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Phoenix councilman rides in wheelchair for a day

Politician realizes challenges for the disabled

by **Lynh Bui** - May. 18, 2012 11:35 AM
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At 7:30 a.m. on Wednesday morning, Councilman Tom Simplot started his day as usual, at the Metro light rail stop in front of his home in central Phoenix.

But on this particular morning, there was something out of the ordinary.

Simplot, a healthy, able-bodied person, was in a wheelchair.

He wasn't hurt.

He didn't get into an accident.

On this day, Simplot was taking part of the Wheelchair Challenge to learn more about the challenges people with disabilities face, and to raise awareness on civil rights issues for the disabled.

Jennifer Longdon, chairwoman of the Mayor's Commission on Disability Issues, presented the challenge to several elected officials via Facebook. Simplot was the first to bite.

"As a person who makes policy, you need to know what others go through," Simplot said.

In just a day using the wheelchair, Simplot said he realized several challenges.

First, when getting on board the light rail, he had to make sure his wheels were perfectly perpendicular to the entrance, otherwise the chair would get caught in a groove in the door.

Also, he forgot to turn on the breaks when he got on board. So when the light rail took off, so did Simplot.

Simplot also realized how hard being in a wheelchair was.

His mid-back started to ache and he soon realized how difficult it was to open and go through doors without standing up.

"I've jumped off of airplanes, I've rappelled down buildings and I've spelunked to the bottom of Kartchner Caverns," Simplot said. "This is, by far, the most challenging thing I've done."

Mayor Greg Stanton is expected to take the Wheelchair Challenge at a later date.

Stanton, a huge basketball fan, likely will shoot some hoops in a wheelchair as part of his challenge.

DiCiccio endorses Sepulveda

After months of speculation over whether City Councilman Sal DiCiccio would quit to run for the newly-formed Congressional District 9 seat, it appears we have an answer.

DiCiccio recently endorsed Republican Martin Sepulveda in the race, squashing rumors that DiCiccio would run for the seat.

DiCiccio and Sepulveda have known each other for more than 20 years.

"As a small businessman and former member of the Chandler City Council, Martin knows how to set the conditions for private-sector job creation, balance a budget and maintain fiscal responsibility," DiCiccio said in a press release issued by Sepulveda's campaign.

DiCiccio said with two young daughters, it would be difficult for him to run for Congress.

DiCiccio also said that he has been happy with the reforms.

He's been able to enact as a Phoenix City Councilman and wants to keep the position to continue his work.

Sepulveda will face businessman Travis Grantham, former Air Force pilot Wendy Rogers and former Paradise Valley Mayor Vernon Parker for the Republican nomination.

Former prosecutor and Arizona Democratic Party Chairman Andrei Cherny, state Sen. David Schapira and former state Sen. Kyrsten Sinema are the Democrats vying for the seat.

Read more:

<http://www.azcentral.com/community/phoenix/articles/2012/05/17/20120517councilman-rides-wheelchair-day.html#ixzz1vFUhbwil>