



The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) is an international treaty adopted by the United Nations in 2006. The CRPD was inspired by U.S. leadership in recognizing the rights of people with disabilities through its own Americans with Disabilities Act. As of February 2013, the treaty has 156 signatures and 128 ratifications. The CRPD has been a vital framework, particularly to the developing world, for creating legislation and policies that embrace the rights and dignity of all people with disabilities.

Status of the CRPD in the United States

The United States signed the treaty in 2009 and transmitted it to the U.S. Senate for their advice and consent in May of 2012. The U.S. International Council on Disabilities has led the community's call for ratification (expressed by over 375 disability, faith, business, and veteran organizations), rallying Senate support, and working with leaders like Senator Bob Dole to ensure bipartisanship and secure the 2/3 Senate vote needed. In July, the CRPD was voted successfully out of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC).

On December 4, 2012 the United States Senate considered the ratification of the CRPD but fell short of the super-majority vote required, much due to the falsehoods spread by the opposition. A strong opposition effort, led by the Home School Legal Defense Association, arose just before the July hearing in the SFRC, falsely claiming that the ratification of the CRPD would harm parental rights and require serious changes in U.S. law. Despite amendments (RUDs) adopted at the SFRC hearing to quash the opposition's concerns, the opposition movement added former Senator Rick Santorum as its main spokesperson and efforts remained determined to overcome the treaty's chances at ratification.

The vote in December, with Senator Kirk (IL) being absent, required 66 votes in favor to succeed. The official vote count was 61-38, signaling a loss by a mere five votes. The nays included Senator Moran (KS) who previously had announced his sponsorship of the treaty. All Democrats and Independents voted in favor of the treaty. The eight Republican Senators who voted in favor of the CRPD were: Barrasso (WY), McCain (AZ), Lugar (IN), Snowe (ME), Collins (ME), Ayotte (NH), Brown (MA), and Murkowski (AK). Republican Senator Cochran (MS) originally voted in favor, but withdrew his vote.

The wave of media coverage of the Senate's failure to ratify has been substantial with major networks including CNN, NBC, CBS, and MSNBC all featuring the CRPD as a lead story. In reaction to the failed vote, Senate Majority Leader Reid committed to bringing the treaty up again in 2013. For the 113th Congress, the treaty has returned to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC) with the original nine recommended RUDs from the Administration. Republican Senator Lugar (IN) has left the Senate, making Senator Corker (TN) the new Republican Ranking Member of the Committee. Senator Kerry has been appointed Secretary of State and the new SFRC Chairman is now Senator Menendez (NJ).