

Testimony Given by Lex Frieden at Senate Confirmation Hearings

for

C. Everett Koop, M. D., U. S. Surgeon General Designate

September 29, 1981

Good day! My name is Lex Frieden. I am Director of the Independent Living Research Utilization Project at the Institute for Rehabilitation and Research and Assistant Professor of Rehabilitation at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, Texas. I have been involved in organizing a number of advocacy groups and independent living programs including the American Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities, the Coalition of Texans with Disabilities, and the Houston based Coalition for Barrier Free Living. I am speaking today on my own behalf and none of my testimony should be construed to represent the views of any organization or groups with which I am now or formerly have been associated.

Since my neck was broken in an automobile accident in 1967, I have become intimately familiar with the needs and problems of disabled people in our society. During the last decade, we have made great progress toward assuring equality and providing opportunity for disabled people; but we seem to be caught now between knowing what is needed and knowing how to best meet those needs given severely limited economic resources. I believe we are in danger of losing the gains we have made recently in the areas of independent living, consumer involvement, education, and vocational opportunities.

Many severely disabled people like myself, who have in the past been confined to nursing homes or living with their parents due to inadequate health care, attendant care, housing, and transportation, are now living in ordinary settings, taking part in community activities, and doing productive work. We are threatened by changes in government programs. If sensitive public administrators who are committed to securing equal rights and opportunities for disabled people are not recruited to manage those programs, they may be lost in the current shuffle to reorganize, reprioritize, and cut funding. We must have administrators who are familiar with our problems, who are sensitive to our needs, and who are open to our suggestions about meeting those needs and about finding practical solutions to our problems.

I believe that Dr. C. Everett Koop is such an administrator. In previous discussions with Dr. Koop, I have been impressed by his understanding and openness. He has recognized the need for a coordinated, rational, national policy on disability. He has recognized the need to maintain support programs for disabled veterans and to bring those programs for civilians up to the level of those of our veterans. He has expressed support for integrated, generic service programs which would foster independence of disabled people

and help us live a more active normal life style in our own communities. He has expressed support for mainstream education, transportation, housing, and attendant care programs whenever possible. He has expressed support for consumer involvement in program planning and implementation, and in this regard, I believe he has recommended the establishment of an office for liaison with disabled people in the Public Health Service. He realizes there is a need for all of us to learn more about independent living and rehabilitation, and I believe he would try, as Surgeon General, to maintain the progressive momentum that we have already established in these areas.

I appreciate this opportunity to endorse Dr. Koop's nomination as Surgeon General, and I would be pleased to work with you or with Dr. Koop in the future on issues of mutual concern for disabled people.