

# Disability Power on the Hill: Jed Brings Montana to D.C.



Nearly 100 Advocates from across the country, including LIFTT's Jed Barton (fourth from the left on the second to top row), descended upon Washington, D.C. for the AAPD Disability Power on the Hill Event. This group picture was taken just outside the Capitol building on the stairs that lead into the US Senate Chamber (AAPD Photo)

Every so often, the disability community gathers in Washington, D.C. to remind the halls of power that independence and inclusion are not optional extras: they are rights. This September 2025, LIFTT's own Public Relations and Government Affairs Specialist Jed Barton carried that message all the way from Billings, MT, to Capitol Hill as part of the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) *Disability Power on the Hill* event.

The journey wasn't glamorous (five days of travel and meetings will wear down even the toughest Montanan), but the purpose was clear: show lawmakers that people with disabilities are engaged, informed, and determined to shape the future.

## From Montana to the Marble Halls

The event gathered ninety advocates from more than forty states, a diverse, vibrant mix of experiences, stories, and perspectives. Jed found himself shoulder to shoulder with people who cut across every imaginable line of race, identity, and disability. The energy was electric: each story sparked a spark, each conversation a reminder that disability advocacy is a national movement with local roots.

And Jed? He brought Montana's voice into the mix: the voice of rural communities where Medicaid and SNAP aren't political abstractions, but lifelines.

## Policy, Pizza, and Power Naps

Between panel discussions on Medicaid changes and budget cuts, Jed squeezed in some very human moments. His first instinct was to visit a Smithsonian Museum, but travel fatigue had other plans. Instead, he opted for a nap and a slice of D.C. pizza. Advocacy, after all, takes fuel.

This balance of the serious and the ordinary ran through the whole trip. One moment, he was listening to experts warn about the risks of work requirements for Medicaid. Next, he was swapping stories with other first-time visitors to the capital. Both matter because advocacy is about policy *and* people.

## On the Hill

Tuesday was prep day: training on how to speak to congressional staff and which bills to highlight. By Wednesday, it was showtime. Jed made his way through the labyrinth of Senate and House office buildings, coffee in hand, determination in stride. He attended Montana's traditional "Constituent Coffee" (yes, our delegation really does gather Montanans for juice, pastries, and quick chats every Wednesday morning) before dashing between meetings with staff from Rep. Troy Downing, Sen. Steve Daines, and Sen. Tim Sheehy.

He told the LIFTT story: who we serve, what we're building, and why independent living programs matter in eastern Montana. He also championed national disability priorities, including ending subminimum wages, raising outdated SSI savings limits, and finally funding special education as Congress had promised fifty years ago.

## Why It Matters

By the end of the trip, Jed had walked miles, traded handshakes, and planted seeds of connection. It may not make headlines tomorrow, but those meetings matter. A staffer who met Jed this September 2025 may remember his face when an email from

Montana lands on their desk six months from now. A Senator who hears from LIFTT may be more likely to listen when funding is on the line.

Advocacy is both big and small: it's pushing for sweeping laws that protect millions, and it's also grabbing coffee with a Senator and making sure they know your community exists. We are grateful that Jed was equipped to do both and do it with intelligence, wit, and the kind of hard work that reminds us why representation matters.



*Jed (Left) with a group of disability advocates from Texas in front of the US Capitol. (AAPD Photo)*

## **Gratitude and Joy**

Jed's trip was made possible through the sponsorship and support of both AAPD and LIFTT. Jed, LIFTT's team, and our communities express profound gratitude for that opportunity. Without the investment of these organizations, Montana's voice might have been absent from those vital conversations.

What meant the most to Jed, though, was not only the chance to walk the halls of Congress but to walk beside fellow advocates from across the nation. Meeting nearly a hundred Americans who, like him, are ambassadors of Independent Living was a joy and a revelation. Each brought their own story, their own perspective, and their own courage, and together they embodied the truth that the disability community is not just present, but powerful.