

## 10b - Steps to Equality

By Michael Auberger

*Among the more radical groups in the disability rights movement has been American Disabled for Attendant Programs Today (ADAPT). In 1990, ADAPT organized a series of demonstrations to press for passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. During one rally in front of the U.S. Capitol, protesters threw themselves out of their wheelchairs and began crawling up the building's 83 marble steps. Each carried a scrolled paper with the opening words of the Declaration of Independence to present to lawmakers. It was a dramatic demonstration of the need for wheelchair access to public buildings.*

*Before the "crawl-up," ADAPT co-founder Michael Auberger addressed the 700 demonstrators from his motorized wheelchair at the bottom of the Capitol steps. Auberger recalled a 9th grade class trip that he had made to the Capitol before injuring his spinal cord in a bobsled accident.*

Twenty years ago, I walked up these steps a wholly equal American citizen. Today I sit here with you as less than second-class citizens who are still legally discriminated against daily. The steps we sit before represent a long history of discrimination and indignities heaped upon disabled Americans. Among us are those who have been forced to live in institutions against our will. There are those among us who have had our children taken away solely because we are disabled. We have been denied housing and jobs. These indignities and injustices must not go on. We will not permit these steps to continue to be a barrier to prevent us from the equality that is rightfully ours. The preamble to the Constitution does not say, "We the able-bodied people." It says, "We the people." We are the people.

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