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VIEWPOINTS

Candidates aren't talking about disability issues

The November 2006 elections are upon us. Across the state, organizations like Seguin Services have joined forces with One Illinois, a community initiative for persons with disabilities, and all affiliated with them, representing 2.2 million voters. Those 2.2 million voters are still waiting to hear from the candidates—but no one's talking. Now is the time for us to stand up and be heard—and counted.

Over the next 15-plus years, millions of baby-boomers will be retiring and many of them will continue to care for their child with a disability. Where will their child live when they are no longer able to provide for their care? The state's own data shows there are more than 1,800 Illinoisans over the age of 60 caring for a family member with a developmental disability. Right now, the only options in Illinois for their child are a state-run institution or a nursing home. For many parents this is just simply not an option.

Both Governor Blagojevich and gubernatorial candidate Judy Baar Topinka must be challenged to develop a plan to address this most crucial need. They can't talk about education, healthcare, housing, jobs, and human rights without talking about community services for children and adults with disabilities and mental illness. But then, no one's talking.

Organizations like Seguin across the state are banding together to persuade both candidates to adopt a plan in their campaign platforms to address the needs of more than 10,000 non-served individuals with developmental disabilities who have been identified

in the state's own database.

Additionally, Blagojevich and Topinka cannot ignore the wages of direct support professionals in the private sector being significantly lower than that of the same worker in the public sector, with no increase in the state budget to bridge this gap.

They can't turn their back on the fact that the actual cost for providing residential services, when they are available, far exceeds the funding supplied by the state to provide those services.

They must acknowledge the lack of affordable/accessible housing throughout the state as a major crisis preventing many people with disabilities from living in their own homes with support.

According to The Arc's State of the States in Developmental Disabilities: 2004, Illinois ranks 47th in spending allocated for community services, including residential, day program, and individual and family support services.

With November right around the corner, there is no time like the present to ask the hard questions of the candidates. What will Blagojevich and Topinka do to address the needs of people with disabilities? The candidates have been asked these pressing questions, but no one's talking. As voters we deserve action—not just answers. Make your voice heard and your vote count in November.

To learn more about how you can help to insist the gubernatorial candidates speak to these important issues, visit www.oneillinois.info.

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