

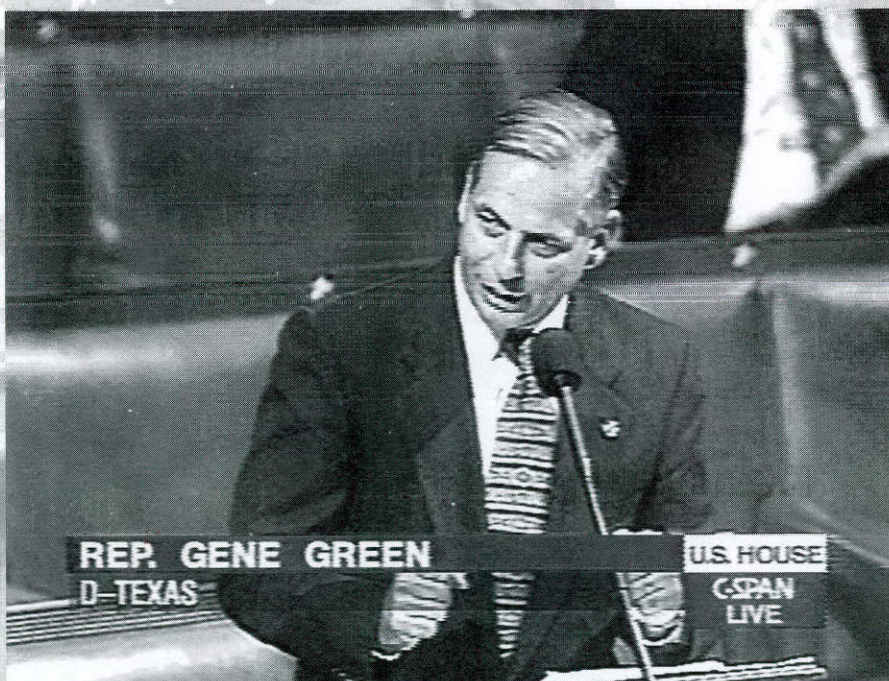
Vol. 18 No. 9 October 1995

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trc today

An Employee Newsletter for Texas Rehabilitation Commission

A day
you never
forget.



Gene Green, D-Texas -- the "Gentleman from Texas" who wouldn't yield. He stood firm, to-the-point and committed to the cause. People with disabilities owe him a debt of gratitude.

trc today

An Employee Newsletter for Texas Rehabilitation Commission

Texas Rehabilitation
Commission
4900 N. Lamar Blvd.
Austin, Texas 78751-2399
Vol. 18 No. 9 October 1995

A Victory for People with Disabilities

The longest five days in VR history

In a classic showdown, VR narrowly escaped consolidation in HR 1617.

Tuesday, Sept. 19, 1995 — It could have been the end of Vocational Rehabilitation. Instead, it turned out to be a new beginning and a show of strength, courage and solidarity. It had all the elements of real drama ... tense moments, high stakes, great expectations, courageous acts and dashed hopes. Then finally, a thrilling victory.

Led by a strong advocacy effort from Texas, the public program of Vocational Rehabilitation successfully met one of the greatest challenges in its 75-year history. On this day, the full Congressional House of Representatives voted to remove VR from HR 1617 by a close vote of 231-192. Forty-one Republicans broke ranks to support VR.

"In almost 40 years of service to people with disabilities, I have never experienced or seen the emotions I have today. This victory comes from a strong grassroots advocacy that so many people played a major role in," said Commissioner Arrell. "I have never seen staff, consumers and

legislators pull together the way they did for this." The teamwork in Texas made a difference. Joe Owens, executive director of the CSAVR, wrote to Arrell that the victory was "... the direct result of the aggressive and relentless efforts of individuals in Texas." Advocates were relentless in voicing their concerns. Our congressmen and women listened to these concerns and aggressively acted upon them.

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Texas Rep. Gene Green led the charge on the floor of Congress to introduce an amendment to pull VR out of HR 1617. Green, a Texas delegate on the Goodling McKeon Committee, had been unsuccessful in an attempt to remove VR from the bill before it left committee. Green remained undaunted in his resolve. In the true Texas tradition of standing tall in the face of adversity, he led the fight for a floor vote which beat the odds at success.

Green was not alone. Reps. Lloyd Doggett, Pete Geren and Sheila Jackson Lee stood up to speak on the behalf of VR. Another 20 members of the Texas Congressional Delegations voted for the amendment. Insiders say that the five days leading up to Sept. 19 felt longer than the 100 days we recently experienced during the state legislative session. And although the days leading up to the House vote were intense, the groundwork was laid some time ago.

It actually began about five months before when Frankie Watson, regional director from Houston, met with her Congressman, Gene Green, during a conference in Washington. They met again in Houston and Green took up VR's cause in committee.

An attempt to pull VR out of HR 1617 while in committee failed. As the bill lay waiting two months to reach the floor of the House, advocates contacted their representatives any way they could — fax, letter, phone, appointments and at town meetings. Their message was clear and emphatic, "Take VR out of HR 1617!" But strong advocacy was also occurring for keeping VR in. Everyone knew that it would go down to the wire. Here's a recap of the events leading up to the vote:

The weekend before the vote: TRC staff works with Green to write a short, clear and compelling amendment. Hopes were buoyed for the coming confrontation and calls were made for supporters in the House.

Monday: TRC works to counter misinformation put out from groups supporting VR's inclusion in HR 1617. Then, when all seems to be going well, the Republican sponsor of the VR amendment pulls out, eliminating the bipartisan appeal. A frantic search is on for another co-sponsor.

Tuesday morning: Several compromise amendments are proposed but after analysis, none pass the muster. Three co-sponsors are found and all pull out. Finally, Jay Dickey, R-Arkansas, agrees to co-sponsor the amendment.

Tuesday noon: The Dickey-Green amendment goes to the floor. Green stands firm under heated debate.

Tuesday afternoon: Green tells supporters that the opposition is strong and well organized. Not hopeful of pulling it out, he calls for letters from advocates with disabilities to counter this surge from the opposition. TRC rallies and quickly contacts consumers to write letters. Within the hour, letters flood Green's office. They are delivered to him as he stands on the floor, advocating for the program.

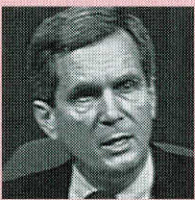
Tuesday 4 p.m.: Countdown. Arrell paces the floor as the vote nears. A voice vote is called for and the Speaker declares that the amendment failed, based upon noise from the nay response. Green calls for an electronic vote. The 15 minutes allotted for voting is sheer torture to watch. The numbers in the vote go back and forth. Finally the moment arrives ... the Dickey-Green Amendment PASSES, 231-192.

It was a magic moment for VR advocates across the country. In TRC's Brown-Healy Building, you could hear shouts of joy from every floor.

Arrell cautions that the war is not over, just a major battle. There is work to be done to ensure the integrity of the Kassebaum Bill. You can be sure those who were in favor of consolidating VR with other job training will be working hard to amend Kassebaum in their favor.

Still, it's a victory to savor. A victory because people with disabilities would not accept less than what they deserve — which is equal opportunity for services and employment. A victory because we would not allow for any backsliding in the hard fought and won victories of the past.

Excerpts from Congressional Testimony



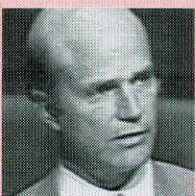
"In the state of Texas, we have one of the finest rehabilitation programs. It is not only the people who work as rehabilitation experts, it is individuals with disabilities who came out in numbers to tell me of their great concern with this piece of legislation." — Rep. Lloyd Doggett, D-Texas



"Why in God's name do we have to reform every program in the government, regardless of whether or not it works or does not? This is fixing a problem that does not exist." — Rep. Gene Green, D-Texas



"Those who are physically challenged are on the side of Congressman Green and so are those of us who believe that the special attention given to persons who are physically challenged has resulted in a bounty of fruit — of successful workers, of people who are taking their rightful place in society." — Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, D-Texas



"The VR program has put more than 13 million people to work. It more than pays for itself because it takes people who want to work and help themselves and puts them into the workforce. It's a highly specialized process and does not fit into the Careers Act." — Rep. Pete Geren, D-Texas

Seeing is Believing...

It's been said by almost everyone involved that it was the tireless work of advocates which resulted in the recent victory in the House for people with disabilities. The numerous letters, faxes and calls sent to show concern about VR's inclusion in HR 1617 turned the tide in VR's favor.

And while many can claim to have sent one or even 10 letters, how many can say they wrote 1,000 letters to advocate for the program. Jo Miller, mother of TRC client Nic Richards, did just that. She is responsible for writing, getting signatures and sending over 1,000 letters to members of the Goodling McKeon Committee. Nic's counselor, Bob Cogburn, helped Jo in this effort by giving her "talking points" for the letters and information on appropriate congressmen/women to contact.

When asked about why she felt such a great need to do this, she replied: "When my son landed in the hospital, the doctor

told me he would be a vegetable the rest of his life. For six weeks he just laid there, without any attempt at rehabilitation. Then we got a visit from a TRC counselor and it became a different story."

Nic's trip to the hospital was unexpected. While working in a bank, a robbery attempt resulted in two bullet wounds — one to the head and one to the back of the neck. And it wasn't the first time for him. Two years earlier

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while managing a restaurant, Richards was shot in the forehead during a different burglary. The first time he lost sight in one eye. This second time resulted in quadriplegia.

With TRC's help, Nic received intensive therapy at Dallas Rehabilitation Institute and got

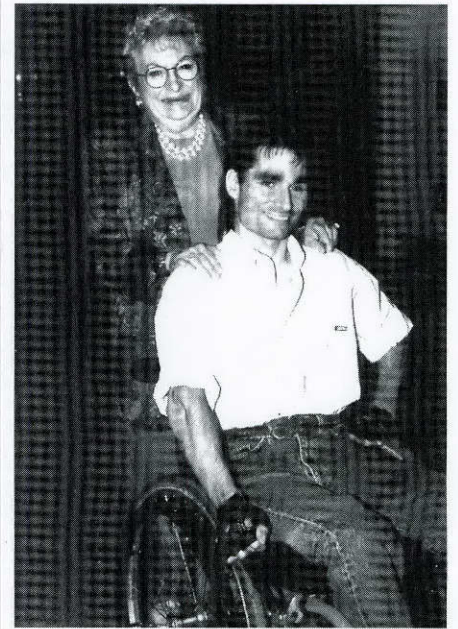
some significant return in function. He now attends North Texas University where he will receive a master's degree in Computer Science.

"When I met Nic, he was working hard to overcome spasms in his legs with the help of a physical therapist. I could see his determination and commitment," says Cogburn. "Right there I knew I had a very special client who was going to benefit from everything this agency had to offer."

"A voucher is not what I needed when I was in the hospital," says Richards. "You know, the same injury can have a lot of different outcomes. You need someone there to guide you and help you make decisions best for you. Each situation is different."

Both mother and son have grit and a positive attitude. And both fight hard for what they believe in. Lucky for us, they believe in TRC and the VR program. "One man wouldn't

sign a letter and told me that you've got to start cutting the budget somewhere," recalls Miller. "So I asked him what he would do if his son faced a situation like mine did. He didn't have an answer. Well, I know the answer is VR."



Jo Miller and Nic Richards

Let's talk about Choices

New and veteran counselors across the state got to test drive on-line tools such as the PDR and Choices while they were in Central Office recently.

Choices, the automated vocational assessment tool, will give a quick picture of a client's interests and aptitudes and match these with specific job titles. It also gives reasons why certain jobs aren't appropriate and provides information on colleges, trade schools, etc.

Training is currently going on in the regions and counselors are expected to have this software available to them between November and January.



Tim Spong, counselor in the Austin DHS Office, gives area managers and counselors a quick spin through the program and discusses with them the different ways this software can be used to help better plan services.

Temporary Services - a new look at an old problem

Five years after ADA, two-thirds of Americans with disabilities between the ages of 16-64 are still not working. No other demographic group under 65 has such a small proportion working.

At the same time, big business is downsizing, trimming staff and employee benefits. A new approach is needed to allow people with disabilities to compete in the workplace of the 90s and beyond. Here is one that shows a lot of promise.

Goodwill Temporary Services of Austin and Peak Performers, a special employment program of the Texas Industries for the Blind and Visually Handicapped, are breaking ground in the temporary services market to provide people with disabilities a new gateway into the job market.

Peak Performers has a contract through the General Services Commission to provide temporary employees in 47 clerical and light industrial job classifications to several state agencies. These programs are designed to focus on reversing employers' attitudes about the productivity of people with disabilities, cracking the door into the jobs they might not have access to any other way.

"People with disabilities can compete in the workplace," says Bert Whaley, director of Employment Services for TIBH. "Peak Performers just gives them the opportunity to prove themselves."

U.S. Department of Labor information points to a workforce in the year 2000 that will be 75% temps and contract workers. 65% of businesses already use temp help regularly as part of their staffing strategy and the temporary services industry is one of the youngest, fastest growing and profitable businesses in the country.

These new temp programs for people with disabilities will help them benefit from this new workforce development and provide a faster track for people with disabilities into the job market of the future.

Focus on Quality

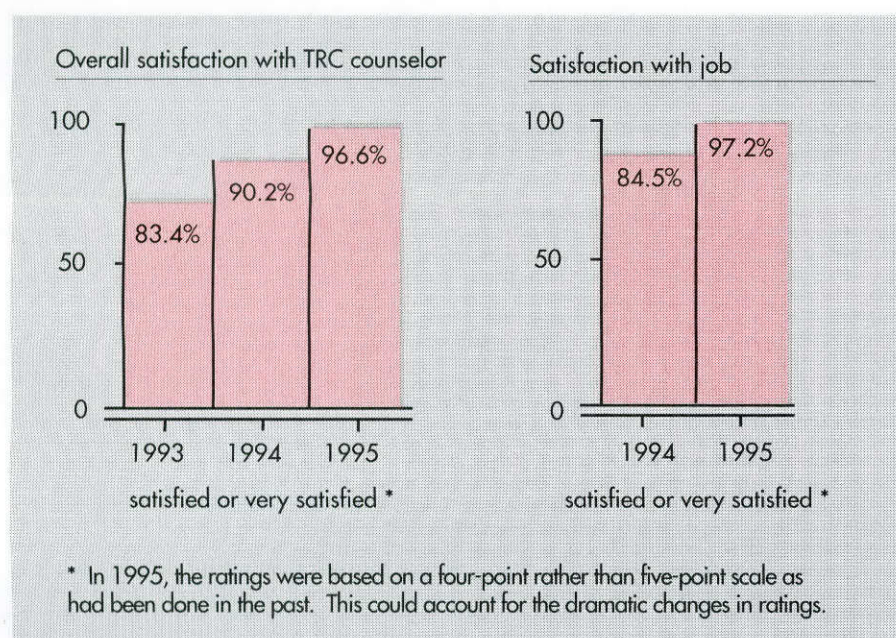
The initial results are in and the 1995 Client Satisfaction Survey confirms the fact that the best just keep getting better. This year, over 14,000 clients (from both successfully and unsuccessfully closed cases) were polled in a telephone survey to see what they thought of their experience with TRC.

As in past years, we questioned consumers on issues such as involvement in decision-making, satisfaction with counselors, and whether they were treated with courtesy and respect. Ratings in these areas have consistently been high and continue to improve as well.

New questions were added last year that focus on our consumers' perceptions of the quality of their employment — a real litmus test for the quality of our services. Here's how we rated:

- 91.2% were happy with their wages;
- 97.0% were satisfied with their job benefits;
- 90.2% felt they had an opportunity for career advancement;
- 92.9% felt secure in their employment.

"We are thrilled with these new findings," says Joellen Flores Simmons, deputy commissioner for Rehabilitation Services. "Feel-good rehabilitation doesn't show up in these results. These results tell us that our clients are happy with the jobs they are getting after our services. Folks, that is what it's all about."



Looking down the road, the 1996 survey will yield even more information. The Quality Task force has worked with the Texas Rehabilitation Advisory Council (TRAC) to modify questions and increase focus on looking at specific services clients feel help or hinder their rehabilitation.

Recently, there was a seminar in Austin to acknowledge an area manager, counselor and RST from each region that were rated the highest by their clients in the quality survey. These employees were also used as a focus group to learn about what they see as quality in their service delivery.



(Left) Counselor Mary Saenz and RST Brunilda Garcia of the Corpus Christi Field Office. (Right) RST Kathy Cash of the Wichita Falls Field Office receiving a certificate from Terry Smith and Kay Sitton from the Quality Committee.

WOW!!

Year-end numbers at DDS went through the roof at 253,401 cases cleared for FY 1995 — over 2,000 cases over the target. As well, quality shined with a 96 percent accuracy rate.

"It took a great deal of team work and commitment to make this happen."

"Employees at DDS are to be commended for their superhuman efforts," says Ken Vogel, deputy commissioner for DDS. "It took a great deal of teamwork and commitment to make this happen. There has been a lot of transition here and employees did not let it distract them from the task at hand."

During a recent visit, positive comments were echoed by Noel Wall, regional commissioner for SSA, particularly that having such a high production and maintaining quality is quite an achievement.

Fiscal Year 1996 holds long-awaited progress in working conditions. In November, employees begin moving into the new building and automation of examiner workstations soon will be complete. More on this as it develops.

And that's not all

DDS isn't the only one to come out with good numbers. In FY 1995, there were 21,467 successfully rehabilitated clients in the Vocational Rehabilitation Program, an increase of over 1,300 closures.

"We can be very pleased with these figures," says Joellen Flores Simmons. "There has been a steady increase in successful closures over the last several years as well as very positive feedback about our quality. I am proud of how hard everyone has worked to get us here. Keep it up."

Across the State

August 1995

Welcome Aboard!

Debra Hill Jacks, RST
Cynthia Ewing, counselor
Edward Sweat, RST

Kudos

Javier Leal is the new area manager in the Corpus Christi Field Office.

Deaths

Dwayne Alexander, former TRC counselor
David Glenn, director of programs

State Service Awards - October

10 Years

Charles Carson
Linda Bryant
Pilar Galvan
Gail Karwoski
Phyllis Rummel

15 Years

Brenda Brown
Mary D. Johnson
Kimberly Olson
Annie H. Meza
Lawrence Bugh
Linda Daniel
Dreama Awbrey

20 Years

Rosalinda Rodriguez
Rachel Gonzales
Peggy Felter

25 Years

Dale Pohlmeier
Nancy Aleman
Magdalena Hancock
Donna Kurtz
Ken Vogel
D Larson

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TRC Today is published by the Texas Rehabilitation Commission for distribution to its employees and retirees throughout the state. We welcome submissions for publication, but reserve the right to edit or screen materials according to newsletter policy. Address submissions or inquires to Shayla Fleshman, Public Information Office, Texas Rehabilitation Commission, 4900 N. Lamar Blvd., Austin, Texas 78751-2399; or telephone (512) 483-4043.

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August 1995 Retirements

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C. R. Jennings
James E. Payne
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Ron Trull
Jerry L. Hickman
Glen R. Cagle
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Late Braking Good News!

S143 (AKA: the Kassebaum Bill) passed the full Senate with no amendments offered during debate that would affect vocational rehabilitation. Next month we will cover in depth what this could mean to the future of VR.

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