

My name is Richard Beckwith. I work and live in Oregon (Senate District 21 and House District 41). I am an older, able-bodied man who works in the technology industry as a research psychologist. No, I am not that kind of psychologist. My PhD is in developmental psychology. However, for the past 30-some years, I've mostly done research on the impacts of technology on people. I've been in my present position since the mid '90s. See, I told you I wasn't that kind of psychologist.

I am writing because I learned about SB 576 A from a colleague. He is a talented designer with whom I've worked for years. He is also quadriplegic. I also work closely with an engineer with blindness (RP) and another engineer who is Deaf (congenitally) and uses ASL interpreters for his day-to-day work. That's two interpreters each day. The Deaf engineer's value to the company is sufficient that we pay for two full-time interpreters for him. Just today, I met with all three (plus the interpreters) about three entirely distinct projects.

The point I want to make is that each of these people, although disabled, make the work of those around them much better. The reason can be found in the academic literature. Part of my research is in looking at technological innovation, and I'll note that research shows that something about diversity of lived experience allows for higher quality group output. I suppose this isn't surprising, but the significance can sometimes be lost. As awful as it is to say, disability has value.

I'd like to point out that different disabilities have very different impacts on personal finances. Obviously, the workplace accommodations for my Deaf colleague cost a lot: three salaries. However, he requires few accommodations at home. My blind colleague gets very few accommodations in the workplace and his home has some but few. My quadriplegic colleague does require some physical accommodations at work (e.g., changes to automatic doorways or a larger, more accessible cubicle) but there isn't much that the company needs to do in the office. He does require a lot at home. He has an accessible van but, as you might guess, can't drive it himself. He requires help for much of his life but, oddly, not much for his work.

His design skills help him. He designs and builds things to help him be more independent, but dependence is needed for anyone who's quadriplegic. He makes a full salary but that's not enough to hire the caregivers he needs just to "co-execute" his activities of daily living. He relies on them for his life outside his job.

I understand from speaking with him that he may lose the money he needs to pay for his caregivers, which he needs to live. It seems more than ironic that he would not be able to work because he makes too much money but then he would lose his caregivers and would need to quit work so that he could get access to funds to pay for the caregivers,

If he stops working, it would be such a loss. It would be a loss for my colleague, for sure. He takes great pride in his work and to have to give it up so that he can afford the help he needs just seems so bizarre. Also, as you can guess, it would be a great loss for me. I would lose a valued colleague who brings so much to the table. I submit that it would also be a great loss for Oregon because I am certain that there are more people like him around the state bringing skills and knowledge to the table and enhancing the work environment and work output of many individuals and companies around the state...and that's just those today. What about all the future designers and engineers, doctors and lawyers, and more in the future?

I would think it would be worth a lot to Oregon to have these people in the workforce in any case. However, if I understand this correctly, these people will need support one way or the other and therefore will use state funds. To have them simultaneously contribute to Oregon seems like the smart move. I hope we take it.