

Hello. I'm Noah Smith and I want to start by thanking the organizers of this year's rally for inviting me to speak in front of all of you. Last year I had the opportunity to sit next to Dana Reeve and listen to her advocate on our behalf. Like Chris she displayed a tireless passion and determination for the cause that bears their name. I'm saddened that she isn't with us this year, but I am honored to share in her and Chris' legacy, along with all of you. As many of us have learned in the past couple of days, passing the Christopher Reeve Paralysis Act is extremely important, and long overdue! I think the nature of my own accident is a perfect example why there needs to be a federal infrastructure to treat and care for spinal cord injury. In the fall of 2002 I was preparing to travel to Chile to study Spanish and Latin American culture. I was an honors college student at the University of Oregon where I carried a 4.0 grade point average, participated in University Theater, and worked for the Outdoor Program. On Thanksgiving weekend of that same year, I was traveling back to college on the interstate from my home in Oregon. I was only a few miles from my apartment when a wheel came flying across the freeway and crashed through my windshield, bursting my c7 vertebrae. The wheel belonged to a Ford pickup truck, which was traveling in the opposite direction on the freeway. The driver of the truck was a 19-year-old kid who had been working on the truck's brake pads the day before. When he put the wheels back on he didn't tighten the lug nuts enough. The wheel came loose at 60 mph, rolled down the freeway and hit the concrete median, before becoming airborne and landing on top of me. The driver was uninsured and without assets to assist my family and I as the costs of care and recovery mounted in the days following my injury. I received no settlement. As a result I was forced to drop out of school and move back home with my parents.

The Christopher Reeve Paralysis Act is important because it creates hope, increased awareness, and improved quality of life for people like me who are victims of other people's

mistakes. But whether you're an armed service member returning from abroad with a debilitating injury or someone who has spent a lifetime with paralysis, no one deserves to live with the everyday indignities and difficulties of SCI. We are gathered here today to fight for our rights, but also to fight for those people who will be injured tomorrow, because while it is curable, spinal cord injury is not predictable or preventable. Like a wheel falling from the sky, it can strike anyone at anytime. And while our presence here is a testament to our strength in the face of adversity, the reality is that there are hundreds of thousands of people whose resolve is equal to our own, but who are unable to be with us because of medical complications, physical pain, or a lack of finances. Whereas an abundant gathering of people marks most political movements, only a few hundred are present at ours. But this does not mean our cause lacks urgency. It is our absence more than our presence in Washington that most cries out for a cure. Among those who wanted badly to be here is one of my best friends in California. He broke his neck in a Firestone Tire rollover accident and now requires 24-hour care to do the most basic daily activities, including bathing, eating, and going to the bathroom. But despite his physical limitations he has a vibrant and agile mind, which he uses to advocate for paralysis through his website, scirecovery.com. Like so many others, his voice should not be forgotten today. He has the heart, the mind, and even the finances to be here, but he doesn't have the body. While all of us are able to exercise freedom of speech, like inmates we lack the freedom of mobility. With that said, I'd like to thank you all for coming. Let's pass the CRPA, unlock the prison of paralysis, and GO FORWARD!

Noah D. Smith

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