



Disability History and Awareness Month 2023



Jennifer Keelin

One of the most pivotal demonstrations during the fight to pass the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was the Capitol Crawl which is still regarded today as one of the largest direct-action demonstrations to date. On March 13, 1990, disability rights activists and protestors with disabilities marched from the White House to gather at the U.S. Capitol building to protest the

efforts within the U.S. Senate to stall and stop the Americans with Disabilities Act from passing. On this day, the "Capitol Crawl," as it would come to be called, became one of the most visible and emotionally impactful demonstrations for disability rights.

Among the many disabled people who participated in the historic demonstration was six-year-old Jennifer Keelin. Like other demonstrators, she threw herself from her mobility device and began to crawl up the steps of the capitol building. The Capitol Crawl was an extremely effective practical demonstration of the barriers and inequalities that people with disabilities experienced all around the country, as even the legislature, a hub of American democratic values, was on display as a woefully inaccessible space. At the time, the sudden unplanned mass of people crawling up the steps reportedly inconvenienced several senators – ironically making the capitol less accessible to them – which motivated them to get the ADA passed.

[The] further up the steps I went, the more I felt empowered. I felt like I had all of the other kids behind me [who couldn't be there]. I felt that it was important, not just to represent myself, but to represent them and their voices.

– Jennifer Keelin

On September 25, 2008, President George W. Bush signed the ADA Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAAA) into law. The amendment broadened the definition of "disability," thereby extending the ADA's protections to more people. The act overturned a 1999 US Supreme Court case that held that an employee was not disabled if the impairment could be corrected by mitigating measures; it provides explicitly that such impairment must be determined without considering such ameliorative measures. It also overturned the court restriction that an impairment that substantially limits one major life activity must also limit others to be considered a disability.

Profiles by Andrew Caruana, Policy and Research Intern, Office of Senator Sara Gelser Blouin

Andrew is a Junior at Willamette University studying philosophy. He is a lifelong Oregonian and has cerebral palsy.

Sen.SaraGelser@OregonLegislature.Gov

503-986-1708