

MARTY OMOTO COMMENTARY

California Disability Community Action Network



ACCOUNTABILITY WITH ACTION

Advocacy without borders for the rights of children and adults with disabilities, mental health needs, the blind, deaf, persons with traumatic brain and other injuries, seniors, workers and organizations who provide or advocate for services and supports. This report and commentary goes out to over 55,000 people with disabilities, mental health needs, the blind, seniors, community organizations, facilities, workers, policymakers and advocates

across the State. Marty Omoto is the director of CDCAN (California Disability Community Action Network)

Reply to this commentary:

Email: martyomoto@rcip.com Website: www.cdcan.us

MAY 19, 2010 – EARLY WEDNESDAY MORNING

PRAYING FOR TIME

SACRAMENTO, CALIF – These are – and have been for the past several years – hard times for our community of people with disabilities, mental health needs, people with traumatic brain and other injuries, people with MS, Alzheimer's and other disorders, seniors, their families, community organizations and workers who provide supports and services. Year after year after year of facing threats of cuts or outright elimination of programs and services, rollbacks in eligibility, and actual loss of needed services, and loss of jobs or the constant fear of losing all of those things.

Many in our communities – including those people with disabilities, mental health needs, seniors in the Asian and Pacific Islander, Latino and other communities of color – do not understand the workings of state government and politics nor have first hand information of what will or will not happen. More often than not, the politics that our communities know is simply about survival.

It is about being deeply anxious, worried and frightened about how to cope with what is happening now – and what will happen next. In speaking to hundreds, sometimes thousands of people across the State, I know while they may not know about the “Olmstead Decision” or about the “ADA” [Americans with Disabilities Act] they do know about their own life or the lives of their children and family. They know what is right – and they know what is happening to them is wrong. No one should tell them not to be scared.

We are facing difficult times – though we also remember that these are difficult and hard times for every Californian – for every American. Unemployment in the State is at the highest levels recorded in modern times. Revenues in every state has dropped and spending cuts in nearly every state has meant major reductions. These are hard times for our state and for our nation.

But for our communities of infants, children and adults with disabilities, mental health needs, and seniors, of workers and community organizations who provide supports and services, these difficult times have been a part of our lives since late 2001, when those first budget cuts occurred that despite promises that they were temporary, kept growing in depth and spreading to other needed programs and services like some relentless virus. And before that – the massive cuts and reductions that occurred in the early 1990's. We lagged behind others when times were good and somehow ended up in front when times got bad.

And so people in our communities wonder: how will we get through this time, when the struggle seems endless every year. Budget cycles use to end and begin allowing at least a half a year between the next battle. Now – for the past three years or more, the cycle is without end or a beginning. It doesn't stop. The crisis of being threatened with cuts or being subjected to them is without end or a beginning now.

For many of us it may seem like a siege – a war of attrition that is exhausting our resources to fight, our willingness to hold on to hope or to see a vision beyond our fears.

I was reading an email from someone who wrote to me who was terrified of all the proposed cuts – and what it would mean to her life. She had no idea what would likely happen. All she knew was many bad things have already happened to her – and many more bad things could happen – and happen soon. Too soon. Not enough time to even plan what to do next. But enough time to be frightened.

It made me think of a song from the past – “Praying for Time” by George Michael. It was a number one hit back in 1990 and the lyrics spoke of somber and difficult times – of despair, of a breakdown not only of what was right, but the hope that would make things right again. And yet, maybe there was still some hope – at least for more time to get through it.

Praying For Time

*These are the days of the open hand
They will not be the last - look around now
These are the days of the beggars and the choosers
This is the year of the hungry man - whose place is in the past
Hand in hand with ignorance
And legitimate excuses*

*The rich declare themselves poor
And most of us are not sure
If we have too much*

*But we'll take our chances
Because God's stopped keeping score
I guess somewhere along the way
He must have let us all out to play
Turned His back
And all God's children crept out the back door*

*And it's hard to love,
When there's so much to hate
Hanging on to hope
When there is no hope to speak of
And the wounded skies above
Say it's much too late*

*Well maybe we should all be praying for time
Do you think we have time?
Do you think we have time?*

*These are the days of the empty hand
You hold on to what you can
And charity is a coat you wear twice a year*

*This is the year of the guilty man
Your television takes a stand
And you find out
That what was over there is over here*

*So you scream from behind your door
Say what's mine is mine and not yours
I may have too much but I'll take my chances
Because God's stopped keeping score
And you cling to the things they sold you
Did you cover your eyes when they told you
That He can't come back
Because he has no children to come back for*

*It's hard to love
When there's so much to hate
Hanging on to hope
When there is no hope to speak of
And the wounded skies above
Say it's much too late*

*So maybe we should all be praying for time
Do you think we have time?
Do you think we have time?*

Please give us time

By George Michael "Praying for Time"

To see short clip (5:20 min) of George Michael performing the song unplugged go to You Tube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-qYIFIZEtZM>

And so we can pray for time – and for hope, even if it seems there is no hope to speak of.

And yet we will get through this time. Not because we simply say it to ourselves or chant a slogan at a rally or defiantly proclaim it at a budget hearing in anger – but because we have to. We have to. We have to get through this.

The lives of people we love and need depend on it I remembered that when my sister – who had developmental disabilities – was alive.

We don't have a choice. We have to get through this.

Which means we don't give in.

We don't surrender to hate or to demonizing others – things that are too easy for us to do to each other - just as we claim it is easy for a policymaker to do to *us*

We don't sacrifice others in order to save our own specific program or our own specific services, just as we believe that government does that to us in order to protect something else.

We must always remember that the standard of what is right in California must **never** be about bringing people down to the level of how badly another state treats its own.

A friend told me a story about two joggers who come upon a huge hungry bear in the woods that is ready to attack. One jogger starts stretching out his legs preparing to run while the other is scared stiff staring at the bear. The stiff jogger says to the other "what the hell are you doing?" The jogger who finished stretching and was now ready to sprint away said quite simply "I don't have to outrun the bear - I just have to outrun *you*."

The reality and truth of disability, mental health and senior rights is that no one is left behind. But many are, despite what we say at rallies or hearings.

Behind closed doors – we shout and scream – “what’s mine is mine and not yours...” as the words to “Praying for Time” goes. It is a line we believe that policymakers from either party say in terms of funding and revenues. It is what we might feel – though never admit out loud - about our individual services and supports

It is not just the job of government to respect rights - it is our responsibility too - we as advocates, in communities across the state must remember that. We must fight for that as much as we fight for other things.

We cannot just say it – we must mean it – we must be there for others – not just ourselves.

An adult with mental health needs should not be sacrificed for a senior who needs IHSS. An infant at risk of developmental delays and in need of early intervention should not be left out in order for a person with disabilities to receive Medi-Cal. A person with traumatic brain injuries should not be given up in order for a person to keep their supported living. An adult with disabilities in an adult day health center should not be left out in order for a person who receives CalWORKS to be left in. A legal immigrant needing Cash Assistance Program for Immigrants grants should not be tossed out in order to save a child with special needs in foster care. All these lives are important. We are one community. Advocacy without borders.

People are scared and frightened about the seemingly endless budget proposals to cut or eliminate services in ways that not everyone even our own community will understand when it is not happening directly to them. And yet if we are to get through this time we need to understand that– if only because we cannot expect policymakers to understand if we do not.

People are scared to lose their homes, their services, their supports, their jobs, the paycheck that supports their families – whether it is a person living in their own home in their own community with IHSS or supported living services and their SSI/SSP or CAPI grant; or a person living in a developmental center or nursing home, or a person with mental health needs who desperately needs community based mental health services; or a family needing early intervention or respite; or a person who works as a support worker or service coordinator or technician or aide. One can see it in their faces. One can hear it in their voices.

No one has a right to tell another who is threatened not to be scared, not to be worried of the threat they face – not when threats exist, not when other threats have become real.

What we **can** say to each other is that we'll be there. That we are one community. Not in some fake Hallmark Card type of way or the empty chant said at a rally that later ends up really meaning that “one community” translates as “just us” and “just us” means “not you”.

Accountability with action means that we hold ourselves – as much as we hold others including policymakers – accountable and responsible for what happens and how we act. More than ever, after 9 years of consecutive and growing cuts, we need to act right if we want to right what is wrong.

For us, we need to remember what we are fighting for – and how we frame an issue and the consequence of what it does or means to another person or program.

In my next commentary and alert, I will offer up some ideas on how we can respond, how we can fight back without forgetting our history or the promise of what that means to all of us.

Until then, let's remember that hope is not unreachable or some distant image that keeps fading as one inches closer to it like some cruel mirage. It is real. Many of us are living it.

But for many others – it is something they do not have yet or something that at the moment has been denied or lost or given up.

And that means we are *all* threatened.

There is no safety in hiding behind a closed door that we believe is a sanctuary against further cuts because “they” didn’t get us this time – or somehow we are okay because the cut to us was rejected – even if a cut to another person was not; or because we did not fight to stop a cut that harmed someone else.

We can pray that we will never do that. But we know that many do.

We can pray to get through this. But we remember that many didn't.

We can pray for hope. And hope that many will.

And we can hope that we will stand with each other – and mean it. We can hope that while we may not always agree with the philosophy of a program or service – we can agree that any change must be done respecting people's rights, health and safety.

We can remember the African Proverb: When you pray – move your feet.

And we can remember the haunting words from that song, “Praying for Time”

“...And the wounded skies above say it's much too late...” and ask ourselves: do we have the time?

We can pray for it.

We can pray for time – and hope – not just for ourselves but for others too.

And when we pray

We **WILL** move our feet.

Note: watch for next commentary and action alert later on Wednesday May 19th.

ACCOUNTABILITY WITH ACTION TRAINING IN SACRAMENTO JUNE 14TH – RSVP IF YOU WANT TO ATTEND – SPACE LIMITED

If you are interested in attending a free “Accountability With Action” actual full scale training that I will be giving on June 14th, Monday afternoon from 1 to 3:15 PM in Sacramento at the Rancho Cordova City Hall, please send me an email at martyomoto@rcip.com. There is limited seating, so please RSVP as soon as possible. If this training is successful, we will do it in other areas of the state, depending on resources.

URGENT!

PLEASE HELP CDCAN CONTINUE ITS WORK!!!

We need your help. CDCAN Townhall Telemeetings, reports and alerts and other activities cannot continue without your help.

To continue the CDCAN website, the CDCAN News Reports. sent out and read by over 50,000 people and organizations, policy makers and media across California and to continue the CDCAN Townhall Telemeetings which since December 2003 have connected thousands of people with disabilities, seniors, mental health needs, people with MS and other disorders, people with traumatic brain and other injuries to public policy makers, legislators, and issues.

Please send your contribution/donation (make payable to "CDCAN" or "California Disability Community Action Network):

CDCAN

1225 8th Street Suite 480 - Sacramento, CA 95814

paypal on the CDCAN site is not yet working – will be soon.

MANY, MANY THANKS TO the Pacific Homecare Services, Easter Seals, California Association of Adult Day Health Centers, Valley Mountain Regional Center, Toward Maximum Independence, Inc (TMI), Friends of Children with Special Needs, UCP of Los Angeles, Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties, Southside Arts Center, San Francisco Bay Area Autism Society of America, Hope Services in San Jose, FEAT of Sacramento (Families for Early Autism Treatment), RESCoalition, Sacramento Gray Panthers, Easter Seals of Southern California, Tri-Counties Regional Center, Westside Regional Center, Regional Center of the East Bay, UCP of Orange County, Alta California Regional Center, Life Steps, Parents Helping Parents, Work Training, Foothill Autism Alliance, Arc Contra Costa, Pause4Kids, Manteca CAPS, Training Toward Self Reliance, UCP, California NAELA, Californians for Disability Rights, Inc (CDR) including CDR chapters, CHANCE Inc, , Strategies To Empower People (STEP), Harbor Regional Center, Asian American parents groups, Resources for Independent Living and many other Independent Living Centers, several regional centers, People First chapters, IHSS workers, other self advocacy and family support groups, developmental center families, adoption assistance program families and children, and others across California.