of these, the registration form. Registrations are still open. Today we probably have 65 people that have registered for it from around the state.

I don't have these printed out for you, but each of these issues has a very complete fact sheet that really provides a lot of information about the issues for which we will advocate. As an attendee you will get a copy in the mail if you register. All the legislators will be invited to lunch with us as well. We look forward to seeing you there. It's a fun day and a beautiful time to be in Lansing. If we ever get out of winter, it's a beautiful time there in spring.

Chris Jacques: I promised you that we would have a second half too. It won't be as long as the first half. I want to give a bit more orientation on the Walk4Hearing on June 21. I have some material to pass out to you for informational purposes. We have some sign up materials and we will also show you how to sign yourself up on the

internet. How many have computers at home and are on the internet? Beautiful.

I will say this. You can be involved in this walk without actually leaving your house since you all have computers. The way that system is set up is you can write little notes to all your friends and relatives and whoever else you know on the internet and you can send them a note with a link. After they are compelled to donate after hearing your story... poof! They will show up on the internet as a donor. If you are a team captain, all they need to do is pick your team and it will show the transactions. You can sit at home and easily get \$100 to \$1000. You don't have to handle any money but you get credit for it.

At the walk itself, we will give out little prizes and it will be a fun and exciting time. For the walk, as I mentioned earlier, there are three or four different ways to be involved. One is to volunteer as a team captain. We have the kickoff meeting at the Hilton on May 7 that is designed for people who want to be a team captain. That is not difficult but you agree to contact people who agree to walk and raise money. They can also raise money on the internet. You can donate right on the spot. When each person walks, your team gets credit for that. That is one way. You can be a volunteer who walks and raises funds. That would be the people that the team captain gets to walk.

The third way is to just donate. If you are not going to walk or be a team captain, come and see me and I will let you donate to my team. The fourth way is to be a sponsor for the walk. Generally these are companies and larger donations. The credit you get there is that we will put your logo on our t-shirts for anyone that raises \$100 per team

The sponsors have until April 23 to sign up. If you work with a company that you think would be very interested in sponsoring the Walk4Hearing, see Marilyn at the end of the meeting and she will give you a packet to give your employer. Those are the four different ways for people to be involved in the walk.

Did anyone not get one of these in the mail? [*postcard announcing Walkathon Kickoff*] If you would like to pass out some more postcards, I will keep these up here. Since I know that all of you are probably interested in being a captain, you will get a quick look at what will be going on at the kickoff meeting. You get the first copies of the team interest forms. By the way, if anyone says I will be a team captain tonight, you will get a t-shirt tonight.

The last thing here is how to register online. This is an instruction set. Are you pretty savvy on the internet? Then this will be pretty simple? We will do the walk through at the team captain meeting. You will see how to register as a team captain and how everyone can sign up.

Marilyn Knol: to get to the website you go to www.walk4hearing.org At this point you see all of the spring walks and some of the fall walks. West Michigan is the last

spring walk on the list. We want to bring your attention to our local celebrity. Please take a minute to read Hannah Cluley's great story. Last year we collected close to \$35,000. We already have some teams. The instructions will walk you through how to start a team, to join a team or to register as an individual. We will cover all that at the kickoff meeting.

Chris Jacques: We just wanted to get you familiar with that tonight. If you know of others not on the mailing list who might want to be involved, let us know. We will start the program for Walk4Hearing between 5:00 and 6:00 p.m.; there will be an open bar and some food. At 6:00 p.m. we will go through what we intend to do with the monies raised and we will go through the details enough to help you know what to do to help out for the Walk4Hearing.

One other thing I wanted to mention, did any of you get this in the mail? [*postcard announcing "Get In The Loop!" with Deidre Downs, Miss America 2005*] Here is a program at 84th and Burlingame, at the Van Singel Fine Arts Center, with Miss America who has a hearing loss. The program will start at 2:00 p.m. on Saturday, April 19. The last Miss America I met was in 1962 at the Detroit Auto Show. Does anyone have any questions?

Thank you for coming. I know that spring break is a bit tough. We appreciate you coming here. Tell your friends and neighbors about the Walk4Hearing and the Day at the Capitol. You have the information and we appreciate all of your involvement. Thank you for coming tonight.