# National Federation of the Blind

# 2022 National Convention

# General Session III

## July 9, 2022

## 8:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. CT

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MARK RICCOBONO: The morning session is now in order.

(Cheering and applause).

Good morning, fellow Federationists.

And Eid Mubarak to all of you. Hopefully you got your card on your chair, and thank you to our NFB Blind Muslims group for helping all of us participate in the holiday.

(Applause.)

Before we begin, I want to add one note from yesterday. I told you about Ruth Stewart, and I did not mention, and many people have been asking, I wasn't keeping it a secret. She was a member in the great state of Maryland. So again I ask you to remember Ruth as we begin this morning.

We are going to begin with our invocation. Today is the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha, and I want to begin by saying we very much appreciate our blind and sighted members who participate in the Muslim faith for making the sacrifice to be with us at this convention during this holiday, recognizing that it is a sacrifice for you to do so. We have a member from Arizona to give the invocation. He is a staff member at SAVI, and comes to offer us an invocation this morning. Here is Adbullah Shuli.

(Cheering and applause).

ABDULLAH: (Speaking Arabic prayer).

I want to start in the name of God, the most gracious, the most merciful. Greetings, peace upon you all, greetings of peace, blessings, and mercy upon us all. Thank you, Mr. Riccobono. Today, as Mr. Riccobono mention ed, is a special holiday in Islam, and a holiday is time to spend with family and loved ones. And there's no bigger family than the Federation family.

(Cheering and applause).

And there's no more fitting holiday to spend with the NFB holiday than Eid al-Adha, which celebrates the sacrifice of Abraham. We stand on the shoulders of all who made efforts to institutionalize the changes we see, to promote the high expectations of blind individuals and make us a bigger part of society.

Not only are we standing on their shoulders, but we're also walking in their footsteps and making sacrifices of our own. Gathering here today, in Washington seminar, and all the other sacrifices throughout the year that we do to continue advocating and supporting and promoting the efforts of the National Federation of the Blind. Together with hope, love, and determination, any sacrifice is worth it. Because we are all here for the same purpose and cause.

I want to ask everyone to reflect on the sacrifices that you've made, the sacrifices that the people around you have made, not only in, you know, being here, not only in advocacy for blindness, but also in your personal life and your professional life, in all aspects of life, think about the sacrifice and reflect on it, and reflect on your own sacrifice and be gracious for it, be appreciative of the sacrifices that you've made and the sacrifices of the people around you, and show them that appreciation. As many of you have noticed, there is a card on your chair, which says Eid Mubarak, which means "blessed holiday". I want to thank Islam By Touch for supporting this, it's the first organization that brings Islamic education material in English and braille. Because braille is important. We all want to be able to access the information that we want, and thanks to Islam By Touch for bringing that in braille to everyone.

I want to end by, on a holiday in Islam, there are two major holidays, and throughout the day we give thanks to God and praise God, so what I'm about to recite is something that we say throughout the day, and it's just saying "glory be to God and all praise to God", and just repeating that.

Allahu Akbar... (repeating prayer) thank you.

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

Thank you very much. Let's have a door prize for the holiday.

BENNET PROWS: How about a holiday bunch of gift cards and all kinds of door prizes? Before I tell you who the in-person winner of the first prize of the morning is, I'm going to read a couple of names here of virtual participants, and we thank you all for being with us on this holiday, and also, on Zoom or whatever, YouTube, and everything.

We've got -- and when you hear your name, please send an e-mail within 30 minutes to prize@nfb.org, and you'll win.

Abbie Mesce from New Jersey, a $25 gift card. And Linda Page from Colorado, $30 gift card as well.

Now, for the in-person one, and for the holiday as well, we have $100... $100!

(Cheering).

And it goes to Tyler Williamson of California. Anybody here with that name? If you are, stand up and jump around and yell and scream and make it known that you are here and then don't leave, don't sit down, because you'll disappear on us.

Not yet... okay, next name... Latira Taylor of Louisiana.

I'm sorry, Lakira...

Okay, we'll get another one. Laurie Rossio of Maryland. You here, Laurie? Come on, Laurie, where the heck are ya! I guess they're not there. Next?

Carl Weiss of Florida.

MARK RICCOBONO: Nobody's here this morning...

(Cheering).

BENNET PROWS: Anybody want 100 bucks?

MARK RICCOBONO: I'll take it if I have to.

BENNET PROWS: Jack Pratt of Texas!

Here's here, we got him, and stay standing, because if you don't, you disappear and I'll get the money.

(Laughter.)

MARK RICCOBONO: All right. Stand up again, Jack. Wave your cane or your guide dog in the air!

(Laughter.)

Okay, I know you all heard the announcement, but just another reminder that it really makes a difference if everybody continues to mask when we're in meeting assembled or in the hallways or the elevators.

(Applause.)

So please, we really appreciate it. There are tests, again, at registration, which will be open at lunch if you need a test. They'll be available. In a crowd like this, with as many people as we had, it's inevitable that someone will test positive. We have had some people test positive, and I want to say I appreciate our leadership that has been working hard to help those who have tested positive and make sure they're taken care of. And most importantly that all of you are doing your part by distancing where you can and wearing your masks. Again, if you need a mask, plenty of them available here. So thank you.

I should give you a registration update, since I mentioned registration. As of the close of business yesterday, the top 10 list looks very much the same. Virginia at 75 individuals. Nebraska didn't move up at 11, either, so Virginia seems to --

(Laughter.)

Virginia, 75 people registered. Number 9, New York, 76 people registered. Number 8, Georgia, 80 people registered. You can still catch up to number 7, Georgia, which is Colorado, 82 people registered. Number 6 is Florida with 95 people registered. Arizona did move up a tick, number 5, Arizona, has 98 people registered. A couple more, you can get to 100.

Number 4, California, 129 people registered. Texas, still number 3, 155 people registered. Number 2, Maryland, 212 people registered. And Louisiana, still number 1, but with a few more, 225 people registered.

(Cheering and applause).

We still have the same number of international participants. So, total registration, a little bit up from yesterday. Total in-person registration, 2,420. Our virtual registration, which also remains open, so you're still eligible for door prizes, 1,476 people registered.

Okay, we're now going to move to a discussion of the financial report. And as has been mentioned a number of times in this convention, we had the unusual circumstance of having an officer pass away while in office. So, definitely keep Jeannie Massay on your heart this morning. I mentioned earlier in the convention that Norma Crosby has been helping with the treasury duties. In fact, she started doing that back in March, when Jeannie was sick, we asked her to chip in. So how about a round of applause for Norma!

(Applause.)

Doing a little extra work there.

So, I have here, the 2021 audited financial report of the National Federation of the Blind. This is also online in PDF and in a braille-ready format, also all affiliate presidents received it if you went to the affiliate and treasurers meeting.

In the audited financial, we start with the opinion from the auditors, which is very important, and it reads as follows: We have audited the consolidated financial statements of the National Federation of the Blind, a nonprofit organization, which comprise the consolidated statement of financial position as of December 31, 2021, and the related consolidated statement of activities, functional expenses, and cash flows for the year then ending, and the relate notes to the consolidated financial statement. In our opinion, the accompanying consolidated financial statements referred to above present fairly in all material respects the financial position of the Federation as of December 31, 2021, and the net changes in their assets and their cash flows for the year then ending in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America.

This is the best opinion statement you can get from the auditing firm. It says that there are no exceptions and that our processes have been good and we've been good stewards of our financial resources.

(Applause.)

I'll remind you that we call this a consolidated statement, because in addition to the financials of the National Federation of the Blind, in 2021, we operated a wholly owned LLC, KNFB Reader, LLC. KNFB Reader, LLC was dissolved as of December 31, 2021. So next year, there won't be a consolidated statement because there will be nothing to consolidate.

(Laughter.)

So we stopped managing KNFB Reader LLC. We still own the technology, the Federation does. The app is being managed by a firm that has been working on it from the beginning, Sensitech, and they have rebranded the name. And so this has been done to preserve the app for those who have purchased it. But the Federation will continue to receive revenue from that, but it will come directly to us.

So we have the consolidated statement of financial position, and we start with the assets. Again, remember, this is for last year. Cash and cash equivalents, $3,921,349.

Prepaid expenses: $1,182,677.

Receivables, $1,036,837.

Investments: 25 million dollars.

Other investments insurance, $3,187,258.

Property and equipment, net, 192, 132.

For total assets of $35,001,742. We show liabilities as follows: Accounts payable and accrued expenses, deferred revenue, $125,000. Accrued annuity benefit of $28,130, for total liabilities of $837,413. Our net assets are then shown as, with donor restrictions or without donor restrictions, -- an example of donor restrictions would be we have some scholarship funds that are restricted to just be used for scholarships, or award funds that can't be used for other purposes. So total assets without donor restrictions: $29,823,988.

With restrictions, $4,361,341. Giving us a total net assets of $34,164,329. And of course, when you add total liabilities and net assets, you get the $35,001,742 figure.

Then we have the activities breakdown. Under public support, we have contributions -- I will give you the totals, and I will give you what portion of that is with donor restrictions. If I don't mention any with donor restrictions, it means there aren't any.

So contributions, total, $16,821,920, of that, $183,310 were donor restrictions.

Donated services total, $5,442,809.

Government grants and contracts, total, $1,730,180.

Then we have net assets released from restrictions during the year. The total is 0 because the amount that was released is the same as the amount for without donor restrictions. So the total amount released was $158,367.

Total public support: $23,969,966, of which $24,943 were with restrictions.

Then we have another category: Sales of independent products and services. And the total there is $340,128. Net investment s, this could be an income or a loss number, but it was a nice income number, positive, for last year. Total: $2,501,986, of which $460,494 was restricted. This gives us total revenue across the board, 29 -- let's see...

Yeah, I'm sorry. Total revenue: $2,041,402.

Now all of the gains, public support, together, $26,351,589, of which $485,437 is restricted. Sounds good, but the thing is we had some expenses last year.

(Laughter.)

Program services, blindness integration, $10,079,673. Civil rights advocacy and self-organization, $7,312,286, and nonvisual access systems, $5,354,531, giving us total program services of $22,646,490.

We had management and general expenses, $694,487, and fundraising expenses $1,241,897.

That is a total program services expense s of $1,936,394.

Total expenses for the year is $24,582,874.

This brings us to changes in net assets for the year, a positive $2,254,149, of which, again, 485,437 is restricted. So, a very good year.

(Applause.)

Our net assets at the beginning of the year, beginning of 2021, $31,910,180, of which $3,875,904 was restricted. Net assets at the end of the year: $34,164,329, of which $4,361,341 was restricted.

The other report here is the report of our functional expenses, and it has a lot of detail. I will just give you the grand totals across the categories. But it breaks out all of our expense areas, and gives you quite an amount of detail. Under grand totals, volunteer services: $2,638,110, again, these are all expense. Salaries, $4,653,903

Total salaries and related expenses of 8 million dollars.

Under supplies, $4,807,000.

Under postage and shipping $1 million.

Printing and publications $3,792,866.

Travel, $47,000. I think the number will be higher this year.

(Laughter.)

Conferences and conventions, this number will be higher also, but for 2021, it was $28,299.

Professional fees: $4,123,410.

Telephone, $17,000.

Occupancy, $462,784.

Donated media, this is an expense, also, it nets out with an equal income. $2,804,698.

Awards and grants: $1,047,412.

Information technology: $1,716,924.

Equipment rental, maintenance, and repairs: $26,240.

Equipment, braille, and technology center: $26,639.

Royalty fees of $10,428.

And other.

For total expenses before depreciation and amortization

And total expenses: $24,582,704.

A very good year!

(Applause.)

At the National Federation of the Blind, we don't believe in debt, so the cash flow pretty much doesn't give any new data. We don't spend money we don't have.

(Applause.)

Now, there are a number of notes, as there always are, in the audited document. For example, it will tell you the nature of the organization and about our processes. The notes start on braille page 30, and they go to braille page 67.

I could go through all the notes if you would like. They are available online for you.

Now that's the report for last year. I want to give you this year's information, but also... I... want to share with you... I'm juggling a lot of documents up here.

Last year, we made a significant investment in our safety and support efforts. And this is reflected in the numbers you've already heard, but I've broken this out so you will know. Last year around our safety and support work we spent $1,102,000. This includes our special committee council that we hired to do the investigation was $622,000

Our external investigator, who investigated a lot of -- well, all of the prior claims we got related to sexual misconduct, was $300,000. By the way, Tanya Bonya is here at this convention. I hope you had the chance to meet her.

And then we had an additional $120,000 that we spent on training and our work with RAINN, and an additional $60,000 in other expenses related to our engagement in our safety and support work.

All of that, the $1.1 million, was funds that were not budgeted for last year. But, I think, reflective of the fact that we had a very good year despite those unanticipated expenses, we were still up significantly for the year. So we're always reviewing our financial position and making adjustments as needed too. So fiscal responsibility is really important to us.

For the first five months of this year, I regret to say the numbers look very different. Maybe you expected that. For the first 5 months, we show an estimated loss in our investments of $2,826,974.

That's more than our investment gain for last year.

We do expect from our mass mail program, positive $640,000.

Still outstanding.

So in our monthly financial report, we show these two numbers together as a total outstanding revenue of a negative $2,186,480.

We have actualized revenue for the first 5 months of $6,068,111, and when you add those two numbers together, the actualized revenue and the estimated, you get a total revenue of $4 million.

Again, we have had expenses for the first 5 months. Our expenses for the first 5 months have been $7,467,559.

Giving us an estimated change in net assets after the first 5 months of the year of a negative $3,285,928. So a comment about that is, obviously, a big chunk of that negative number is the current stock market. We're in the stock market for the long haul. You heard Sandy Halverson say that we have not dipped into our rainy day fund. We haven't needed to. There's no need to panic. We review our investment strategy on a regular basis, and over the last 3 years, took a number of steps to really hedge against what we are now experiencing in the market.

So don't be too sad about the down investment number. It will come back. We just need to hang in there a little while. But I think here's the good news. If you look at the first 5 months of the year, just dividing the year by 12, we should have spent about 41% of our budget and taken in about 41% of our revenue, if everything came in equally on a monthly basis. Of course, it doesn't. But for the first 5 months, our revenue is 39% of what we've budgeted for the whole year. This is actually a very good number, because a huge amount of our annual revenue comes in in the last quarter of the year, but also our 5-month number does not reflect the extensive sponsorship support here at this convention.

Compared to 39% of budgeted revenue, we know that a lot of our revenue is coming, we've only, on the expense side, have only met 36% of our budgeted expenses. And, of course, we've had a lot of expenses leading up to the convention. So we're really on track this year to do very well financially.

I think, if there are no questions, that is the financial report we have for this convention.

(Applause.)

We would accept a motion to accept the financial report.

It's been moved and seconded to accept the financial report. Are there any questions?

Okay. All those in favor, say aye.

(Many ayes).

Opposed, say no.

(Silence).

Okay. Congratulations on a great year.

(Applause.)

And thank you all for your contributions.

BENNET PROWS: How about a door prize for that?

MARK RICCOBONO: Oh, yeah, have a door prize.

BENNET PROWS: We've got Starbucks $50 gift certificate with some chocolate-covered espresso beans from Washington State, and that goes to Jennifer Lyman of Washington, DC, the other Washington!

Jennifer Lyman?

Okay, let's try another Texan. Carolyn Mason of Texas. Are you here? It's awful quiet... you don't even hear the rebel yell or anything. So let's see... let's try Donald Christie of Florida.

(Cheering).

Okay, he's here!

MARK RICCOBONO: Okay, from here, we've usually moved to the honor roll call of states. However, in the virtual conventions, we had many chapters and affiliates make contributions in advance, and many of you said you really liked that, so we're keeping it. We won't have an honor roll call of states except to say that there have been significant pledges and contributions made to the Federation. A detailed report of that can be found at nfb.org/convention. I'm not going to read every contribution to you. I will give you the totals, however. But I do want to say that contributions from affiliates and divisions, members really make a significant difference, because these are, for the most part, unrestricted funds that allow us the flexibility to do what we want to do. So thank you to all of the affiliates who have already made pledges and contributed to the total of $109,275.

(Cheering and applause).

This includes contributions to the Jacobus tenBroek Memorial fund.

Kenneth Jernigan fund, $10,295.

The SUN Fund, $19,985.

And our White Cane Fund of $19,650.

And I know that there were a few that missed the deadline, so if you're not reflected in the report, we're sorry for that. But your contributions are still welcome all the same.

Let's give a big cheer for all the conditional contributions!

(Cheering and applause).

And this is a good time to say that you can still give 20, and if you haven't had the opportunity to give 20, you should do so to participate in the contributions and maybe win a trip to our 2023 convention, which, after this convention, don't you want to come back?

(Cheering and applause).

So $20, give $20, you go back to the fund tables, go to nfb.org/give20, please do that soon. I know Melissa Riccobono, who is tuned in online, said that she made our Give 20 contribution, so I appreciate that. I would encourage each of you to do the same. And if you're listening virtually, of course, you can still do that. So a nice way to support the work of our organization. I know that our other funds will be eager to have your support as well. And by the way, I want to thank our Dream Makers Circle participants who were part of the reception last night. It was a great event, and I do encourage others to be part of our Dream Makers Circle.

(Applause.)

Okay, we're going to move to the elections.

I want to say that this convention makes decisions about what happens with the Federation, and we take that seriously. Now, in the last two years, the board was confronted with a challenge. We made the decision to take the convention virtual. And the board was very clear that we have to continue to do our business. We can't just sit around and wait for the pandemic to end!

(Applause.)

So after careful thought, the board proposed to the membership rules of engagement for the virtual conventions. And we socialized those and we asked members to vote on those rules in convention assembled, and we had many more people who are eligible and registered to vote during the virtual conventions than actually participated. Which is reflective of this room. Not everybody makes it to this room. But that's also because we have a delegate model. Everybody has a voice, because there are delegates who are elected to be in this room. And we relied heavily on the delegates in the virtual convention.

Now that we're back in convention assembled, the board felt that the standard rules of the convention apply and it was up to the convention on how to run things. So since the convention didn't decide to change the rules, you had to be here to vote.

(Applause.)

Voting is available to members who are here. And you heard yesterday we appointed a nominating committee which was chaired by Pam Allen. I am now going to give the floor to Pam Allen to give the report of the Nominating Committee. Here's Pam Allen!

(Applause.)

PAM ALLEN: Thank you. Good morning, fellow Federationists, and thank you so much, President Riccobono. I want to thank everyone who served on the Nominating Committee and also to Seth Lamkin for your assistance. The Nominating Committee recommends the following.

President, Mark Riccobono, Maryland.

First vice president, Pam Allen, Louisiana.

Second vice president, Ron Brown, Indiana.

Secretary, Everette Bacon, Utah.

Treasurer, Norma Crosby, Texas.

Board position number 1, Shawn Callaway, District of Columbia.

Board position 2, Carla McQuillan, Oregon.

Board position 3, Adelmo Vigil, New Mexico.

Board position number 4, Sheila Wright, Missouri.

Board position number 5, Donald Porterfield, Arizona.

Board position number 6, Barbara Emanuel, Alabama.

And if Everett is elected as secretary, we have placed a name for nomination for a one year position Grace Pyers from Rhode Island. This is our report, sir, and we recommend passage.

(Applause.)

MARK RICCOBONO: I heard a motion to approve the Nominating Committee report. Is there a second?

(Many yelling "second").

MARK RICCOBONO: Again, this is just to accept the report of the Nominating Committee.

Any discussion?

All those in favor of accepting the Nominating Committee's report, say aye.

(Many ayes).

Opposed, say no.

(Silence).

Okay, so the slate has been accepted for nomination. I now turn the elections over to Pam Allen.

PAM ALLEN: The name of Mark Riccobono has been placed in nomination for president. Are there any other nominations?

Are there any other nominations?

Are there any other nominations?

It's been moved and seconded that nominations close, and Mark Riccobono be elected by acclamation. All those in favor say aye

(Many ayes).

All opposed?

(A few scattered nos).

Congratulations, Mr. President.

(Applause.)

(Chant from the crowd: RICC-O-BO-NO! Clap, clap, clap clap clap).

(Laughter.)

(Applause.)

MARK RICCOBONO: I do love you all.

(Applause.)

First of all -- still hard to believe we're back together. It's been so long.

(Laughter.)

Well, first of all, I do want to thank all of you for the faith and the trust that you place in me to take on this awesome responsibility, which I do take very seriously.

That would not be possible to do on your behalf without my family, and so none of them are here in person, so I hope the next time you get to be around them, I hope you thank them for their role. But I certainly want to thank Melissa Riccobono, who I know is tuned in today.

(Cheering and applause).

A lot of people who don't decide to engage in the work of this organization as active members find it hard to believe the love, the commitment, the honest working together that we share. But you know it, and I know it. And I am forever grateful that I have the opportunity to share it with you. And as I said yesterday, without a doubt, you will continue to have my best efforts as long as you want me to serve. And you will continue to have my best efforts even after you wish for me not to serve.

But it is a true honor to serve, and I'm really looking forward to the work that we're going to do together to realize all of our dreams. Thank you.

(Applause.)

BENNET PROWS: Mr. President, I'd love to give a special door prize for the election of you.

MARK RICCOBONO: Okay, just for me?!

(Laughter.)

BENNET PROWS: Let's see if we get your name.

(Laughter.)

And I'm going to include the virtuals in here too. So Amelia Rome of Tennessee gets a $50 Independence Market gift certificate, and James Pearson of Washington -- that's Jim, of course -- gets $25 Independence Market.

Now, for the election of our president, to show you our tremendous love for you, we're going to give away 150 bucks.

(Applause.)

Let's call Andrew Cutnick of New York! Maybe he's virtual -- Andrew Cutler.

All right, let's go back out West to Roy Simpson of Arizona.

We're still doing our reconnaissance...

How about Lenora Harris of Alabama?

(Cheering).

(Laughter.)

Jackson Chandler of West Virginia.

MARK RICCOBONO: Where are all the people anyway?

(Several in the crowd shouting "I'm here! Right here!")

(Laughter.)

MARK RICCOBONO: They want you to draw Massachusetts, Bennett.

BENNET PROWS: How about Carolyn Lewis of Montana?

MARK RICCOBONO: Right in the front row!

I think we got her.

BENNET PROWS: Yup, we got her.

(Applause.)

MARK RICCOBONO: Okay. The Nominating Committee has placed the name of Pam Allen into nomination for the position of first vice president. Are there any other nominations?

Are there any other nominations?

Are there any other nominations?

It's been moved and seconded that nominations cease and Pam Allen of Louisiana be elected by acclamation to the position of first vice president. All those in favor say aye.

(Many ayes).

Opposed say no.

(Silence).

The ayes have it. Pam, congratulations.

(Cheering and applause).

PAM ALLEN: Thank you so much, President Riccobono, and thank you, my Federation family. It's such a truly humbling honor for which I am so thankful to serve as your first vice president. And I appreciate your trust and your faith in me. And this belief that you have placed in me, and the responsibility and accountability to each of you to move our organization forward, are something that I take very seriously.

President Barack Obama said: The best way to not feel hopeless is to get up and do something. Don't wait for good things to happen to you. If you go and make some good things happen, you will fill the world with hope. You will fill yourself with hope.

Since 1940, the National Federation of the Blind has been transformative in shaping society's views about blindness, and in providing hope and increasing opportunity for all blind people. We stand against social injustice and advocate for equity for all blind people.

And we do this with courage and respect and with love.

The work that we do together isn't easy, always, but it is essential. And it is not possible without everyone here, everyone in this room, everyone listening, all of our members, working together to make change, and doing that with a bond of unity and love. It is an honor to serve with you, President Riccobono. I thank you for you and Melissa, for your support. And I want to acknowledge my husband Roland for all the ways that he leads and gives in so many ways.

(Cheering and applause).

I'm so grateful and thankful, and I look forward to continuing to learn from all of you to work side by side with each of you, and to continuing to build the National Federation of the Blind. Thank you so much.

(Applause.)

MARK RICCOBONO: I just want to say, this organization, in today's time, would not be what it is without Pam Allen.

(Cheering and applause).

We love you, Pam.

PAM ALLEN: I love you too!

MARK RICCOBONO: And I'm glad we finally got a New Orleans convention, man!

(Cheering and applause).

Seems like so long ago we were scouting this hotel in 2018!!!

(Laughter.)

The Nominating Committee has placed the name of Ron Brown from Indiana into nomination for the position of second vice president. Are there any other nominations?

Are there any other nominations?

Are there any other nominations?

It's been moved and seconded that nominations cease, and Ron Brown of Indiana be elected to the position of second vice president. All those in favor say aye

(Many ayes).

All opposed say no.

(Silence).

Ron, congratulations.

(Applause.)

RON BROWN: Thank you. Mr. President, Federation, this is Ron Brown, you know, Jean Brown's husband.

(Laughter.)

To my Federation family, I thank you all. In 2001, I was elected to the national board of directors. In 2008, I was elected to be the second vice president, and have served in that capacity ever since. I have thoroughly, thoroughly enjoyed serving my Federation family. I believe that living is giving, and I thank you all for giving me the opportunity to serve. And I thank, in particular, my wife, Jean Brown, for giving me the last 35 years of her life, because this is our anniversary!

(Applause.)

Thank you guys.

MARK RICCOBONO: Well, happy anniversary!

(Many in the crowd yelling "happy anniversary! We love you!")

MARK RICCOBONO: So great to serve with you, Ron.

Let's see, the Nominating Committee has placed the name of Everette Bacon of Utah into nomination for the position of secretary. Are there any other nominations?

Are there any other nominations?

Are there any other nominations?

It's been moved and seconded that nominations cease and Everette Bacon of Utah be elected by acclamation to the position of secretary. All those in favor say aye.

(Many ayes).

Opposed, say no.

(Silence).

The ayes have it, Everette, congratulations!

(Applause.)

EVERETTE BACON: Thank you, Mr. President, thank you to all my Federation family. I was thinking, this board is very much a family. I had the honor of being elected in 2015 to this board. And President Riccobono, Mark, he's my friend. You know, Pam Allen is my friend. These folks, they work all the time for this organization. I will get a text from Mark as he's walking home, usually around 9:00 at night, and say "you got a minute?" And we'll chat and we'll talk, sometimes about what's going on in the Federation, sometimes we'll just talk about baseball. But, you know, he puts his whole heart and life into this organization, and...

(Scattered applause).

And the funny thing is, usually either right before he texts me or calls me, Pam Allen is doing the same thing!

(Laughter.)

And I'm just so fortunate to be their friends, and be a part of this organization and think about how we can make it better for all of us, and how we can make the plight of blind people better and stronger and more inclusive of all blind people, of all races, of all dispositions. It's something we all think about and try to focus on making better all the time.

I also do want to say that when I came onto the board, Jim Gashel had been the long time secretary of this organization, and he stepped away last year. And the fact that I'm now the secretary and following in Jim Gashel's footsteps, it really means a lot to me.

(Scattered applause).

So thank you to all of you, and I'm proud to serve as your secretary.

(Applause.)

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you, Everette. Glad to see you made it back from the Upside Down

(Laughter.)

Who made it to the Stranger Things screening last night?

(Cheering).

Okay, awesome.

For the position of treasurer, -- Everette, I should say I appreciate you always being available to take my late-night calls. It's nice that you're two time zones behind me, you know?

(Laughter.)

But he's always there, which is great. As are all the members that serve on this board.

For the position of treasurer, the Nominating Committee has submitted the name of Norma Crosby of Texas.

Are there any other nominations?

Are there any other nominations?

Are there any other nominations?

In harmony, it's been moved and seconded --

(Laughter.)

That nominations cease, and Norma be elected to the position of treasurer by acclamation. All those in favor, say aye.

(Many ayes).

Opposed, say no.

(Silence).

The ayes have it. Congratulations, Norma.

(Applause.)

NORMA CROSBY: Thank you, sir, and thank you to my Federation family. Today is a bittersweet day for me. I'm always honored to serve you on the national board, and yet today I'm sad that I'm taking over for a woman that I love so much. Jeannie Massay was a really good friend to me, and I'll try my best to do as much work, in the same fashion that she did. And thank you again so much.

(Applause.)

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you very much, Norma, for your service. And I can tell you that your treasurer-elect will have no problem asking questions about expenses, because she's been doing it for the last 3 months, and she's asked a number of questions, which is great. That's the kind of interaction and accountability we expect in our leadership. So thank you, Norma, for your service.

For board position number 1, the Nominating Committee has submitted the name of Shawn Callaway of the District of Columbia.

(Applause.)

Are there any other nominations?

Are there any other nominations?

Are there any other nominations?

It's been moved and seconded that nominations cease and Shawn Callaway of the District of Columbia be elected as a member of the board. All those in favor say aye.

(Many ayes).

Opposed say no.

(Silence).

Shawn, congratulations.

(Applause.)

SHAWN CALLOWAY: Thank you. First of all, I want to thank the God I serve.

(Cheering and applause).

He's truly brought me a mighty long way.

I also want to acknowledge Amy Buresh, Amy Ruell, and John Fritz. It's been an honor to serve next to you guys, for real

(Applause.)

I also want to acknowledge my wife Tonya, and you, President Riccobono. I tell everybody every meeting that you're invited to that you're our fearless leader, and you are. So I thank you for being that.

Also, I want to say that we gotta recognize that this is a volunteer organization, and that sometimes people go above and beyond, especially when I'm in leadership, I've done a bad job in some instances when I've had these committees of delegating, and I've had my members tell me, Shawn, we got this, we can help you out. So I want to acknowledge first of all Mr. Colin Wong, who serves as co-chair of the diversity and inclusion committee.

(Applause.)

Also to my dear friend Denise Brown.

(Applause.)

Also Mr. Randy Belvins.

(Applause.)

The Federation does give many titles -- title of president of DC affiliate, being on the board of directors, co-chairing different committees. It's given me titles in the workplace, when I apply for jobs, I put down the positions in the National Federation of the Blind, and that seems to impress employers.

I've chaired and served on different disability committees in the community because of the title that's been given to me by the National Federation of the Blind.

But the title that the Federation has given me that is extremely important is the one of father. Before becoming a Federationist, I didn't believe I could be a father. And, um, when I joined this organization, I met a lot of people who are outstanding parents, and I was able to watch them, and that gave me the confidence to be a father.

(Cheering and applause).

I'm standing here today next to my daughter.

(Cheering).

Some of you who know her, y'all refer to her as The Princess.

(Laughter.)

But she's Camille Calloway.

(Applause.)

And when I first took her to school, I mean, when I first picked her up from school at her new school, she was 3 years old, she introduced me to her teacher, she said, Ms. Brown, this is my daddy, he's blind, and he can do anything anyone else can do.

(Cheering and applause).

So first I want to say to my daughter, sweetheart, I just thank you so much. This week I've been running around. I leave early in the morning. And I come back, and you're asleep, late at night. But you've been understanding of that, and I'm truly grateful for you, for you being that way.

And I love you very much.

(Applause.)

And to my Federation family, I just want to say, I thank you for your confidence in me, and I thank you for giving me the confidence to be a father to this wonderful young lady. So thank you all.

(Cheering and applause).

MARK RICCOBONO: Wait a minute. When did she start walking? Wasn't it just yesterday?

(Laughter.)

It's going by fast, Shawn! It's going by fast.

Glad to have the Princess here though.

(Applause.)

I don't know, Bennett, they're getting a little restless for a door prize... you want me to give you one?

BENNET PROWS: Let's do it then. We've got a $50 gift card from Delaware with some popcorn balls... you know, (making popping noise with mouth) balls!

(Laughter.)

That goes to... oh, Ryan Strunk! Minnesota! If he's not here, I'm going to find out why

(Laughter.)

MARK RICCOBONO: I don't think he's here...

BENNET PROWS: Not here, okay. How about Richard Stracks from Oregon?

How about Jose Marquez of Texas? Another Texan. Anybody there from Texas?

Not here, okay. Quinton Brown of Tennessee.

While we're waiting for somebody to stand up, I'll give away a virtual gift card to Sherri Gomes of California, a great author of a new book, too, a $25 gift card, and I wasn't paid to say that either! She attended a senior meetup I attended a few weeks ago.

How about Joel Tevera of Florida? Are you here?

Oh, she's in the room with COVID?

MARK RICCOBONO: I just would caution everybody not to maybe share people's personal information on the convention floor...

(Laughter and agreeing applause).

BENNET PROWS: How about Jeffrey Wilson of Massachusetts?

Wave your hand, jump up there, there he is. We've got him. Don't sit down, you'll disappear!

MARK RICCOBONO: Okay. Okay... for board position number 2, the Nominating Committee has submitted the name of Adelmo Vigil of New Mexico. Are there any other nominations?

Are there any other nominations?

Are there any other nominations?

It's been moved that nominations cease and Adelmo Vigil of New Mexico be elected by acclamation.

All in favor say aye.

(Many ayes).

Opposed, say no.

(Silence).

Adelmo, congratulations.

(Applause.)

ADELMO VIGIL: Thank you, Mr. President, and fellow Federationists. I want to thank you for the confidence in me to serve on this very important board. We're on the board here for the best organization in the world of blind people! (Cheering and applause)

And it's an honor to be able to do so.

I want to thank my wife, Soledad, for her support throughout my work with the NFB.

(Applause.)

Also, when we think about where we've come from, we've made many changes in the last many years. But because of the work that we all have done, it is not just by me as a board member or any of us board members. It's because of YOU, the membership of this organization, that makes the difference.

I want to thank you all for everything that you do. And together with love and determination, we can transform dreams into reality. Thank you.

(Cheering and applause).

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you, Adelmo, and congratulations. I'm sure that Soledad got a picture, because she always gets a picture!

Our Nominating Committee chair informed me that I got these two board positions backwards, so sorry about that. But for board position number 3, the name of Carla McQuillan of Oregon has been placed into nomination. Are there any other nominations?

Are there any other nominations?

Are there any other nominations?

It's been moved and seconded that nominations cease and that Carla McQuillan of Oregon be elected by acclamation. All those in favor say aye.

(Many ayes).

Opposed say no.

(Silence).

The ayes have it. Congratulations.

(Applause.)

CARLA MCQUILLIAN: Thank you, Mr. President and my Federation family. I lost my vision when I was 10 years old and the only other blind person I knew was my older brother, and I fondly refer to him as my pitiful blind brother, because everything he wanted to do but couldn't do is because he couldn't see. When I lost my vision, I thought, if that's what blindness is, that's not who I am. I spent the remaining years of my childhood and 10 years of my adulthood pretending that I could see, because blindness wasn't -- (voice breaking) -- it did not define who I was.

And in 1988, I won a scholarship from the great state of Illinois!

(Cheering).

And I went to the convention thinking, yeah, I'll go, I'll collect my money, because I was a poor college student and needed it. But I'm not gonna have anything to do with these blind people.

Well, little did I know... I met Patti Gregory at the time -- Patti Chang -- and hung out with her. And I met a totally blind pharmacist. A lawyer who then became a judge. Teachers. And people doing everything I never thought a blind person could do. And it changed my life (voice breaking) in a way I cannot even tell you.

This organization is responsible for all my success in my life. The way I perceive myself and my place in the world. And you have no idea what an honor it is (beginning to cry) to be elected to this position, and to be able to begin to give back, which I will never be able to do to the extent that I have been given.

So thank you all very much. I would like to thank my husband. Next month we celebrate our 41st anniversary.

(Applause.)

So Lucas is the one running around the convention most of the time. And 41 years, boy, he's... you can only call him certifiable for that! Putting up with me for that long.

(Laughter.)

So, again, I thank you all for your confidence in me and the support you have offered me all these years that I've been in the Federation. Thank you all SO much.

(Applause.)

MARK RICCOBONO: Congratulations, Carla, and we should take this opportunity to thank Carla for... what... 26 years of running NFB Camp?

(Cheering and applause).

That's a huge job. You have no idea. Give her a bigger round of applause than that! Come on.

(Louder cheering and applause).

BENNET PROWS: How about a round of door prizes for Carla McQuillan, too!

MARK RICCOBONO: You know, many of us had our kids in NFB Camp at one time.

BENNET PROWS: Absolutely. We have a mixed bag with a flag that says "winners never quit and quitters never win", and then there's a popcorn ball and a $50 gift certificate -- oh, socks! The Cycle for Independence donated from Idaho socks that they have for cycling. Anyway, 50 bucks. How about Abbie Brushko of New Hampshire? Are you here? She is here! We got her! Congratulations, too, Carla.

(Applause.)

MARK RICCOBONO: Okay, for board position number 4, the name of Sheila Wright of Missouri has been laced into nomination. Are there any other nominations?

Are there any other nominations?

Are there any other nominations?

It's been moved and seconded that nominations cease and Sheila Wright of Missouri be elected by acclamation. All those in favor say aye.

(Many ayes).

All opposed say no.

(Silence).

The ayes have it, congratulations, Sheila!

SHEILA WRIGHT: Thank you very much. A long time ago, I won't say how long ago, the National Federation of the Blind changed the direction of my life. I had very little self-confidence. I was really struggling. I came to the Federation in South Carolina because I needed help. The state agency had very low expectations of me and told me that I would never make it past one semester in college.

(Disapproving shouts from the crowd).

Their altitude -- I don't know about their attitude, but their action changed VERY quickly when Mr. Katz gave them a call.

(Laughter.)

-- and started supporting me.

I immediately started being asked to do things in the Federation. Sometimes I didn't think I could do it. And Marshall Tucker would say "girl, you can do it!" And it's kind of hard to turn somebody down, whether you believe in yourself or not, with that type of encouragement.

I've had many, many opportunities to do things that I never dreamed I would be doing. I love this organization. I've tried to give back, and I will continue to give all I can to this organization.

It gets better and better with time. I've seen it grow. And it just keeps getting better! So thank you, Federation. Thank you for your support.

(Applause.)

And your belief in me.

(Cheering).

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you very much, Sheila. Look very much forward to serving with you.

For board position number 5, the Nominating Committee has submitted the name of Donald Porterfield of Arizona.

Are there any other nominations?

Are there any other nominations?

Are there any other nominations?

(Completely synchronous motions shouted from the floor).

(Laughter.)

It's been moved and seconded that Donald Porterfield of Arizona be elected by acclamation.

All in favor say aye.

(Many ayes).

All opposed say no.

(Silence).

The ayes have it. Congratulations, Donald.

DONALD: (Ringing silver bells).

Thank you, President Riccobono. I went to my first National Federation of the Blind convention in Orlando, and the overwhelming sense I had was: This is where I belong, with the National Federation of the Blind.

The National Federation of the Blind has been like family to me since 2011. And yesterday, President Riccobono, you asked us a question about who will tell our story. And I've been talking about that ever since I heard Hamilton for the first time.

(Some cheers).

And there's a narrative to tell about the blind. And I firmly believe that this is our narrative. This is a narrative that we, the National Federation of the Blind, have to tell. We do not want to let others write the story for us.

And what I see and what I experience in the National Federation of the Blind is that we are writing our narrative, and I am honored to be a part of this great organization. I am honored that trust has been placed in me to serve on the national board. And, you know, I look at the National Federation of the Blind as, I mean, it's family. And this is our family business. And thank you for the opportunity to serve. Thank you, President Riccobono.

(Cheering and applause).

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you, Donald. Look forward to serving with you.

For board position number 6, the Nominating Committee has submitted the name of Barbara Manuel of Florida. Are there any other nominations? Are there any other nominations? Are there any other nominations?

It's been moved and seconded that nominations cease and Barbara Manuel of Alabama be elected by acclamation. All in favor say aye.

(Many ayes).

All opposed say no.

(Silence).

Congratulations, Barbara, you're elected!

(Applause.)

BARBARA MANUEL: Thank you so much, President Riccobono and my NFB family. I stand before you today honored yet humbled for this tremendous opportunity to serve in our remarkable organization on a greater level.

(Sniffling tearily) the National... (cutting off).

(Cheering and applause of encouragement).

(Voice breaking) the National Federation of the Blind has been a driving force in my life for some time. Over the years, my Heavenly Father has provided more opportunities for success, for service, than I thought possible. The more I grow into our movement, the more I realize that all of our dreams CAN come true.

(Applause).

Observing all of you, your tenacity, the determination you have, your loyalty and responsibility toward an improved quality of life empowers me to forge ahead, knowing that I have an entire family believing that we can make change.

The National Federation of the Blind continues providing vast arrays of opportunities for any individual who wants to make positive, impactful changes for our nation's blind community.

We have a distinct, dynamic, capable group of leaders at the helm, and I feel honored that you would even nominate me and put your trust in me to serve in this capacity.

I don't believe any blind individual in the United States and beyond has not been positively touched in some way by our organization. And it's our mission to advance further and further until equality is the norm, not the exception.

(Cheering and applause).

Family, can we have accessible websites?

(Crowd shouting "yes!")

Can we have accessible medical devices?

(Cheering).

Can we cause an affordable technology platform to become reality?

(Yes!)

Can we have equal wages?

(Cheering).

Can we have equality at the polling places when we vote?

(Cheering).

Family, we can live in a world where equality is inherent to all. Each of us have a very important role to play toward eliminating these and other barriers that deters progress for our community.

As I serve you in this capacity, I implore you to commit yourselves toward assisting changing what it means to be blind in America and beyond.

We need everyone in this room to commit anew, to diligently work toward a brighter future for our youth and ourselves. I've had an opportunity to work with some of our youth scholarship winners this week. They are awesome. They have expectations. They have goals that they want to achieve in their areas of expertise. It is our responsibility to ensure that every opportunity available is available to them. For 82 years, we have and will continue to empower blind people. As we realize dreams that were only hoped for in past years.

We can all make lasting imprints that will positively improve lifestyles for all, sighted and blind alike. Can I count on you?

(Cheering and applause).

You can count on me to the best of my ability to serve you. Family, let's continue to build the National Federation of the Blind!

(Cheering and applause).

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you very much, Barbara. Look forward to serving with you.

The Nominating Committee has offered one other nomination. This is a one year position that comes about by Everette Bacon moving from his board position that would be up for election next year, to an officer position. So there's a one year board position, and the Nominating Committee has offered the name of Grace Pyers of Rhode Island to be elected to this position. Are there any other nominations?

Are there any other nominations?

Are there any other nominations?

It's been moved and seconded, in stereo --

(Laughter.)

That was pretty good synchronization!

(Laughter.)

That Grace Pyers of Rhode Island be elected by acclamation. All those in favor say aye.

(Many ayes).

Opposed say no.

(Silence).

Grace, congratulations, you're elected!

(Applause.)

GRACE: Thank you, fellow Federationists, for this opportunity. It is my honor to serve on the national board and I pledge today to serve to the best of my ability, to continue to move and grow our movement and move it forward.

It's... it really is an honor to be here. The NFB has given me so much. I will never forget my first chapter meeting and the warm welcome that I received. From the moment I walked into the paratransit van, everyone treated me like I was family. I came home and I remember telling my husband, now, and my brother about this meeting that I had, and how wonderful, and they had to come with me because these people were great.

And then I attended my first convention, and I will never forget that as well.

I... the Federation has given me so much, I don't think I would be where I am today without the gift of the National Federation. Thank you, Federation family, and thank you for this opportunity, and again, I will do my best to serve on our national board and do the best of my ability.

(Cheering and applause).

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you very much, Grace, look forward to serving with you.

How about another round of applause for John Fritz, Amy Buresh, and Amy Ruell for their service?

(Applause.)

And a big appreciation for all the members of our board who have been elected to serve this convention.

(Cheering and applause).

BENNET PROWS: Let's have a door prize for them.

MARK RICCOBONO: Okay!

If this --

BENNET PROWS: If this gentleman is in the room virtually and his name is Rex Lovett of Massachusetts -- I think that's pretty apropos of this new board because we love it!

The room will get someone...

Bonnie Stillwell of Virginia.

She's not here apparently...

Michael Johnson of California, are you here? Michael Johnson of California. Is anybody here???

(Laughter and applause).

Well, let's see if Audrey Farnham of Oklahoma is here. Okay, we see here, thank you.

MARK RICCOBONO: All right, Audrey!

Okay. For the first time at this convention, we're running ahead of schedule.

(Cheering and applause).

So the question is whether or not to have a PAC report from Scott LaBarre. Scott, go ahead.

(PAC Man theme song playing).

MARK RICCOBONO: Now, Scott, don't feel obligated to use ALL of our extra time. We've got other business we could do.

(Laughter.)

SCOTT LABARRE: Mr. President, I appreciate the admonition, but you know, I am a lawyer, and we are what we are and we do the best we can.

(Laughter.)

First, let me say congratulations to the board members reelected and those newly elected. You make us proud. You represent us well. As general counsel to the organization, I know that behind me when I represent the organization is a tremendous board and amazing leadership. And so, thank you for all your service.

(Applause.)

So, we're doing okay. We're doing okay on the PAC plan. But the PAC Men are, well, I'm afraid the ghosts seem to be overtaking us. We're not winning yet. And, you know, we just have to devour this. We have to increase the ability of this organization to do its job, and we gotta fund the movement.

So, thus far we've come up about $9,000 annualized in our PAC annualized projected figures. We were at 474 projected, and now we're at 483. So we need people to get back to the PAC table, and that of course means both in person at the back of the room, and we've got some just wonderful people working the PAC table this morning. We have Sean Sandoval from Colorado and Lisa Bonderson from Colorado working the table. They're wonderful people, they would love to see you, and they'll give you a piece of candy too! So just get back to the PAC table and do your PAC business. You know, you can give as little as $5 a month on the PAC plan. Now, I've seen many of you spend LOTS more than that in the bar! So if you can just give up one of those beers, just one, and sign up on the PAC plan, we really need your help.

So you can go to the back of the room, or you can go to the back of the room virtually, where you will find the PAC form, which is at nfb.org/pac.

Anybody in this room can do that. Anybody listening online can do that. On YouTube can do that. Your mom can do it. Your father can do it. Your cousins, your aunts, your uncles, anybody can do it! So get on the PAC plan.

Now, Mr. President, I want to report on the competitions. For the PAC mule, the division with the greatest percentage increase -- let's give it up for the seniors!

(Applause.)

And that's Scott the PAC Mule, Ryan named the mule after me last year, I guess because I named the rat after him, but whatever.

Now, Pare, as in John Pare, Pare the PACyderm, going to the state with the most increase in business thus far, with 69%, is going to Montana!

(Applause.)

Mr. President, despite, you know, your comments yesterday, Colorado is still in the lead for the PAC Rat!

(Cheering).

GOOOOO Colorado!

And we're still number 1!

(Chanting) we're number 1! We're number 1!

(A portion of the crowd taking up the chant).

(Laughter.)

Now, you've gained a little bit, Maryland, you're only $85 behind us, but we're still ahead for now, and I'm clinging onto that as long as we can.

(Laughter.)

We've drawn some more names for the $25 gift cards. This would have been for yesterday's afternoon session. We have, the winners are, and if you're here in the room, please go back to the PAC table to claim your card. If you are online, please call me at 410-659-9314. 2424 is my extension. 410-659-9314, 2424. And we'll get the gift card sent to you

Okay, here are the winners. We have Sedika al-Salam of Maryland. Bonnie Lucas of Alaska. Patricia Pyle of Michigan. Danielle Harten of Maryland! Scott Spalding of Kentucky. Tom from Minnesota -- yeah, dere. And again, yesterday, Donna Frankel won a gift card and hasn't picked it up yet. I don't know if Donna is at the convention or -- she's here? Donna, please go get your gift card! It's waiting for you at the PAC table

So please join me in helping to build the National Federation of the Blind by funding our movement. It must be done. Mr. President, I'm outta here!

(Applause.)

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you very much, Scott.

SCOTT LABARRE: And I didn't eat up all the extra time!

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you. We're gonna see if we can get to discussing the constitutional amendment. But we've got some presentations first. And I'm excited about them. The first is Living the Life She Wants: Staying Grounded and Shooting for the Moon with the Federation Philosophy. We have a member who has been building a career at NASA, and also in her own life, and she and I have come into the Federation in a similar time period, so it's been a joy to observe her journey. And really her strength in applying the Federation philosophy and building both her career and her personal life. She is truly an example of what thousands of blind people do in this movement on a daily basis to apply our philosophy to living the lives they want.

So here to talk to us about her journey, from Maryland, is Denna Lambert.

(Applause).

(Intro song: "I won't change my life, my life's just fine, fine, fine! Whoo!")

(Crowd clapping along to the beat).

DENNA LAMBERT: Thank you! Thank you. Good morning, good morning.

(Cheering).

All right, a few months back, President Riccobono reached out to me and he said, hey, are you interested in sharing part of your story?

I was like... okay, who, me?

(Laughter.)

Okay, what part of this story do you want me to share? The part that I have more gray hairs than I did 3 years ago?

(Laughter.)

Or that some of my girls on new year's eve night, a little bit of mimosas in us, we were decorating our vision boards, but we failed to include a whole pandemic where we would be stretched and tested beyond our wildest dreams and fears? Or the part that says that I would have to dig down deep in my soul for all the courage that I would need to pursue my dreams of working in the aerospace industry and to become a mom?

Even if it meant there was failure, or that I would be walking much of that journey alone?

He said yes, all of it.

And I would say, okay. Say less.

It was 20 years ago, almost to the day, that I came to the convention and introduced myself at the 2002 Louisville convention as a scholarship winner.

(Cheering).

Thank you!

I was excited, I was nervous, I was hopeful, because I saw and heard so many things at that convention. I met businessmen and women. Engineers, parents, students. I went to the parties... all of the parties!

(Laughter.)

Some of y'all are just waking up now from some of those parties.

(Laughter.)

But I basically experienced a microcosm of our society as a whole. Everyone was there.

So, someone who is 20 years older with a few more gray hairs and hopefully wisdom to share, I'd like to take a few moments with you to have a conversation. Now, Mark mentioned something. He said y'all would be like talking to family. So is that okay? (Cheering).

There's a saying: Teach the young early what we have learned late.

I hope I will share with you things that feel challenging, hopeful, and real, which is my story. Though I have the honor of standing before you, there are hundreds, possibly even thousands of our Federation family members who are in the room, are in our affiliates, who could share wisdom and insight that could positively shift your trajectory in your life as an individual, living out the version of your life that you deeply desire, even if you haven't realized it yet.

So, 2 and a half years of living in a pandemic have forced us to shorten our time horizon, meaning that we have to place more urgency on the decisions and actions we've taken. I can only imagine what the initial NFB founders and leaders were facing when they formed this organization that will provide strength, unity, and community to blind people who were fighting just for the right to simply live. And attain self-determination.

How this showed up for me was growing up in a home where there was absolutely no doubt that my mom and dad cared and loved me deeply, but as a young adult, I realized a sense of urgency to finding that sense of confidence to pursue my dreams and make my own decisions.

Now, it just wasn't about going to college or picking a degree. It was even something more basic, like choosing what I wanted to wear, or doing my own hair as a whole 16-year-old.

And even choosing to use a white cane without any fear or shame of what my mama would say, or her disapproval.

That confidence did not come from just one instance, but it took understanding that while I would survive, and likely even earn a degree, I would not seize that gift of freedom and self-agency that you can observe in so many people here. I would likely end up living a life where others would make decisions for me.

So after attending a voc rehab transition seminar in Arkansas -- where's my Arkansas family?

(Shouting from the audience).

(Laughter.)

And meeting a ragtag bunch of people and staff from the Louisiana Center for the Blind -- (cheering) -- I was shook.

Joanne Wilson, with all of her gusto, helped me navigate a conversation with my parents that led to me attending LCB.

(Cheering and applause).

That phone call was the core values of the NFB in motion. The core values were alive in that conversation and subsequent conversations in my brief time at LCB.

My point is that the feeling in your gut that says, there's more for you, don't wait, don't second-guess yourself, just go and tell somebody, but do not shortchange yourself or the process of training.

You may have noticed that I mentioned that I was a student at LCB for a short period of time. I left LCB after only 8 weeks of training to go off to college. But later, I would realize that I had indeed shortchanged the training and mentorship I needed. Even though attending a training center is not the only way to gain confidence and independence, there is something about the process and our method of positive philosophy of blindness and structured discovery that is potent and well-measured.

I went off to college as an electrical engineering student at the University of Arkansas. My head was full of knowledge, but short on wisdom. For example, a few blind freshmen, we had our own little crew, found that the laundry facilities were not fully accessible, and if a response to that, of us raising this issue to university leadership, the university responded with the offer for the university's housekeeping staff to do our own laundry for us.

(Disapproval from the crowd -- someone yelling "NO!")

Yeah! Now, to the 17-year-old version of me, that seemed like a victory.

(Laughter.)

But even in the short time at LCB, helped me identify that ugly, sinking feeling that was "am I perpetuating the lower expectations of the blind?" And this needed to stop.

(Cheering and applause).

I share this example with a bit of embarrassment, because I haven't told anyone this story, but to present a tangible example of the power that can be wielded by a collection of blind people. But how wisdom would have said, okay, are you real? Are you kidding me?

This will point out the ripple effect and influence that we have on each other's lives.

I did realize that while we had won the battle of making the university do something, anything, we were well on our way to losing the war on misconceptions and poor beliefs on the capability of the blind.

(Applause.)

What impression did that one housekeeping staff member have when she had to deliver multiple loads of laundry to the blind students? And you KNOW she had to spill the tea with her family when she shared what she had to do to help blind students. Again, it wasn't right.

But for brevity and to save face, I did in fact eventually learn how to do my own laundry, thank God.

(Laughter.)

(Applause.)

And come up with a simple alternative tech solutions and went on to complete my degree.

After my graduation, I encountered rejection after rejection and saw some shifty job requirements after I returned home from another failed job interview. I had to shift gears and get creative. I started attending regional and national conferences and organizations such as the Society of Black Engineers, Microsoft, and others, with the assistance of voc rehab, my university, with a small grant they gave me, and my only person funds from working at work-studies.

This was called self-investment. And I began to broaden out my mentor base with not only academic advisors, but experienced professionals from my Greek organization, Delta Sigma Theta, Incorporated, and my frats, Alpha Phi Alpha.

(Applause.)

And my sighted community mentors who I could learn from.

I finally received the call I had dreamed of. It was NASA calling.

(Cheering and applause).

Fast-forward to today. I am now the DEIA lead for NASA's Early Stage Innovations and Partnerships.

(Cheering and applause).

Which is a functional leadership position within a $350 million portfolio. We are tasked with identifying, promoting, and advancing the transformational space technology that helps NASA achieve its on-Earth and long duration missions.

(Applause.)

We are the widest and lowest entry point into NASA's space technology readiness level, or TRL. With almost 700 funding opportunities, we are the most outward facing technical component NASA has, with funding vehicles that reach small businesses, researchers, and students.

15 years ago, I remember hearing hesitations as to why the NFB was funding and moving out on the Blind Driver Challenge. And at the time, it did seem a little far-fetched, a little crazy. But as I review proposals and engage in topic-specific technology research opportunities outside of blindness, what the NFB has been doing is the first step toward radical innovation.

While we may not see all of the rewards and benefits now, I am confident that we will see them in the near future with spin-off technology and techniques that we will advance with more innovation.

So right now, I want to make you aware of a pilot program that we just started, targeted to students, entrepreneurs, and researchers who have even just an idea, just an idea, but you need some support to bring it to market.

It's our Innovation Core, or iCore, pilot, where we will provide $10,000 for applicants coming in, offer technical assistance in order to accelerate your idea, and help you build the network you need to move on towards larger funding tiers, possibly to the tune of $400,000.

So I would like to see more names of people in this room and on the scholarship winner list as applicants in our funding opportunities.

(Cheering).

So, I want to close with a personal experience. Many of you may remember that I wanted to be a mom. After much thought, prayer, and skepticism, I landed on one question: Would I be happy with how I lived my life, and the decisions that I made, if I did not pursue this?

With the support of my chosen community and the family within the NFB, I asked: Can I choose to say yes to this life I wanted?

Now, this question was specific to my choice to become a single mom. But it has application elsewhere. For you in the audience, this may hit home in other ways, whether it is employment or in education, relationship, or something else.

Many people outside of the adoption community, which is what I chose to pursue motherhood, may not know that in private adoption, the expectant mom, who is voluntarily choosing to place her child with a family, is offered an opportunity to choose the family she wants. The 16-year-old me would have said, why would she choose me? I am blind.

The version of myself at that time didn't have many blindness or independence skills. And why would any expectant mom choose me for one of the biggest and permanent decisions in her life?

But the 37-year-old me was bold enough to say, why NOT?

(Cheering and applause).

I've observed this in myself over and over again, and sometimes in the blind community, that we can easily talk ourselves out of opportunities and choices when we listen to the lingering voices of doubt and misconceptions.

But I dare each of us to say "why not me", and have the actions and decisions that reflect that same energy: Why not me?

(Cheering).

Even if there's failure along the way, there is an acceptable level of risk that must be wagered for many powerful innovations, partnerships, decisions, and choices. Oh, and let me go back to that ripple effect that I mentioned earlier... it indeed came back full circle. In order to receive approval to become an adoptive mom, I had to pass a home study test. With a licensed social worker.

Let's call it the "white glove test". And it covers ALL, and I mean all, areas of your life.

My fear of rejection drove me to sign up for courses that were above and beyond my agency's requirement for prospective families.

And after one frantic call with her, the social worker said, "Denna, please stop. For one, you're causing too much paperwork".

(Laughter.)

"But these courses are way too expensive. I know that you are quite capable of being a well-rounded and safe mother."

(Whooping and applause from the audience).

And after she completed her report, because of course, she can't tell me what she's thinking while she's writing her report, I said, "how did you know?" And she shared that she had observed multiple blind people leading families, managing classrooms, and going about their lives with dignity, respectability, and grace.

(Cheering and applause).

In part, that was enough for her.

So if you are that blind person she observed, I want to say thank you.

(Applause.)

And I leave you with the charge to feel empowered, knowing that you have influenced and achieved positively shifting not only your life as a blind person, but in others you may not even know the name of.

Thank you so much.

(Cheering and applause).

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you very much, Denna Lambert! How about a door prize for that?

BENNET PROWS: Yeah, how about that? We've got a great door prize for that one. We've got a $25 cash from Mississippi, and flavored popcorn ball, and a couple other things in there, and the winner is going to be... Courtney Hollingsworth of Maryland! Courtney, are you here? Courtney Holingsworth of Maryland...

Robin House of Missouri, are you in the house? Robin House from Missouri.

We'll try Cynthia Morris of Nevada, although this also has chocolate-covered cherries from Washington, I have to mention that.

MARK RICCOBONO: I have to buy some of those! If I could only find some to buy!

BENNET PROWS: Not here. So next one... Nathaniel Wales of Connecticut. Nathaniel, you should be here.

Of course, a lot of people should be here but they're not.

(Laughter.)

Well, we'll try another one. Terry Shelton of Mississippi.

When I get to the second 2000th name or something like that, I'll just say we've called all the roll and nobody's here!

How about Anna Aikens of Georgia?

Heather Luddi of Georgia? There, we got one! Phew!

MARK RICCOBONO: Okay, nice!

Okay. Our next presentation is Living the Life He Wants: Stoking Employment Opportunities.

The presenter for this item is another blind person who is using his own life experience to raise expectations for all blind people. His title is with Meta, but we didn't invite him for that reason. We invited him because he is a blind person who is pursuing his dreams in many ways.

One of the ways he has pursued to raise expectations in his own life includes riding a bike from coast to coast in this country.

(Cheering and applause ).

But not just that. We've talked about telling our stories, and he's committed to using his stories to bring attention to the employment and underemployment issue that exists, and the low expectations that are at the root of blind people having employment opportunities. We've gotten to know him really virtually during the pandemic, so it's great to have him here in person at this convention. I got to first meet him in person a couple of months ago at our national office. I got to actually meet his whole family! They were running all over the building. He's got a number of little kids.

(Laughter.)

And it was great to see them running around.

So here to talk to us about his experience and the work that we've done together is Jack Chen.

(Music: "Must be the Money by Nelly").

(Crowd yelling "hey, must be the money!")

JACK CHEN: Awesome. I'll say that cheering was for me, but wait until after this and maybe you won't be cheering, I don't know!

Thank you, Denna, for that wonderful presentation. I think you basically said everything I was going to say. So, can I just say, ditto, and then walk off?

(Laughter.)

No? I guess I won't!

But I will say that I was really impacted by your story of low expectations. You see, when I was growing up, people didn't look at me like they did today. My family -- I'm Chinese American --

(Cheering).

Okay, yeah, I hear that! That's good!

My greater family lives in Taiwan. And both my brother and I are visually impaired. And when we were growing up, my relatives in Taiwan wrote us off. They didn't know what to do with us. They had no experience with people who were blind or visually impaired.

So, thank you, Denna, for not kowtowing to the tyranny of low expectations.

But I want to share my story, and it's really because of other people that I've been able to do what I've done in my life, including my wife and my four kids, who Mark mentioned running all over the building, tuned in, thank you, but also to my God who I serve.

(Cheering and applause).

Yes, amen!

So, New Orleans -- who here is from New Orleans?

(Cheering).

All right. I love this city! Many ways. New Orleans is a city of resilience. I don't know how many know, but there was a large fire in 1788 that threatened to wipe New Orleans off the face of the map. Okay? And they were building it back up, and 6 years later, in 1794, another fire came and threatened to wipe New Orleans off the face of the map.

During the Civil War, political unrest, daily torchings and burnings, again, threatened the city.

Hurricane Betsy in the 1960s. Katrina in 2005. And most recently, Ida. That one-two punch that thought they could take New Orleans down. But they couldn't. Because you know, New Orleans is our -- is a cultural icon in our entire country. It stands today, everyone knows New Orleans for what? Among other things, great music, and my favorite, great food!

(Cheering).

Okay!

And so I say again, New Orleans is a city of resilience. But for me, this has been a really powerful homecoming. You see, for me, it's been an emotional experience, because I was here 31 years ago, and that was the last time I was here. I was coming to New Orleans for a cornea transplant. I went to Louisiana State University Eye and Ear Hospital.

(Cheer from the crowd).

All right!

And on the flight here from New Jersey, I remember very specifically seeing the blue sky above and the white clouds below, and I was thinking to myself, how much more could I see on the way back? They told me that I would be able to read a newspaper. I would be able to go shopping and see the price on the box of cereal. This was my sophomore year in high school.

I had been to New Orleans many times in the past before 1991, for other cornea transplants that didn't go well. This time, though, they said that they had developed DNA technology that would help me to be able to find tissue donors which my body would not reject.

So here I was, going into the surgery, and when I came out, they had put this big thick gauze pad over my eye and taped it really tight. I sat in my bed for a couple of days before I went to the examination room. And when I got there, I remember sitting on this big hard plastic chair.

I remember the doctors coming over and they peeled off one layer of bandages, and my mom and my doctor were in the room. But nobody else moved. And I was puzzled. "What's going on?"

So I went, inpatient as I was, I went and touched my face like this, and when I felt the skin of my eyelid, I knew something was very wrong. Because I couldn't see anything. I had become totally blind.

Despite the sweltering weather outside, it felt like someone took a cold bucket of ice and just poured it, all of it, right to the deepest reaches of my soul. I was without hope and completely fearful about what the future was going to be.

I imagined myself walking down a long hallway, and a door to the left was slamming, and a door to the right was closing, and behind me and above me and below me. But what could I do, but just put one foot in front of the other?

The alternative was terrifying -- to sit down and do nothing.

And so what I did was put one foot in front of the other.

(Applause.)

Thank you.

What was I doing? Before I came to New Orleans, I was studying for my SATs, remember, I said I was a sophomore in high school. So to block out all of the fear, I went back to studying for my SATs when I returned. I put one foot in front of the other, not knowing what was to come in the future. I was a pretty mediocre braille user at the time, I have to admit, but I dug hard into it, anyone remember the 3500-word Barons SAT book? Yeah, I decided to memorize the whole thing. That is not a testament to my ability, but my pigheadedness.

So, SATs were in three months. And I was going to give it all I got.

And I was frightened to go back to school. I had always interacted with school and gotten around by the limited eyesight that I already had. So going back and navigating the school with a cane was frightening to me. Most of my friends wouldn't really hang out with me. You know, I imagined for a young person, seeing someone else go through tragedy had to be very difficult. And they didn't know how to react.

But for me, it left me alone.

I jumped back into wrestling. I was on the wrestling team as a sophomore. But if my record were to predict my future success, it would be... maybe 1 win, and a whole lot of losses.

Well, in December or so of that year, test results came back. And my parents opened the envelope for me. And I was shocked. I had scored 10 points lower than my brother, who was off on his freshman year at Harvard.

(Cheering).

And I could not believe what was happening. At the end of the wrestling season, past results were not a predictor of future success, thank goodness. I wound up with a winning record and wrestled at districts.

But the biggest test of all was coming. My friend Oliver and my friend Ryan and I walked to the guidance counselor's office for that fateful call, some of you may remember, placing a call to the college admissions office to find out whether you got in.

Well, only one person at my school each year had gotten into the school. So when Oliver got on the phone, he hooped and hollered and said he had gotten in, and I was so happy for him, but I was fearful for myself.

And then I got on the phone and, I don't know how I managed to stammer out my name... and then I heard, Mr. Chen, you've been accepted to Harvard.

(Applause.)

I felt like my whole future had been squeezed into this really tight package. But now I had cut off the zip-tie and it was exploding. My future was really dark in the past, but it started to have some light and some life. Just kind of like what I said about New Orleans, and how it rose from the ashes again and again.

But Harvard wasn't easy. No, no.

(Laughter.)

I only had about 20% of the reading materials that I needed. Going to class was hard. It was like putting a thousand-piece jigsaw puzzle together. You know, I had some lectures, some readings, and that was the easy stuff. That's like the edge pieces and the corner pieces. But all this stuff in the middle, you had to extrapolate. You had to guess. Sometimes you were right and sometimes you were wrong. But I did get through it and managed to graduate.

(Cheering and applause).

It gets better...

A few years later I went to work for a startup. I had graduated with a computer science degree and I went to work for a startup building home automation technology way before "internet of things" was even a term. They asked me to manage the data center at the company. But the operating system for those sophisticated pieces of equipment wasn't accessible and I couldn't read what was going on. I couldn't see the lights on the front of the machine, didn't know whether I had to replace the hard drives or not.

But at the same time, they also asked me to help them design the second generation of their product. So, in doing so, I helped them build a patent portfolio and emerged a few years later with my name listed as the inventor on over 40 patents.

(Cheering and applause).

I guess I got a little tired of computers, and jumped into law.

(Laughter.)

And went to law school at night, and graduated, and then went to take the bar exam...

(Crowd member saying "oh, man").

I heard someone say that, they know what's coming. The bar examiners said, Mr. Chen, you can't use a computer to take the bar exam, you'll have to use a tape. And anyone who's done that knows it's like having to take a 200 page test on a teleprompter.

I did pass, thankfully, in two states, New York and New Jersey.

(Applause.)

And I've had so many wonderful experiences. I know my wife and kids are tuned in, and I have the most wonderful family ever.

(Applause.)

I've had the chance to work as product counsel for Google for over 10 years, as a member of the product team and product manager for Chrome OS. For the last year and a half, I've had the opportunity to support the legal team that supports the product team that builds the technology that supports 99% of Facebook's revenue.

(Applause.)

(Cheering).

I've run marathons and Iron Mans and climbed Mount Kilimanjaro and all these things.

Do I share all these things to tell you about how great I am, or to inspire you or to show you that blind people can do anything?

No, not really.

Let me tell you a story.

5 weeks ago, I had the opportunity to go to my 25th college re union at Harvard and after standing in Harvard Yard having lunch one day, my friend Edward Lin said, I have one regret in college: That I couldn't help you more. I said, what do you mean? He said, you were my roommate for a summer, and you had to take differential equations, and he said, I volunteered to go to class to help you understand what was going on the board. And he said, I went with you that first day, and he said, the teacher was going so fast and was putting so many things and equations up on the board, he said, I couldn't help you. It was impossible.

Well, Edwin watched me struggle and suffer for the next 3 years. But he did see me graduate with a degree with honors.

(Cheering and applause).

And he said -- so, Edwin is now a senior executive at Citi Group, and he told me this story. He said, I had the opportunity to interview a blind person for my group. He said that when he was about to extend the offer letter, his coworkers told him, you must be crazy. Do you think a blind person can be successful at an organization like ours? And Edwin said, yes, I know he can. I know because I've seen it done before.

(Cheering and applause).

So it's that same sentiment that inspired me and my co-founder Dan Berlin to create a movie about blindness and success. Why don't we watch the trailer?

A young woman, shoulder-length blond hair.

I first met Jack on paper. When I read his credentials, I thought, it's a really great -- super good school --

Impressive career, extremely intelligent, and completely blind.

Sterling light productions.

It's not just bias, it's associations that people have.

And these are not good associations.

Dan Berlin using a white cane.

DAN: Weakness, lack of supports.

We are looking for something that would be incredibly hard to do.

What's the craziest thing you could think of doing? And he said ride my bike across the country.

Bike wheels spin.

WOMAN: When people hear about Race across America, they say, I want to do it. I say, okay, let's talk for a second. If you can't ride 100 miles a day, don't even bother starting training.

And then a blind guy takes it on, it's telling you something about your assumptions about a blind person, isn't it?

This spring.

I'm an assist ant attorney.

I'm Jack Chen, assistant general counsel at Meta.

70% of people like me are unemployed.

Jack Chen, Dan Berlin, Tina Ament, Kyle Coon.

MAN: How amazing it is to cross the entire continent on a bicycle.

Many people thought we were crazy for even starting it.

People have died.

Nighttime, cyclists in the rain, a flash of lightning.

Peak Kansas, right? There's a tornado

Two men on a tandem bike.

With a skeptical sense of disbelief that this was possible.

Producer, Lukas Beinken.

Not only the longest single stage race in the entire world...

It's like a million races in one.

MAN: There was definitely an element of danger regardless of whether cyclists were blind or not.

Director Ramon Fernandez.

Just one person who sees this movie and it changes their behavior, then I think we've won.

(Swelling string music).

Surpassing Sight: Join us on Facebook at Team Sea to Sea.

(End of trailer).

(Cheering and applause).

JACK CHEN: Thank you.

Race Across America was a 3100-mile cycling race from San Diego to Annapolis crossing 15 states and thousands of feet of elevation gain, putting people into RVs, give them no sleep, make them work 16 hours a day getting 8 cyclists from one side of the country to another... sure, nothing can go wrong.

(Laughter.)

No, it actually was the toughest thing I've ever done in my entire life, by far.

On the second day of that race, I got a calf cramp. Who gets a calf cramp on the second day of a 9-day race? What was I going to do? If I dropped out, our chances of finishing would be less than 30%.

I got an infection in my toe. And the crew chief had to go online to YouTube to watch a video for how to do this minor surgery to lance somebody's toe

(Shocked reaction from the crowd).

I got yelled at by a number of people on my team for something I said. We had to stop the race and we had to have this "come to Jesus" moment, because it threatened to tear the whole team apart.

So like I said... work 16 hours a day and shove people into this tight confined space and nothing will go wrong...

(Laughter.)

But one of the things that Dan Berlin, who is my co-founder, said in the movie. He said, "it's in the deepest struggles that, there, you will find the vitality of life".

(Cheering and applause).

My friend Edwin had personally watched me struggle, and he had personally watched me find victory and rise from the ashes. You see, the thing that really impacted me and Dan was the fact that some statistics say that 70% of college-age blind people in America can't find a job. Dan and I wouldn't stand for that.

Dan was a CEO of his own corporation, a very successful vanilla extract company that produced 75% of the vanilla extract in our country.

I was an attorney working for Google at the time, having transferred over to Facebook later on.

And the two of us said, we have to do something about this.

So when you think about the stories like Edwin and when you think about what other people see in us when we become victorious and surmounting the challenges we have, we tell our own story. We wanted to tell our own story, but we could only do it on a one on one basis. And I know each of you does that as well.

We wanted to solve this problem at scale. And so we said we're going to take on the toughest cycling race in the world, but we're going to do it as blind professionals.

We want to tell a story of success, both on and off the bike.

We wanted every person, every hiring manager, every chief executive of every corporation in America, to see our story and have that Edwin experience. We wanted every fully sighted person in the world to say, yes, he can, because I know. I've seen it done before.

(Cheering and applause).

And to close, I'm going to ask each of you to come on to this journey with us and to partner with us to do this. First of all, we're so incredibly honored that the National Federation of the Blind has partnered with us as an executive producer of this film, and that we will be having the worldwide premier of this at the conference here this evening.

(Cheering and applause).

So each of you is invited. Please come. The time and the location has changed on the agenda, so it will be at 5:30 at 333 Canal Street at an independent theater, and we'll get to see it on the big screen.

(Cheering and applause).

So, I would want each of you in the room, each of you who is online, start telling people about this film. When the full release comes out, I want everybody to see it. So please help us spread the word, number one.

Number two, for the folks who are blind and low-vision in the room and online, sometimes it feels like the doors are going to be slammed in your face. I've had that experience before myself. You have no idea where things are going to go. But when we all face those challenges together, and we emerge victorious, you know, you lift me up. And I'll continue to do the same, battling through challenges, I'll hopefully lift you up as well.

Let's together create more and more Edwin Lins in this world. People who can say "yes, he can, because I've seen it done before."

Together, we're going to take 70% unemployment rate and we're going to knock it down to 7% or lower.

Thanks, everyone.

(Cheering and applause).

MARK RICCOBONO: Jack Chen, everybody!

(Cheering and applause).

I encourage you to get to the film if you can, if not, there will be other opportunities, and we certainly want to use it in our chapters and affiliates to build a program for us to talk about un employment and low expectations for what we can do to make a difference to change it. So thank you for the opportunity to be an executive producer and for coming to the National Federation of the Blind for guidance.

(Cheering and applause).

How about a door prize?

BENNET PROWS: Yeah, let's do it. We've got mixed bag again with some bicycle socks. To, you know, help you out. It's got other things in it, about $50 and other things. So let's see if Florida Starks from New Jersey is here. Florida Starks, are you here?

Lucas Siminaire from Texas. Another from Texas. Lucas Siminaire...

Okay, Regina Mitchell from Nevada.

(Cheering).

I bet she's here. Stand up, stay there.

MARK RICCOBONO: NFB in the kitchen! Did we find her?

There she is!

All right. Well, we have now on the agenda "reports and resolutions", which means we have a little bit of time. So we're going to consider now the constitutional amendment that has been offered. According to the constitution of the National Federation of the Blind, amendments to the constitution must come to the convention and receive two-thirds support of the state affiliates in order to be passed. So it's a supermajority. It's not simply a straight majority vote. It's hard to get amendments passed, so they don't come up that often. We read the amendment yesterday. We will read it again, and then accept a motion and discussion.

We're getting ready.

BETH BRAUN: National Federation of the Blind proposed constitutional amendment 2022. The following proposed amendment to the constitution of the National Federation of the Blind as amended 2014 was approved for recommendation to the 2022 convention by the Federation's board of directors on May 12, 2022.

Under Article III membership, the current constitution as amended 2014 reads: Section e, any member or local chapter or state affiliate or division of this organization may be suspended, expelled, or otherwise disciplined for misconduct or activity unbecoming to a member or affiliate of this organization by a two-thirds vote of the board of directors or by a simple majority of the states present and voting at a national exception. -- convention. If the action is to be taken by the board there must be good cause and a good-faith effort must have been made to resolve the problem by discussion and negotiation. If the action is to be taken by convention, notice must be given the preceding day. If there is a dispute about good faith or good effort, the convention as supreme authority of the Federation shall have the power to make the final disposition of the matter, but until or unless the ruling of the board is reversed by the convention, the ruling is in effect

Proposed amendments to Article III, membership section e, remove the word "member". This section will now pertain to local chapters, state affiliates, and divisions. Section e would then read as follows: Section e, any local state or chapter or affiliate of this organization may be suspended, expelled, or otherwise disciplined for misconduct or activity unbecoming to a chapter, state, affiliate, or division of this organization by a 2/3 vote of directors or by a simple majority of states present and voting at a national convention. There must have been good cause and a good faith effort through discussion and negotiation. Notice must be given on the preceding day at a board meeting or open session of the convention. If there is a dispute as to whether there was good cause or made a good faith effort, the convention as the final decision making body shall have the final say in the matter. But until the board action is reversed, it remains in effect

Section f: Any member of this organization may be suspended or otherwise disciplined, and any nonmember may have their activity restricted by standards periodically reviewed by the board of directors. Members will be provided with opportunities to give feedback on the code on a periodic basis set by the board. While considering disciplinary actions taken by the board, either directly or through the procedures it establishes, there must be good cause and a good-faith effort must have been made to hear the concerns of all parties involved. With regard to handling reports of violations of the code, the board will establish policies and procedures on how such reports will be investigated and then resolved. Any person subject to a ruling under these policies and procedures may appeal that ruling to the board, which may elect to have a subcommittee of the board handle the appeal. However, any three board members may initiate via request a full review of any investigation of misconduct. Members must be made aware of their rights and the subjects and standards used in the appeal. Anyone may appeal the final decision to the National convention. Such an appeal must be filed in writing within 30 days of the board's decision, the written request shall be addressed to the president and must be signed by 5 delegates to the next convention supporting the appeal. Notice of hearing must be given the preceding day in an open board meeting or session of the convention. Due to the sensitive nature of matters, any disciplinary action will only be considered in a closed disciplinary meeting consisting of the delegates present and voting and the committee's president. The president shall be present unless a conflict of interest prevents them from chairing the committee, in which case the delegates will elect a president who does not have a conflict of interest in the hearing

All efforts must be made to protect the identity of the individual harmed. A matter not fully investigated shall never be considered by the convention. If dispute arises as to whether there was good cause or the board made a good faith effort, the national convention as supreme authority of the Federation shall have the authority to make a final decision in the matter. But until or unless the board's ruling is reversed by the convention of the Federation, the ruling will continue in effect.

MARK RICCOBONO: The amendment is offered by more than 5 delegates, which is what the constitution calls for, as the board of directors has offered it as a motion to the convention. Is there a second?

It's been seconded. Is there any discussion of the constitutional amendment?

Lynn Heits, you're recognized.

LYNN: Thank you. I will be speaking today serving as our president and our delegate for the NFB of Pennsylvania. And I will be voting no on this constitutional amendment. And I urge all other delegates to do the same. The board told us last July that members were being disciplined and suspended in accordance with the constitution. Now comes this amendment, which was only recently available.

Most of us have not even read it, and even more, don't understand it.

Here is what I do understand. With respect to expulsion and other discipline of an affiliate, chapter, or member, the standard in the current constitution, misconduct unbecoming -- or, I'm sorry, activity unbecoming of an affiliate, chapter, or member -- only the board of directors by a two-thirds majority vote, or the convention with a majority vote of all affiliates, can discipline, suspend, or expel an affiliate, individual, or division.

Beginning in March of 2021, or about that time, and continuing, the President has been disciplining members without a two-thirds board vote, or a majority convention vote. He has done this essentially on his own in response to reported code of conduct violations.

Now, the board wants the affiliate to approve this amendment to our constitution.

If the president and the board have the authority to do what they are doing, why do we need to amend the constitution? My concern is that there is more to this amendment than we are being told. For example, our existing constitution gives members the absolute right to have disciplinary actions taken only by the board of directors or the convention.

However, by using the word "may" in place of the word "shall", at several key points, the amendment reduces the rights of members and gives more discretion to the board.

Repeated use of the word "may" rather than "shall" means that the right of appeal is an illusion. If the board does not choose to have a subcommittee to review an action, and three members of the board don't demand a board review, the member's right to appeal -- I'm sorry, the member's right to appear before the national convention will be gone.

The president can act alone. That's what this amendment says. If the board does decide to hear an appeal, the amendment says the board's decision can be appealed to the national convention.

But the right to an actual convention appeal is also an illusion.

The written appeal must be filed within 30 days of the decision, and be signed by 5 delegates, imposing obvious barriers to diminish rights of members to be heard.

And that's the point of this amendment. To diminish the rights of our members, and give complete discretion to the president and the board.

There is no other way to read it.

With a year from last convention to think about it, why was this amendment not available until June? Considering the gravity of the unexplained changes, I suggest, respectfully, that this amendment should not be adopted as is, and definitely needs more thought. Any amendment like this should be widely shared and discussed among our members, chapters, and state affiliates. As we have seen with the recent events affecting our country as a whole, the constitution matters. If we decide to amend -- (applause) -- if we decide to amend the constitution, we should be sure that we're doing it right for the future, and not to just tidy things up if we have not been doing things correctly in the recent past.

Thank you very much.

(Cheering and applause).

MARK RICCOBONO: Ronza Othman.

RONZA OTHMAN: Mr. President, members of the National Federation of the Blind, with all due respect to my colleague from Pennsylvania, much of what she has said is not accurate.

(Scattered applause).

There are a number of aspects that I would like to address, both as a member of the special committee who recommended that we close what is apparently to some, but not in actuality, a loophole, in our constitution. As a member who is a delegate from the great state of Maryland. And as a survivor.

This constitutional amendment is intended to do several things. First and foremost, it is intended to conform the constitution to something that we as a convention already agreed to years ago, which is accountability, transparency, and to make sure that we are protecting those who are harmed and giving due process to those who are accused.

(Applause).

The constitutional amendment does not take away anyone's rights in any way, shape, or fashion. In fact, it augments them. It augments them by removing into a separate provision the part that affects members, so that those members are able to have decisions reviewed in a fair and in a culturally and also in a survivor-centric approach.

I personally do not want this whole convention to know my business in terms of how I was harmed!

(Cheering and applause).

This organization owes me confidentiality, privacy, and respect. And what the constitutional amendment does is guarantee that respect, even for those who don't understand the constitution itself.

With regard to divisions, affiliates, and chapters, absolutely nothing changes in this constitutional amendment.

With regard to members, the only thing that changes is that we augment, in our constitution, what this convention approved, which was that our code of standards that we innately thought we were applying years and years ago, and adopted as a policy matter, is now reflected in the constitution.

Also, individuals who are accused or otherwise disciplined are given an additional avenue of appeal, and that is to come to the convention just like they would have before. Except there if there are certain sensitive matters, the privacy and dignity of those impacted are protected by having it be a smaller group.

With regard to the notion that we did not get enough time to think about this constitution, every single one of us has the right to draft changes if we had wanted to. Every single one of us could have come to the board and proposed something different. And we were told about the amendment, it was socialized in our organizations, and if entities chose not to read it, that is on them and not on us.

(Applause.)

With regards to the statement that the president was making decisions without the authority of us or others, that is patently untrue! And frankly, it's offensive.

And so for all of those reasons, I ask, I strongly, strongly recommend, and I plead with you all to please pass this constitution. We need it, and it's important for our healing and our moving forward. Thank you.

(Cheering and applause).

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you, Ronza.

I know there are many other people. Let me make one comment, which is to say, on behalf of the current board of directors, the statement that the board made in July stands. The board believes it has been operating within the confines of the constitution.

However, the board also wanted to be responsive to the members to clarify in a transparent way the code of conduct, to outline the kinds of procedures that might be wanted by the convention in the code of conduct process, and to make it clear what would happen if a matter came to the convention. The board has heard from survivors that there is a concern about bringing information forward, because they don't want to be faced with the prospect of facing this convention and telling their very personal, painful story. So in that regard, the board crafted a process by which the greatest degree of confidentiality could be maintained while having a due process for individuals.

Now, we've heard one person against and one person for.

Do we have someone else that wishes to speak against the constitutional amendment?

CHRIS HOLLINGSWORTH: Chris Hollingsworth from Indiana. From what I've heard, I don't understand how if we take the protections for the members out and leave it up to the states and affiliates, where does it take the protections for that individual from moving to a different state or chapter and joining again, where we're just moving an offender from one state to another state to another state? How does it prevent that from happening again?

MARK RICCOBONO: This constitutional amendment does not speak to that. That is an organizational question that is not addressed in the constitution, and in my opinion, doesn't have to be. How we share information between affiliates and how we share membership information, I don't think is a constitutional-level question. But what we are doing is we have a list and we share information as best we can through the network that we have, and the board has established a process by which responsible leaders who are informed of disciplinary decisions can request information about any chapter.

I'm not aware of blind people picking up their life and moving to another affiliate just to be part of another affiliate. But I am aware that the Federation network checks with each other quite often when someone from one affiliate moves to another. But in my opinion, that's not a constitutional level question.

CHRIS: At the risk of offending some people, I believe that the Catholic Church got into the same kind of problem because they felt the same way.

(Cheering).

I would vote no if it was up to me.

MARK RICCOBONO: Well, there you go.

I don't think there's a clear analogy there, but...

Is there some -- so I'll take that as against it. Is there someone that wishes to speak for is it? Marcus?

MARCUS SOLSBY: Thank you, Mr. President. I believe one of the grievances that my colleague from Pennsylvania had was the discretion of the board in these matters. I want to remind everyone, the board has an enormous responsibility with our care and well-being as members that they've been tasked with. And to best meet that responsibility, I'm sure anybody that's not just a leader but aspires to be a leader or anyone else would want them to have the freedom to meet that great responsibility that they should, and this amendment addresses by putting certain statutory safeguards in, it does its best to navigate the waters of addressing the real problems accurately and seriously, but also not only protecting victims or potential victims from unnecessary publicity, but also maybe wrongfully accused or whatever. These are a lot of waters that we have to navigate, and this is no easy task, as our speaker from yesterday says. This is hard work to ensure our safety and well-being, but I applaud our national leaders for taking it.

At some point, what it all comes down to, we put our faith in our leaders to institute safeguards such as this, this is a roadmap to doing this, and I believe this is a good step. Thank you, Mr. President.

(Applause.)

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you, Marcus. We've discussed it for about 20 minutes. This is an informal question. Are you ready to vote?

... it was kind of a weak yes...

(More yelling from the crowd).

Okay, so, we will take a vote and see how this goes. And if necessary, have a roll call vote.

My sense of the convention is that people wish to vote unless it's close. So we'll move to a roll call if we need to.

All those in favor of adopting this amendment to the constitution, say aye.

(Many ayes).

Opposed, say no.

(Many nos).

We'll have a roll call vote.

So, if delegates, I'll give you a minute to move to a microphone... Beth... remember that only delegates can vote. Delegates present and voting.

Okay, Alabama. Is that Barbara?

Alabama...

We're going to come back to Alabama. Alaska.

ALASKA DELEGATE: Alaska votes yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Alaska votes yes.

Alabama, are you at the mic?

Okay, we will... we would like to hear you on the mic, so we will come back to Alabama.

Arizona.

ARIZONA DELEGATE: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Arkansas?

ARKANSAS DELEGATE: No.

MARK RICCOBONO: California?

CALIFORNIA DELEGATE: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Colorado?

CO: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Connecticut?

CT REP: No.

MARK RICCOBONO: Delaware?

DE REP: No.

MARK RICCOBONO: Delaware, no. District of Columbia?

DC REP: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Yes. Florida?

FL REP: Florida votes yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Florida, yes.

Georgia.

GA REP: Georgia, yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Who was that? That wasn't Dorothy

GA: Dorothy isn't here, she had to go to the emergency room. I'm the treasurer.

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you, Georgia. Hawaii?

HI: No.

MARK RICCOBONO: Hawaii votes no. Idaho?

ID: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Illinois?

IL.. yes

MARK RICCOBONO: Illinois, yes. Indiana?

IN: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Indiana votes yes.

Iowa?

IA: Iowa, no.

MARK RICCOBONO: Iowa, no.

Kansas.

KS: After a substantial debate in our caucus, Kansas, no.

MARK RICCOBONO: Kansas, no.

Kentucky.

KY: Kentucky is an emphatic yes.

(Applause.)

MARK RICCOBONO: Yes, from Kentucky.

Louisiana?

PAM ALLEN: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Maine?

ME: Maine is a yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Maryland?

MD: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Maryland, yes.

Massachusetts?

MA: Massachusetts votes yes.

(Applause.)

MARK RICCOBONO: Massachusetts is a yes.

Michigan?

MI: Michigan votes yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Michigan votes yes. Minnesota?

MN: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Mississippi?

MS: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Missouri?

MO: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Missouri is a yes.

Montana?

MT: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Nebraska?

NEBRASKA: No.

MARK RICCOBONO: No. Nevada?

NV: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: New Hampshire?

NH: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: New Hampshire?

NJ: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Is a yes. New Mexico.

MN -- NM: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: New York?

NY: No.

MARK RICCOBONO: North Carolina.

NC: No.

MARK RICCOBONO: North Dakota.

ND: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Ohio?

OH: Ohio votes yes.

(Applause.)

MARK RICCOBONO: Oklahoma.

OK: Oklahoma is yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Oklahoma is a yes.

Oregon.

OR: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Pennsylvania?

PA: No.

MARK RICCOBONO: Is a no. Puerto Rico.

PR: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Rhode Island? RI: Rhode Island is a yes

MARK RICCOBONO: Is a yes. South Carolina?

SC: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Is a yes.

South Dakota?

... South Dakota, are you here?

SPEAKER: I haven't seen South Dakota today.

MARK RICCOBONO: We'll come back to South Dakota.

TE: I want to say I don't think the board initially had the authority to do what they did. But that's not what we're voting on. So I want to say yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: I just want to make sure delegates know we can't take comments now. So Tennessee, yes. Texas

TX: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Utah?

UT: Utah says yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Vermont?

VT: Yes. I'm Justin Salisbury, alternate delegate.

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you. Virginia?

VA: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Washington?

WA: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: West Virginia?

WV: West Virginia says yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Is a yes. And Wisconsin.

WI: Wisconsin votes yes, sir.

MARK RICCOBONO: Wisconsin is a yes.

We're going to come back to Alabama.

AB: Alabama, yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Is a yes. And one final time, do we have South Dakota?

.

We don't have South Dakota present. Wyoming was not seated at convention. So we have 50 votes total. We show 40 yes, 10 no. That's 80%, so the motion carries.

(Cheering and applause).

Bennett, can we have a door prize?

BENNET PROWS: Sure can, yes we can.

We have a couple of plaques, magnetic plaques that were donated by Touching Words. We've got 50 bucks, and a Walmart card.

The name is David Sibolla from Washington. David Sibolla...

David, are you here?

How about Jacob Webb of Mississippi? Jacob Webb of M-I-S-S-I-S-S-I-P-P-I?

(Laughter.)

That should have been long enough for him to stand up and jump around, so, no, not there.

Seremia Ramosan, Florida? I tore that name up, I apologize. But nobody seems to recognize it?

Okay, how about this one. Ethel Williams, Alabama.

(Cheering).

MARK RICCOBONO: We got her?

BENNET PROWS: Well, I don't see the Alabama one, but the Florida person is -- okay, yeah, we got it.

MARK RICCOBONO: Okay. We will stand adjourned until 2:00.

(Gavel banging).

(End of session).