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John Mulligan

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Langevin takes House podium Monday to mark disability act

07:31 AM EDT on Tuesday, July 27, 2010

By JOHN E. MULLIGAN

Journal Washington Bureau



WASHINGTON, D.C. — Not long ago, Gina Barrett was going through the effects of her late parents when she came upon a letter that her cousin had written long ago.

"We don't know what is going to become of Jim," June Langevin wrote of her 16-year-old son.

The boy was a high school cadet with the Warwick Police Department, felled when a gun accidentally discharged in the officers' locker room. The bullet severed his spinal cord.

What has become of the crippled boy is that on Monday, Rep. James R. Langevin, a 10-year veteran of Congress now, rode his battery-powered wheelchair up two successive mechanical lifts, rolled behind the polished speaker's podium, and gavelled the United States House of Representatives to order.

The Rhode Island Democrat's brief service as speaker of the House pro tempore was the latest among many achievements unimaginable, said his mother, in those dark days after his accident almost 30 years ago.

Related links

- Video:** Watch a clip of the first session, with transcript, chaired by Langevin, from C-SPAN
- Photo Gallery:** More photos of Rep. Langevin
- Extra:** More information about the Americans with Disabilities Act

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Practically as hard to foresee were the subsequent advances for the disabled, made possible in part by the enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act 20 years ago Monday — the event that Langevin's ascent to the speaker's podium was timed to commemorate.

For the legislators involved and the citizens assisted by the landmark law, it was a day of celebration. For Langevin, his family and a troop of friends and staffers past and present, it was a moment for memories bitter and sweet.

"My life changed forever" at the moment of his injury, Langevin recalled during an afternoon reception amid the bronze and marble heroes of the Capitol's Statuary Hall.



Receiving the ceremonial gavel from House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is Rep. James Langevin on Capitol Hill in Washington on Monday.

AP / Alex Brandon

As he has done many times in a career of public service that began more than 20 years ago, Langevin harked back to hard hours of wondering — from the confinement of a hospital bed in Boston — what opportunities could possibly lie in store for him.

"I took great inspiration from other people with disabilities," he told a crowd with disproportionate numbers of people sitting in wheelchairs, wearing hearing aids, following Seeing Eye dogs.

"When it all happened, we just couldn't realize what kind of life he would have," June Langevin said later Monday, remembering how she and her late husband, Richard, reacted to their son's accident. "We didn't know where the chips were going to fall, but we had faith. We hoped that he would find a passion" that would bring purpose to his life, she said.

"Things had to happen for a reason," she said.

There was no single moment, said June Langevin, when it became clear that her son would find such a cause in public service. But she recalled the neighborhood fundraisers, the volunteers reconstruction work to accommodate their house to his needs — "and just an overwhelming outpouring from people who didn't even know him," as she put it.

"Jim would say, 'Ma, why are all these people going all these things for me?' "

That, said the elder Langevin, may have been the beginning of the path that led ultimately to Monday's appearance at the Speaker's rostrum. Not that it has been easy, she said, alluding to the careful medical regimes and the painstaking daily routines that Langevin must follow simply to begin each day. "When all the rest of us just jump out of bed and go!" she said.

Langevin's own explanation of how he has summoned the strength for his long labors included this: "With faith the size of a mustard seed, you can say to that mountain, 'Move!' and it will be moved," said Langevin. "Anything is possible."

Langevin presided over the House for about 90 minutes Monday afternoon and again in the evening for about an hour, with the business including a resolution to hail the passage of the ADA.

He wielded a firm gavel. After a scattering of applause from the galleries where his family and friends sat, Langevin intoned: "The rules require the chair to remind all persons in the gallery that they are here as guests of the House and any manifestation of approval or disapproval of the proceedings is a violation of the rules of the House."

And Langevin's gavel was as swift.

During the portion of the session devoted to one-minute speeches by

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members, he did the presiding officer's duty of interrupting a speech by Rep. Patrick J. Kennedy when it exceeded the time limit. There followed a moment of confusion when Kennedy tried to press on — apparently thinking the time had come for the longer speeches slated for a later debate.

"The gentleman may complete his thought," Langevin allowed — the speaker's offer of parliamentary courtesy.

"Well, how much time do I have?" Kennedy asked.

"The gentleman has 15 seconds," Langevin replied, prompting laughter on the floor and in the galleries.

"All right, Jimmy. Well, I'll get my chance later and you better be ready 'cause there'll be no holding back then," Kennedy declared with a grin.

During the evening session, as Langevin called for "the yeas and nays" on a House resolution to commemorate President George H.W. Bush's signing of the ADA, President Obama stood on the same South Lawn of the White House to recount the history that led to that milestone. "That's how you changed America!" Mr. Obama told a crowd that included a number of citizens with disabilities.

As the House vote concluded, Langevin announced, "On this vote, the yeas are 377, the nays are zero. Two-thirds being in the affirmative, the rules are suspended, the resolution is agreed to, and the motion to reconsider is laid on the table."

A moment later, he recognized "the gentlelady from California," Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

"What better way" to celebrate the ADA, she asked, "than to have a gentleman with the challenges that Mr. Langevin faces presiding as speaker of the House of Representatives."

There followed a prolonged ovation for the acting speaker, the gentleman from Rhode Island.

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	11:31 AM on July 28, 2010	
	ANDWE WILL NOT FORGET YOUR VOTE FOR OBAMACARE THAT YOU THINK IS GOOD FOR ME, BUT, NOT FOR YOU. THE BILL EXCLUDES MEMBERS OF CONGRESS.	
	MER Score: 1	   Report Abuse
	8:34 AM on July 28, 2010	
	NOVEMBER 2010 CLEAN HOUSE!!!	
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If there someone that can tell us what was his last big achievement for our state.

I know he has done good things for the disabled and he should be admired for that but what he has done for the state.

He may be a good man but he may not be the right man for our state...



Tax Player

Score: 1



7:51 AM on July 28, 2010

20 years ago Monday...and why did it take Congress this long to become ADA compliant when this law is opposed on all other facilities in the U.S.?

Anyway what an accomplishment for a great man, but jimmy has gotta go in November.



RI 101

Score: 2



6:07 AM on July 28, 2010

Sympathy card, too bad its a waste, he will be gone in November, if Rhode Islanders have a brain. He is useless.



John Stark

Score: 6



8:31 PM on July 27, 2010

ark, based upon our replies it appears that you can't fathom why anyone would not gush over Rep. Langevin. Let me help. He is for higher federal income taxes, higher capital gains taxes, higher dividend taxes, and higher federal estate taxes. He is against reducing the current confiscatory federal corporate tax which makes America less competitive and sends jobs overseas. He endorsed race and gender quotas in last week's financial reform bill, and has endorsed racial quotas at the federal level for years. He has failed to endorse any measure of educational choice, and has not lifted a finger to secure out national borders. He is a nice guy and an inspiration to many. He is also on the opposite side of virtually every issue of substance to RI voters. Rhode Islanders do not need him to "care". They need him to get out of the way.



SAILBOAT

Score: 3



8:20 PM on July 27, 2010

LQKKING AT THE THUMBS UP AND DOWN LANGIVEN IS GETTING ABOUT 33% OF THE VOTE. THE SAME NUMBER PATCHERS WOULD HAVE RECEIVED. BYE BYE

1 reply

Govstench

Score: 4





7:17 PM on July 27, 2010

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Isn't he just so special? He is playing the disability card to the max. ENOUGH!! HOW ABOUT THE PEOPLE YOU REPRESENT??? EMPTY SUIT.

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