

Really?? You Are Parking In A Handicap Space??

By: Danny Foster

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Not a day goes by that I don't scratch my head when I see someone who clearly is not disabled park his/her car in a handicap space, jump out of their car and run into Albertsons or the Cherry Creek Mall or some other location.

Sometimes I will say something to them, and other times I think I should just keep my mouth shut. Where do people get off parking in handicap spaces when they don't appear to have any outward signs of a physical disability?

I am not a medical doctor and I am sure that some people who don't have obvious signs of a disability require the convenience of a closer parking spot with a wider area to egress the vehicle. But far more often than not it is simply someone who has no compassion or concerns about those individuals in our society for whom a handicap space is a necessity.

I have represented many critically injured people who need that extra room to get their wheelchair out of their vehicle. It is simply impossible to do this in a tight parking spot. It drives me nuts when I see that all the handicap parking stalls are occupied and someone in a wheelchair, or an elderly citizen with a cane or walker, has to maneuver to the store entrance from a non-handicapped designated space.

Has civility and concern for our fellow citizens gone completely out the window? I suppose the people who illegally or improperly occupy these handicap spaces don't have the ability to read a newspaper so my rant will not impact them. But I am hopeful that it will impact some of you. I see no problem in publicly shaming people who improperly park in handicap spaces. I'm sure many of you have seen the *Seinfeld* episode when Jerry illegally parks in a handicap space and he is chased down by a mob of angry citizens. I think that episode should run more frequently and be required TV for all drivers' education classes.

Aside from the ethical issues, it's also illegal. Most municipalities have the ability to ticket and tow vehicles illegally occupying disabled parking spots. I recently learned that the City of Denver has the Disability Parking Enforcement Program that encourages people to report disability parking malfeasance. You can even sign up to be a volunteer enforcement agent after filling out a brief questionnaire. It's all explained on the denvergov.org website or by calling the Denver Office of Disability Rights at 720-913-8482. Instead of forming an angry mob the next time you see someone violating the law in Denver you should grab that phone and dial 311. Then ask for parking enforcement. They can help make sure that this jerk gets a ticket.

Of course it gets trickier when the car has a temporary handicap placard dangling from the rear-view mirror. This could make ticketing/towing a virtual impossibility. How does one go about securing such a placard when they really don't physically require the handicap parking space? It's as easy as getting your doctor to sign off on a disability parking form from the DMV and then obtaining the placard from the DMV. I have no doubt it's harder to get a prescription for medical marijuana than it is to obtain a doctor's signature on a disability parking form. I also have no doubt that many of these fine upstanding citizens also "borrow" grandma's placard from time to time to ensure that their ability to find parking is easy.

But who really suffers? Who is the victim in these situations? That's obvious. It's the disabled veteran who was wounded in combat and lost his leg. The child with Multiple Sclerosis who has been in a wheel chair since her diagnosis. Or it's the injured woman whose car was T-boned by a drunk driver and now has to use a walker for months while she learns how to walk again. Or it's an elderly person whose arthritis and sciatica make every step an adventure in pain. I could go on and on. So, who suffers from this seemingly innocuous violation? The answer is pretty obvious.

Now I know there will be those who complain that I am picking on them and that just because I cannot see their disability doesn't mean they don't have one. I am sure that might be the case. But let's get real for one second, shall we? There are so many people who abuse the Americans with Disabilities Act, or other federal or state laws that are designed for people who really need assistance. The people who take advantage of these are among the lowest forms of humanity out there.

There are so many contexts where laws were crafted and implemented for those who depend on the government to survive, and then there are the typical low-life's who learn how to exploit these programs to make their lives easier. Yes, I know I am writing an article about illegal parking in handicap spaces, but that's really a microcosm of other problems affecting our society. I'll stop before I go all "Get off my front yard!" on you, but the time has come to stand up for those who need our help, and reject the false claims of those who take advantage.

There are those doing their best to hurt the disabled community, and then there are those who are doing incredible things to help the disabled community. One of them is a high school friend of mine, Jason Romero, who this spring will venture to run across the United States. At an average of 50 miles per day, this will be a huge challenge, and the fact that he is legally blind won't make things any easier. Yes, you read that correctly. As if running 3,200 miles in two months wasn't difficult enough, to do it when you cannot see will only make the challenge more incredible. He is raising money for blind awareness programs and I urge you to visit his website to read about this amazing person and donate to this worthwhile cause. www.visionrunusa.com/donate.html.

So this presidential primary season when you are considering whether you will vote Trump or Clinton, Cruz or Sanders, or maybe even Kasich or Rubio, research what their stance is on people who illegally park in disabled parking spots. If their platform calls for carpet-bombing those insurgents. That's the candidate who will get my vote!