

News from U.S. Rep. John Spratt (D-SC)
Tuesday, May 21, 2002 – For Immediate Release
Contact: Chuck Fant, 202-225-5501

Spratt Backs Newspaper Service for the Blind

WASHINGTON – U.S. Rep. John Spratt (D-SC) has joined with the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) to support NFB-NEWSLINE[®], the pioneering service that allows blind people to “read” daily newspapers using a touch-tone telephone. The new toll-free number is 1-888-882-1629.

A \$4 million grant approved by Congress is being used by NFB to make NFB-NEWSLINE[®] available everywhere in the United States, Washington D.C., and Puerto Rico for the first time ever.

The newspaper service for the blind and visually impaired uses synthesized speech to deliver an audio version of the newspaper text for dozens and eventually hundreds of daily newspapers to blind and visually impaired persons nationwide.

“Through NFB-NEWSLINE[®], a blind person can now listen to the daily newspaper from his or her own community at the same time the printed edition of that same newspaper is being delivered to sighted customers,” said Spratt.

“For blind people or even seniors who can no longer read small newsprint, this means more than being able to enjoy a morning ritual observed by millions of Americans – reading the daily newspaper. It also means being connected to the social and political life of the community in which you live and work.”

Congress established the national “Books for the Blind” program in 1931 to pay for the production of Braille and audio versions of popular books and magazines and distribute them through state and local libraries. NFB President Marc Maurer notes, however, that until now, “the lack of affordable and suitable technology has not allowed newspapers to be included in this service.”

Spratt said there is no charge to subscribe to NFB-NEWSLINE[®]. Federal funds are being used to cover operations and telecommunications costs for one year. A means of support to continue the service after that time is being sought through state and federal sources.

To request an application or find the sponsor of NFB-NEWSLINE[®], contact the National Federation of the Blind at (410) 659-9314. Applications and other information also are available at www.nfb.org.

The National Federation of the Blind is a consumer-based organization of more than 50,000 blind people throughout the U.S. whose primary purpose is to promote security, opportunity, and equality for those who are blind or visually impaired.

#