

# Persons with Disabilities History and Awareness Month – October 2020

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October is Persons with Disabilities History and Awareness Month. Since 2011, Texas has recognized Persons with Disabilities History and Awareness Month with the passage of [HB 3616](#), 82nd Regular Session ([Government Code, Section 662.109](#)). Governor Greg Abbott also signed a [proclamation](#) specifically recognizing October 2020 and highlighting how this year coincides with the 30th anniversary of the signing of the [Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990](#).

*Helen Keller at a Joint Session of the Legislature, April 8, 1941. Left to right: Speaker of the House Homer Leonard, Governor W. Lee O'Daniel, Helen Keller, and Keller's assistant Polly Thompson. Neal Douglass Photography Collection, Austin History Center, Austin Public Library. [Portal to Texas History](#) (University of North Texas Libraries).*

The most famous disability rights advocate to address the Texas Legislature may have been Helen Keller when she appeared before a Joint Session of the Texas Legislature on April 8, 1941, during the 47th Regular Session. Keller had been invited to speak after planning a trip to Texas to lecture on behalf of the American Foundation for the Blind. Her invitation became official when [Senate Concurrent Resolution 17](#) was adopted and filed on February 26, 1941.

[Senate Concurrent Resolution 37](#), filed April 7, 1941, provided for a Joint Session of the Legislature and for appointing a committee of ten members (five members of the House and five members of the Senate) to escort Keller to the House of

Representatives at the time of her address. According to the *Galveston Daily News* ("Blind Solons Named Committee Heads to Meet Helen Keller," April 6, 1941, page 17), two blind members of the Texas Legislature, Senator [Olan R. Van Zandt](#) and Representative [Lon E. Alsup](#), served as cochairmen of the committee to meet Keller. (Van Zandt and Alsup were also author and coauthor of [HB 844](#), 42nd Regular Session (1931), which created the State Commission for the Blind.)

The proceedings of the Joint Session were described in both the [House Journal](#) and the [Senate Journal](#) of the 47th Regular Session.

A [signed copy](#) of Senate Concurrent Resolution 17, 47th Regular Session (1941), a [letter](#) from Senator Olan R. Van Zandt to Helen Keller regarding her visit, and a [signed copy](#) of Senate Concurrent Resolution 37, 47th Regular Session (1941), are now found within the holdings of the [Helen Keller Archive](#) at the American Foundation for the Blind.