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HEADLINE: Gubernatorial hopefuls pledge to help disabled

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BODY:

Face to face with a roomful of men and women in wheelchairs, with walkers or white canes, seven candidates for governor yesterday promised they would do more to help all Marylanders with disabilities.

At a forum staged by a coalition of groups representing the blind, the retarded and those with other physical and mental illnesses, Democratic and Republican candidates pledged to provide the disabled with better housing, improved transportation and more job opportunities.

The candidates said that if elected, they would hire more disabled workers and, by their example, prompt private businesses to do the same. They spoke at a center for the disabled on Cold Spring Lane in Baltimore.

At least two Democratic candidates, Baltimore state Sen. American Joe Miedusiewski and Prince George's County Executive Parris N. Glendening, came armed with videocassettes of their stump speeches to distribute to the visually impaired.

"And I have bumper stickers that look good on the backs of cars, trucks, vans and, yes, even wheelchairs," Mr. Miedusiewski said.

Mr. Glendening -- and the others -- promised to do more to implement the Americans with Disabilities Act. He said funding for new public buildings would include money "up front" to assure access for the disabled and that technical assistance and other government aid, such as low-interest loans, would be offered to help private companies comply with the act's requirements.

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Del. Ellen R. Sauerbrey, a Republican from Baltimore County, said the biggest barrier to the disabled was the lack of money and that the state would not be able to help unless the size and cost of government were reduced.

Lorraine M. Sheehan, a former state legislator who lobbies for the retarded and others with disabilities, acknowledged the possibility that the candidates were promising more than they might deliver. But she said that simply appearing at such an event "sensitizes the candidates" to the problems facing the disabled.

Also at yesterday's forum were former Baltimore Del. Frank A. Conaway and Lt. Gov. Melvin A. Steinberg of Baltimore County, both Democrats, and Republican William S. Shepard of Montgomery County.

Lawrence K. Freeman, a follower of Lyndon H. LaRouche Jr. who has filed as a Democrat, was not invited to the forum but persuaded organizers to let him participate.

Missing were two Democrats, Edward J. Kasemeyer, a former state senator from Howard County, and state Sen. Mary H. Boergers of Montgomery County; and a Republican, U.S. Rep. Helen Delich Bentley of Baltimore County.

CAMPAIGN 1994 -- THE RACE FOR GOVERNOR

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