



A conversation with John Wodatch - Part 1

Voice Over:

(Hip-Hop music plays)

Barry Whaley:

Hi everybody. On behalf of the Southeast ADA Center, the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University, and the ADA National Network, I want to welcome you to “504 at 50.” I'm Barry Whaley. I'm the Project Director of the Southeast ADA Center. “504 at 50” is a special interview series created in recognition of the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. And in this series, we speak with people who are leaders in the disability rights movement, who advanced the cause of equal rights through their tireless work.

We're so very honored today to have as our guest, John Wodatch. He's one of the nation's foremost civil rights attorneys with more than 40 years of experience with the federal government specializing in the rights of persons with disabilities. Our host is Dr. Peter Blanck, university professor and chair of the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University. Peter, I'll turn the show over to you.

Peter Blanck:

Thank you, Barry. Hi, John Wodatch. It's certainly a great pleasure to have you on this show.

John Wodatch:

Thank you very much. The pleasure is mine to be here with you.

Peter Blanck:

Well John, as you know, you may feel the same way. I've always felt blessed to be able to work and a part of my life passionately with leaders like yourself, going back



now 30 years plus. You and I started in this business probably when we were 10 years old, so we're not as old as we think, but working with heroes like Dick Thornburgh and Judy Heumann, Lex Frieden, Justin Dart, so many folks who from my generation shaped and formed my and my family's views, which is touched significantly by disability, on disability civil rights.

And John, you were really at the beginnings of disability civil rights. You were a young civil rights lawyer before section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was promulgated. You had been working in this area and many of us have read an excellent book by Richard Scotch describing an ethnographic way how 504 and the Rehabilitation Act came about. And I thought we could start very early on, John -- some of this is mentioned in the book, but how did you come to be positioned in this way? It was almost like the stars were aligned given racial justice issues at the time, which we were facing of course today, economic issues as well, maybe even aspects of war. But what was your life like before you got into this area and was this just a natural progression of everything you had been working on?

John Wodatch:

That's an interesting question, and I think it's an important one because I think the work that I did before I had responsibility for Section 504 had a lot to do with how I approached Section 504. I know this is ancient history. I graduated from law school in 1969 and went right to work at a federal agency that doesn't even exist anymore, the Department of Health Education and Welfare. And I went there to do school desegregation.

I can tell you I started in the Civil Rights Office of the General Counsel's office on a Monday and had my first hearing, an administrative enforcement hearing desegregating a school system on a Tuesday. And so it was a very activist period of time that we don't necessarily now associate with federal agencies. My first responsibilities were dealing with school desegregation. I had a series of many cases dealing with Southern school systems, dealing with racial integration of the school systems.

I then had some school districts in the north as well, which were very different kinds of situations. But what we were doing was providing equal opportunity on the basis of race. Also had work dealing with a wide range of issues. I dealt with education issues in higher education. HEW at that time had some responsibilities under an executive order for Affirmative Action and non-discrimination in colleges and universities. So one of my big cases at that time was investigating the denial of



tenure to a woman at a northeastern university and eventually found that the university had discriminated and got her tenure.

If you look back at the nature of civil rights, and it was a very vibrant period. One of my cases, people have a hard time envisioning this, was desegregating the blood supply of Louisiana because at that time they had a state law that required you to segregate blood by the race of the donor and only give Black blood to people who were African American, for example.

I was very heavily involved in these kinds of issues from 1969 through 1973 when the Rehabilitation Act was enacted. I had also worked on Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which I think people know from sports and others, but it was a very important parallel to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act that I had been working on. But I worked on the regulation, so I had some regulatory experience.

When the department got a letter from the Senate and from members of the House saying, "We've enacted this Title V of the Rehabilitation Act and it has responsibilities for you, OHEW," I was given that assignment. I had not any background in disability rights. I had been working on race discrimination, sex discrimination, and also national origin discrimination.

For those who with an interest in that, I was involved in dealing with several California counties that were providing information to people whose first language was not English only in English. And so we were working with them, suing them actually to have their documents provided in Spanish and to provide interpretation in Spanish. So I was well versed in civil rights issues and had what you might call a rights bearing attitude, that we were providing equal opportunity. We were changing how America did business. So we get this thing called Section 504, and I literally get it handed on my desk and said, "You are now responsible for this." And if you looked at it the way it was enacted, it was a small statute, it was 46 words. They were very similar to the words that I knew from Title VI of the Civil Rights Act and Title IX, but it didn't have any of the enforcement provisions. And so that began the process.

Peter Blanck:

Looking back at that time, John, was there anything in your persona that led you to understand disability or the importance of that than a non-typical lawyer? You say it was dropped on your desk, but it's more than that to the outside. You had to pick it up and you had to understand it. Talk about how that happened from the sense that we don't know what John Wodatch was thinking at that time.



John Wodatch:

Actually, I could look at the law and say, "I see where this goes. I understand what is meant by this." And if you look at Title V of the Rehabilitation Act, it was really the first attempt at a comprehensive civil rights law. 501 really said that the federal government should engage in Affirmative Action and non-discrimination in its own employment. 502 established the Architectural Transportation Barriers Compliance Board, we now call them the Access Board, and gave them authority to implement the Architectural Barriers Act that had been enacted in '68.

503 paralleled an executive order and required Affirmative Action and non-discrimination in federal employment contracts of a certain size, and 504 paralleled Title VI and Title IX, and said, "Any program that receives federal funds from the federal government, from agencies of the federal government for programs and activities providing services must not discriminate against people on the basis of disability." Of course, then it said "handicapped," but that was the language used at that time.

So I knew as a civil rights lawyer what this meant, what the idea meant, but I didn't have a background, a legal background in the rights of people with disabilities or with disabilities. And so fortunately, HEW had funds and it was a different era. And I was given staff, I was given the ability to hire staff, which was very important because we hired people with disabilities. And I was given a budget to go around the country and talk to persons with disabilities, organizations of people with disabilities, and really did my own analysis of, what is discrimination? How does discrimination affect your life in programs?

And keep in mind, I was dealing with HEW, so we were talking about the education system, both elementary and secondary colleges and universities, looking at healthcare, hospitals and doctor's offices. And welfare was covered here as well. So social welfare, looking at the entire social welfare system.

Peter Blanck:

Who decided to give you that assignment?

John Wodatch:

Well, it was given to the Office of Civil Rights of which I was involved with. And Peter Holmes was the director of the office and probably a person that may be known to people in the disability rights community, Martin Gary-



Peter Blanck:

Yes.

John Wodatch:

Who was the deputy director and was my immediate supervisor and the person I worked with who had a brilliant legal mind and a very strong commitment to civil rights.

Peter Blanck:

... who went on to be an Associate Commissioner of Social Security.

John Wodatch:

That's correct. Was a very influential person as we developed this, as was Peter Holmes. who was the director of OCR, but had not had a background in disability rights issues. But I think it was the experiences that I had in going around the country talking to first parents of people with disabilities, the organizations of disabilities, which at that time were siloed, isolated, but very effective when it came to answering the questions that we had at that period: Who are people with disabilities? How should that be defined, and what is discrimination? And not only what is discrimination, what is the relief that makes discrimination end?

What I found was, the first thing was one very important thing, that people with disabilities were incredibly knowledgeable, not only about their own situations and disability, but on ways to combat it, ways to work out solutions that they had that were very practical in their approach. It wasn't high minded abstract. It was, I need to be able to go to school. I need transportation to get to school that's accessible. I need a building where I can move around, or I need an education program that is designed to meet my needs. It became very basic kinds of situations that we learned about.

The other thing that was interesting to me at the time was that people with disabilities--it was before the sort of vibrant, robust cross disability movement that we know today. They were siloed. So if I talked to people who were blind or had low vision, they were very eloquent about their own issues, but they knew nothing about any other forms of disability. And that was true. We talked to a lot of people with cerebral palsy at that period, and they were very active.

Peter Blanck:



Why do you think that was? It was just a part of the maturation of the movement?

John Wodatch:

No, I think it was isolation of our society. The segregation of people with disabilities was complete in that they were siloed. They were not in any organizations together. They weren't socially together, just as they were isolated from society, just as a society had segregated them.

Peter Blanck:

And the funding streams from government.

John Wodatch:

And the funding streams were program specific. But that changed very rapidly during the '70s, the Independent Living Movement and organizations like the Consortium on People with Disabilities changed that. And I think part of the story of 504 is the story of this movement becoming a movement and feeling its power and understanding how to use its power.

Peter Blanck:

When you had these initial discussions around the country, who were some of the people, if you can remember, that you spoke with and was there this sense of a need for this more unified movement at that time? Of course, Judy Heumann was around and others.

John Wodatch:

Well, Judy was one of the first persons I met. She at the time was an intern working for Senator Harrison Williams in the Senate in New Jersey. And actually Pat Wright was someone who was there as an aid to these people. And so I met both of them at that period of time. Senator Alan Cranston and his staff were very influential people in terms of the movement tied into people in Berkeley as well.

But I think the issue that confronted us, I mean what started us off meeting people of that nature, the original definition of disability in the Rehab Act as it was passed in 1973 had a very narrow definition of who was covered by 504 because they used the definition that they used for vocational rehabilitation services. So the only people that 504 applied to when it was written were people with disabilities who might become employable.



I looked at that and said, "Well, this ..." and after even talking to very few people knew this was ... a civil rights law is supposed to be broad, is supposed to deal with societal problems on a large scale, that definition was wrong. So we went from HEW to the Senate committees, and that's where I met Judy and Pat. We made a presentation to them that they had to really think about this. If they were really intending what the words of this statute meant, it had to have much broader application. And that's when, in 1974,, there were what were called technical and clarifying amendments. Well, that technical and clarifying amendment was the sort of three-part definition that we know today.

Peter Blanck:

John, take us through those almost magical words, how they came about. I know they were derived on prior legislation and what they came to signify, that is the language of 504.

John Wodatch:

Section 504 is based on the language, almost directly parallel language in Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. Basically, all Congress did was take the structure of those two other laws and insert qualified individual with a handicap, discrimination on the basis of handicap instead of discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin.

There are a couple differences though that were important for the nature of 504, and one is that they use qualified, and one is that they protected ... If you look at Title VI, it says, "There shall be no discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin." But if you look at section 504, it says, "There shall be no discrimination against a qualified individual with a disability on the basis of disability." That's important in a number of ... well, two very important ways. One is that it doesn't give protection to people who are able-bodied. It only gives protections to people with disabilities. And so you don't have reverse discrimination under Section 504. And so the idea of having Affirmative Action on the basis of disability doesn't carry the same difficult weight that you have in terms of race, color, national origin and sex.

Peter Blanck:

In other words, the comparator is not people without disabilities. The comparator is discrimination for those people who can use the service.



John Wodatch:

Right, and that includes, in my view, then you can have the comparator of a person with a disability compared to a person without a disability. But you can also have comparators among groups of people with disabilities, which is very important in broadening the nature of discrimination that you can deal with.

Peter Blanck:

Let's take an example that we always hear, just so we're clear. You always hear that a student may be doing well who has a disability and really doesn't therefore need an accommodation, but of course that accommodation may further help that individual. Does that sort of example ring true of what you heard?

John Wodatch:

That's probably a little more sophisticated than we were back at that period. I mean, it's very true now, but back then we were dealing with very elemental ideas. We had to get across the idea that accommodations were part of non-discrimination. If I look back and say, "What did I do that was really important?" I think one of the most important things was getting the idea of non-discrimination, including the idea of taking positive steps. And if you don't take the positive steps, it's a form of discrimination.

Keep in mind, there were people in 1974 and 1975 when we were looking at the regulations, who said all that 504 is, is you treat everybody the same. And the answer to that is "no." If you treat a wheelchair user the same as a non wheelchair user and you have a set of stairs, you are not treating them the same.

And so that idea that non-discrimination includes taking steps so that you are not treating dissimilarly situated people the same is a very important one. From that flows everything from having the internet being accessible, having a program of education that meets the needs, individual needs of particular students. There are a variety of things that come from that.

There was also, if I can take a step back, a Title VI parallel in the Supreme Court. There was a case called Lau v. Nichols, Supreme Court case that dealt with the education of Chinese-speaking students in the San Francisco School District. And the Supreme Court said in that case that educating these students who only spoke Chinese in English was itself an act of discrimination. So that principle became an important 504 principle that is bedrock in 504, is now bedrock in the ADA, in a



whole range of disability rights laws and even in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Peter Blanck:

So you have this new statute of which half of the sections discuss Affirmative Action in that day. What was that tension or how did you explain that tension? The difference between Affirmative Action and accommodation, which was really not Affirmative Action in the traditional sense, but more leveling the playing field.

John Wodatch:

The Lau v. Nichols case helped in that explanation to people. But I think people, after you discussed the issues with them, intuitively got the idea. You could start with very basic examples. The example of a set of stairs being the only entrance to a building and is that equal opportunity for people who have difficulty with stairs or can't use stairs? The same thing in an educational setting, educating a deaf student without an interpreter, people understood that didn't jive with their notion of equal opportunity. And so we were able to take those concepts and broaden them.

Peter Blanck:

Just to hone in on that, it's not Affirmative Action to put in a ramp where a person with a wheelchair can't get in the building.

John Wodatch:

That's right. And also, you built those stairs. Those stairs didn't just exist. That was an act of a recipient of funds. You decided to run your program a certain way that you're building only had that. So you were creating that barrier. It was not created by the person with a disability. It was created outside of that person. And so you have an obligation to ensure that isn't the only entrance or that you deal with that in some way so that your actions are not creating disparities for people with disabilities.

Peter Blanck:

So why is there this conflation even today that people with disabilities are somehow getting an unfair advantage? That's part of the fabric in which we've lived all these years.



John Wodatch:

It's an unthinking response in my view. I think it's the nature of non-discrimination versus Affirmative Action. And I think even when we get into something like the Davis case, the Supreme Court case, Southeastern Community College versus Davis, even there, the Supreme Court recognized that there was some difference between what might be Affirmative Action that's not required, and a zone of activity that might include positive steps, but that the failure to do that is non-discrimination.

Peter Blanck:

That's the case involving a nursing student who was deaf, -- right? -- who wanted to-

John Wodatch:

That's right. And was the first major 504 case at the Supreme Court.

Peter Blanck:

No, I wanted to push you on that a little bit today. This notion of an advantage, I guess is just endemic to our thinking about different groups having benefits in society in America.

John Wodatch:

It brings to mind, I'll flip ahead in a number of years to the Supreme Court case involving Casey Martin, which people may remember. Casey Martin was a pro golfer who had a serious disability that impacted his ability to walk long distances. And he was challenging the rules of pro golf under the ADA, under Title III. And it was an important case at the Supreme Court dealing with reasonable modification of policies, procedures, and practices.

And so the modification that he was seeking was the ability to occasionally use a golf cart. The golf world saw this as, "oh, a person with a disability asking for special services because they want special treatment." And the Supreme Court and the cases developing that case looked at it. And the Supreme Court very clearly said, "Even with this golf cart, he is still at a disadvantage because of the nature of his disability."

You're right, that thread runs through looking at ... and it happens in the employment arena probably more than other areas where someone has a



reasonable accommodation that enables them to do the essential functions of a job. And other workers look at that and say, "Gee, I want that." I look at that nature of how reasonable accommodation has worked. And my own personal view is that a number of things that we look at as reasonable accommodations for a particular person may be generalizable and should be used for other people.

I think the world has a lot to learn from accommodations that people with disabilities use that, whether it's in the academic environment or others. I think we've learned that the timing of the test may not be really the issue that you're looking at. It may be other things that you need. At any rate, that's a much more general point than I think you were raising.

Peter Blanck:

We call that universal design today. But let me make a quick advertisement for our listeners and thank them and tell them that of course, if they have questions about our discussion today or any other topics on disability rights, you can submit your questions online to DisabilityRightsToday.org. That's all one word, disabilityrightstoday.org or call the southeast ADA center at 1 (404) 541-9001.

Before the break, John, we were just beginning to get into the language of section 504, and you had mentioned the importance of the word qualified, which was relatively new in this venue of civil rights. How did that word get in there? What team of people thought of it, and what did people think that that was going to mean?

John Wodatch:

It came with the law. That when the law was developed, that was a part of it. And I think it came about because of, for lack of a better example, the blind bus driver. If you didn't have the word qualified in there, you would be writing a federal law that said you couldn't discriminate against a person because of their disability. And not hiring a blind person to be a bus driver unless you had the word qualified, would mean that would be discrimination.

Peter Blanck:

Was that a new concept at the time?

John Wodatch:



The concept that was closest to it was in Title IX, bona fide occupational qualifications. The idea in Title VII that in the area of gender discrimination, sex discrimination, there were some jobs that required a BFOQ. It was not as well thought out at that point in the early '70s as it might be now. But there were some ideas that there were certain -- being an attendant in the woman's restroom might require you to deal with a person's sex in hiring for a position. So that idea was around, but it hadn't been applied broadly and it was never used generally in a statute the way that it was with Section 504.

Peter Blanck:

And of course, it's relevant to the Affirmative Action discussion in the sense that in the hiring context, presumably you are hiring qualified individuals who happen to be underrepresented because of their race.

John Wodatch:

Yeah.

Peter Blanck:

Was that discussed at the time? What was the sense of this, I mean, in the broader community.

John Wodatch:

The idea that we had to deal with when we were looking at the regulation was how do you deal with qualified in such a way that it doesn't obliterate the idea behind the law? I mean, you have to. So that we got to the idea of essential functions of the job and other issues. We were always in trying to explain the law ... because in those early days we did a lot of public outreach to entities covered by HEW as well as to people with disabilities and the general public making them acquainted with this law and what it meant. A lot of public speaking was involved and a lot of examples.

I was always trying to find examples of qualified that worked for which there wasn't an accommodation that made the qualification really a non-event. And one of the issues I used for a long time was hiring an electrician where the colors of the wires is something that you need to do or enable to do the job.

I used this a number of times in public speaking, and finally I did it in one place and someone in the back of the hall raised their hand and said, that's sure going to be a



surprise to my friend so-and-so who has a vision impairment and is fully functioning as an electrician. And he said, "He uses a device that he puts on a wire and the color of the wire emits a certain frequency and he can tell what the wire is because of that." So I learned a lesson about qualified, but the point was it can be there to obliterate the basic right, and you have to be careful about it.

But it's also important because we are ... and it comes up in the healthcare arena in today's action in terms of when you're making decisions about organ transplantation, which scenario I'm concerned about now because a number of people with disabilities are denied organ transplants on the basis of their disability unfairly.

But the medical community looks at someone with a disability and sees their disability. Now, they may be dealing with stereotypes and bias, but sometimes it may be medically futile to do an organ transplant. So that concept is the same kind of qualified notion there. So it goes beyond employment. It is a very live issue that you have to look at in terms of what discrimination is. And in effect was a saving grace in terms of selling the 504 to all the entities that had to change all of their policies. We are talking about a major change in how America did business. I'd like to think of Section 504 as evolutionary, but it is also revolutionary in that it changes the way we understand one another and it changes the way we interact with one another.

Peter Blanck:

Now John, I'm greedy by nature when I'm working with amazing people like yourself, and I'm sure your listeners are. So I want to alert them to the fact that you have graciously agreed to do a second session with us. So don't feel like we have to get it all in now. I thought we could maybe mention the Davis case was the first major analysis by the Supreme Court, and I've always wondered the contradictions in that case. Yes, she could have an accommodation, but she was still found not qualified and it would change the nature of the program. Maybe set up that case in a way that most people don't know about. Were you involved with that case?

John Wodatch:

I was at that point still at HEW, and we were involved with the people at Justice who were doing it. It was our opinion that the whole clinical part of a course, which is what this was about, this was a person trying to be, as I recall, a nurse. And in order to finish the education program, there had to be a clinical part. In our view, there



are accommodations that would enable the person to work in the clinical part of the program. The Supreme Court didn't see it that way. So for us, it was a very difficult.

But it is the case where we looked at ... you dealt with modifications to programs, you dealt with what they called a fundamental alteration in the nature of the program, and they introduced the concept of undue burdens. I mean, so in that it's a very fundamental case in a lot of the issues that we have since come to understand, interpret and fit together. But at the time, it was shocking to me to see the Supreme Court decide the case the way that it did because in my view, that person with accommodation could certainly finish the education program and if they could successfully apply for a job and have accommodations on their job would be able to function in a job circumstance.

But the Supreme Court laid out some of their concerns with this in saying that 504 would not require anything that was a fundamental alteration in the nature of the program. That has become part of Section 504 since the Davis case, the Supreme Court, the Justice Department in the 1980s doing a variety of federally conducted regulations under 504. That was the first time that the Davis case principles were laid out in 504 regs. And so from like '84 on--

Some other time, we can talk about the negotiations between the White House, the Department of Justice and the disability community that led to how we looked at undue burdens and fundamental alteration. But that's part of that. And just for interest for some future discussion, the people involved were the Vice President of the United States, George Bush who later became President, then signed the ADA. And I think his learning experience in dealing with how we apply Davis in regulations was very fundamental in his coming to an understanding of the disability community and the importance of having laws that protected their rights.

Peter Blanck:

Well, that's fascinating, John. Note that we haven't even made it out of the 1970s, but I guess I would end with a tantalizing question maybe for your listeners. What have we talked about so far that perhaps hadn't been known? The George Bush example you just gave is a very interesting example. I hadn't known that. Did you have a sense of foreshadowing to come after Davis or did you think this was going to be a long road? Let's start with what's new that you told us and then foreshadow where we're going.



John Wodatch:

I certainly don't know how many people know about the negotiations, although some of that is known. And it was very much involved with the Reagan Administration, which was the administration at the time on the Presidential Task Force on Regulatory Relief. And some of that is well known in the role of DREDF, is known in the role of Boyden Gray and a man named Evan Kemp who was at DREDF, working with DREDF at the time. But maybe people don't see it all together in terms of what the ramifications of it.

Peter Blanck:

Well, that's exactly what I was driving at. Evan, who would later become chair of the EEOC.

John Wodatch:

That's right. And a new lawyer at that point, a new lawyer named Arlene Mayerson was working at DREDF and was part of those negotiations. And so they were very formative negotiations. And when the Reagan Administration came in, they established in 1981, the Presidential Task Force on Regulatory Relief. And one of their agenda items was to eliminate Section 504. Another agenda item was to get rid of the Education of All Handicapped Children Act, the Education of the Handicapped Act, which I think much is known about the movement of people with disabilities to end that.

Peter Blanck:

What faction of the Reagan administration was driving that?

John Wodatch:

It was broader based. They looked at regulations were impeding business, and what were the regulations that applied to business? Now, 504 certainly required accommodations for employment. It required sign language interpreters, it required materials in braille or on tape or in other forms. And so they saw 504 as being burdensome to free enterprise. And I think a lot of the early Reagan people coming in were very much from the Hoover Institute at Stanford and were into free enterprise. And the idea behind that.

Now, on the get rid of 504 part, I remember a very fateful day, I was called to OMB to defend 504, why do we need this law? And fortunately, the Republican



appointees who were at the Department of Justice were not in favor of getting rid of 504. They understood it. And also fortunately for us, the Vice President was the person in charge of the Task Force on Regulatory Relief. Boyden Gray was his legal counsel.

And Boyden Gray had a personal relationship with Evan Kemp, who was a person with a disability, and they were friends and he had an understanding of disability issues at a much more fundamental level, as did Vice President Bush, partly from family members and partly from his relationship with Boyden. I think they came to see the importance of non-discrimination just in general terms. In terms of people being able to function in society, but also to have anxiety -- where people were able to follow their desires and develop their talents. And they saw that much more broadly at the beginning.

Peter Blanck:

Would you take a final three to five minutes, summarize, looking back now 50 years, those '70s times, we'll get to the '80s, we'll get to the ADA. What do you think we don't know that you know, or we should know, about that time?

John Wodatch:

First of all, it was a time of incredible intellectual ferment. People were into the idea of equal opportunity. We had seen the Civil rights movement for African Americans led by Martin Luther King. We had seen the Women's Movement and the ideas of we as a society were holding members of our society back on bases that had nothing to do with their abilities. And so that whole zeitgeist, if you will of the moment, all of a sudden people said, "Wait a minute, what about disability?" And so saw that in this context, and so it changed ... Social scientists talk about a paradigm shift and there was a paradigm shift in thinking going on.

We were seeing people with disabilities not just as, "Oh, we're going to do good things for people with disabilities who need help getting jobs and we're going to do voc. rehab," or we're going to do other things. And changing the dynamic around to we are people, every person has rights, we all have certain abilities and disabilities. The government should be opening up society for them.

I think that whole notion really fueled a lot of the change that happened. That's why the laws got enacted. The Rehab Act was vetoed twice by President Nixon before it was signed. That didn't have anything to do with 504 or Title V. The idea that



change was necessary, and it was coming about from race, color, national origin, sex discrimination, we were remaking society. It was a very altruistic period of time.

Peter Blanck:

The Vietnam veteran experience, that had to play a role in that as well.

John Wodatch:

That was very important. I mean, what happened with Vietnam is we had a generation of people who would not have survived in other wars. Medical advances certainly enabled us to help people. And so we had a cadre of people who became disabled fighting for the country. We also had people from the World War II. Remember, Bob Dole is an important person in this period of time as someone who shows you people with disabilities can achieve. But you started having a group of people with disabilities who were disabled defending their country or fighting for their country, and they weren't going to take a backseat. And I think that also gave the politicians a different view of disability.

Peter Blanck:

Well John, you are at the center of that paradigm shift with so many other leaders. We have begun to scratch the surface of this important area. And as I say to our listeners, we will have another episode. John, thank you so much. This is so important to so many people to understand where we come from. I thank you on behalf of our listeners, and I look forward to our next conversation.

John Wodatch:

I thank you. It's been a delight.

Peter Blanck:

Thanks again, John, so much. Thank you to all our listeners. Thank you for joining us for this important conversation. Barry, I'm delighted to turn it back to you.

Barry Whaley:

Thank you, Peter. Thank you, John. You're so generous with your time. We really appreciate it. Listeners, you can access this interview and more interviews at the Section 504 at 50 website. That web address is Section504at50.org. The "504 at 50" series is produced by the Southeast ADA Center, the Burton Blatt Institute at



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