

RSVA PARTICIPATION AT THE 2011 ACB LEGISLATIVE SEMINAR

By: Ron Eller, RSVA Board Member / Legislative Chair

And

Roy Harmon, California Vendor / Rest Area Committee Chair

The 2011 ACB Legislative Seminar took place from Sunday, February 27 through Tuesday, March 1, 2011. Many RSVA vendors joined ACB members from throughout the U.S. to learn about current federal legislation of concern to blind members, which they could share with their representatives in Congress.

Attendees spent Sunday afternoon and all day Monday in meetings where a full roster of speakers briefed the participants on current issues. Denise Worden, U.S. Department of Justice gave an update on ADA regulations. The next speaker was Donald Kahl from the Equal Rights Center, which has worked with ACB recently to document a pattern of discrimination against guide dog handlers in Washington, D.C. Melanie Brunson, ACB's Executive Director, finished Sunday's program with a review of ACB's recent legal Advocacy activities.

Emily Khoury, Legislative Director from Congressman Edolphus Towns (D-NY) Office, gave a presentation on the how-tos of having an effective meeting with your member of Congress on Monday. Mark Richert, Director, AFB, then talked about the issue of making prescription drug labels accessible and about the need to advocate for Medicare to pay for low vision devices.

Steven Schwadron from the Cozen O'Connor Public Strategies, spoke about the detrimental impact that IRS regulations have had on charities through their vehicle donation programs, and about how we can advocate to change the law to revive car donation programs. Karen Peltz Strauss, Deputy Chief, FCC, was the luncheon speaker, and her talk revealed the FCC is working to prepare regulations to implement the 21st Century Video and Communications Access Act that ACB helped to pass last year.

Afternoon speakers reported on the Air Carrier Act and what it means for blind travelers. Aaron Bishop, Executive Director of the National Council on Disability, spoke about the future of the NCD and its issues for 2011. Lastly, our RSVA President, Dan Sippl presented an update on current issues of

concern to RSVA vendors, which was well received with numerous follow-up comments and discussion amongst the attendees.

On Tuesday, all of the attendees headed to the “Hill” to meet with their congressional representatives to present their concerns and requests for action. The ACB issues of prescription labeling for the visually impaired, along with the low vision aid exclusion, and the IRS vehicle donation law affecting non-profit fundraising, were presented to all of the congressional representatives and/or their aides.

ACB President, Mitch Pomerantz, presented awards to several Congressmen and Senators who had sponsored legislation for ACB in 2010. It was amazing to meet and witness firsthand this ceremony which was appreciated by all in attendance.

Additionally, RSVA members discussed the Reauthorization of the Surface Transportation Act and possible legislation for rest area commercialization with their congressional representatives as well. Congressman Mica (Florida) and Senator Barbara Boxer (CA) had held a series of 9 “Listening Sessions” across the country in mid February, with a resultant report that the new Bill should be completed for more hearings early this summer. The RSVA vendors received much support for blind priority at the rest areas while meeting with their congressional representatives, and they will be following the bill as it moves through Congress. Watch for further details in the next issue of the Vendorscope.

SASSY CINDY’S SAGEBRUSH NOTES: “All the folks from Hawaii were burning up those slot machines! They looked like they were winning; BUT...looks can be deceiving.!”

...”Even Bob Humhreys gave into the slots...”
Caught Ya Bob!