**National Federation of the Blind**

**2022 National Convention**

**Board Meeting**

July 7, 2022

8:30 a.m. – 1:20 p.m. CT

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(Gavel pounding).

MARK RICCOBONO: Calling the 2022 board meeting of the National Federation of the Blind convention to order!

(Lots of cheering and applause).

Pam Allen.

PAM ALLEN: Yes, sir.

MARK RICCOBONO: Ron Brown.

RON BROWN: Yes, sir.

MARK RICCOBONO: Norma Crosby.

NORMA CROSBY: Yes, sir.

MARK RICCOBONO: Everette Bacon.

Marci Carpenter.

John Fritz.

Ever Lee Hairston.

Carla McQuillan.

Amy Ruell.

Terri Rupp.

Tracy Soforenko.

And Adelmo Vigil.

(All saying "here").

MARK RICCOBONO: Almost all board members accounted for. I do want to -- if I could have your attention, please -- I do want to acknowledge that of course our treasurer, Jeannie Massay, passed away about a month ago. She is with us, but not in the way we were hoping. So we want to start this morning by acknowledging Jeannie. In her honor, most of the board and others around are wearing the color purple. So we're thinking of Jeannie this morning.

(Applause.)

By long-standing tradition, we do want to start the board meeting by having a moment of silence for those many federation members who have left us in the past year. And these include: Diana Abuchon. Tevin "Diamond" Bailey. Katherine Barr. James Beard. Roger Behm. Jackie Billey. Beth Bowen Dyal. Charlie Brown. Michelle Clark. Ruby Collier. Melanie Cummings. Don Banning. Damona Fletcher. Caryn Fitzpatrick. Dennis Franklin. Doreen Franklin. John Fraser. Nancy Gurney. Joy Harris. Kathy Harris. Ted Hart. Justin Hughes. Robin Hungate. Barbara Jackson. Jackie Kelly. Anita King. Ken Kitchen. Mark Leary. James Lockett. Marcia Marques. Jeannie Massay. Ed Meskys. Tolita Mitchell. Don Morris. Liz Morgan. Sarah Mosley. Kathleen Nelson. Mary Nichols. James Omvig.

Jacquitta Patrick. Lloyd Rasmussen. Mike Records. Ray Roberson. Valerie Robinson. Edwin Rodriguez. Ruth Sager. Carol Siegel. Nicole Soileau. Linda Spurill, David Stayer, Lawrence Thomas, Theresa Thomas, Linda Wellman, Star-Shemah White, Doris Willoughby, Zeisker Wright-Morphis, James Young, Larry Young, and Marcia Dyer. And Joe Ruffalo, thank you. Let's have a moment of silence for all these people and the people that have, for whatever reason, not made it to my paper.

(Silence).

Amen.

Okay. This is the first general session of the convention! It is a general session of the convention, but it is a board meeting, so there are no microphones in the audience. But it's okay, audience. You get to participate anyway.

So we like to hear from you! So you can clap whenever you want and be excited about being here.

(Cheering and applause).

I would invite everybody, if you're able, to rise for the pledge of allegiance. The American flag is to my right as you face the stage, it's to your left. We'll start with the pledge of allegiance and then the Federation pledge

I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God indivisible with liberty and justice for all.

I guess I was thinking Federation first!

(Laughter.)

The federation flag is on the other side of the stage, to my left as you face the stage.

I pledge to participate actively in the efforts of the National Federation of the Blind. To achieve equality, opportunity, and security for the blind. To support the policies and programs of the Federation, and to abide by its constitution.

Nice, this group hasn't lost its chops!

(Crowd cheering).

You may be seated.

(Everyone sitting down).

Okay! It is so great to be back together!

(Applause and stomping of feet, cheering).

As a reminder, you all heard the COVID announcement. We do have a very strong commitment to making this environment as safe as possible. I do encourage each and every one of you to make sure you have gotten an orange wristband and that you continue to mask, especially in large sessions like this, but throughout the convention meetings. We're really relying on each and every one of us to be part of making sure that this convention is as safe as possible. For all of our Federation family members, but especially for those who might have higher risk factors.

So I know that especially going on day 3 here, might be a little weary of wearing a mask for another day. But know that it is what is allowing us to come back together, and it really is important and makes a difference. And so we thank you for that, and thank you to each and every one of you who have been jumping in where needed to help with directing traffic flow or making sure that people find their way, or helping people get masks when they've forgotten one. This convention works because of all of us, right? So thank you for doing your part.

(Crowd applauding).

An important part of our convention, of course, is our commitment to diversity. I have said it many times throughout this convention, but I wish that much of the rest of the world would operate like our convention! As exhibited by the resolutions committee meeting. You know, we can have spirited debate and still shake hands and work together at the end, right?

(Applause.)

We need more of that!

Finally, I would urge everybody to continue to keep your patience up. You know, I know that the smart elevators are not as smart --

(Laughter.)

 -- as those in this convention!

So remember, it's an opportunity to get to know those around you. We're all going to get to the places that we need to, and have a great time.

We do have a number of board positions that are up for election at this convention. Elected positions to be filled at this convention include President Mark Riccobono, Maryland. First vice president, Pam Allen, Louisiana.

(Cheering).

Second vice president, Ron Brown, Indiana. Secretary Norma Crosby from Texas.

(Applause.)

We also have the treasurer's position, which was held by Jeannie Massay of Oklahoma.

And we have board members up for election, including Amy Buresh, Nebraska. Shawn Callaway, District of Columbia. John Fritz, Wisconsin. Carla McQuillan, Oregon. Amy Ruell, Massachusetts. And Adelmo Vigil from New Mexico.

Holdovers on the board who are not up for election include... Denise Avant from Illinois. Everette Bacon from Utah. Marci Carpenter from Washington. Ever Lee Hairston, California. Terri Rupp from Nevada. And Tracy Soforenko from Virginia.

Let's see, was someone calling for the floor?

AMY BURESH: Amy Buresh, sir.

MARK RICCOBONO: Amy Buresh, go ahead.

AMY BURESH: Thank you, and good morning to my Federation family. It is so great to be here with you in Louisiana!

(Applause.)

Where we let the good times roll, right? And don't ask me to say it like Pam, because --

(Laughter.)

16 years ago, my life dramatically changed. In May, I had my first baby. And in July, I had the honor and great privilege to be elected to the board of directors of this dynamic, awesome, powerful, life-changing organization. And what a ride it has been. It's been an honor. I've gained a lot of confidence and had incredible opportunities. But, you know, as time goes by, life changes, and it's time for me to step aside. One of the things that I've had the privilege to see, having the honor of serving as national representative at many state conventions and getting to meet so many incredible Federation leaders -- some elected, some leading by the way they live their lives and quietly and tirelessly help and work to do what needs done within this organization --

And I think that is the beautiful part of the Federation, is, whether you sit at this board table or serve as a state president or an elected office in any way, that's great. And we need that leadership. But we also need YOU. We need members. That is the most important role, the most important thing that any of us can do, and the best title in this organization is as a member of the National Federation of the Blind.

(Applause.)

And so our work goes on, and it takes all of us, not only to make this convention work, but to make our Federation work. And I know. I've seen it, in big and small ways. That together, with love, hope, and determination, standing on the shoulders of all of those great dynamic leaders that have gone before us, we can and will and do turn dreams into reality.

And it has been my great pleasure to be a part of this board and serving you in that way. And I want to say that I'm not leaving, I'm just not seeking reelection this year at this time. But I remain just as committed, just as dedicated, as I ever have been. And I'm still only a phone call away. And those of you that have heard my banquet speech know you've got a friend?

(Singing soulfully) you've got a friend, yeah, yeah, you've got a friend.

(Speaking again) God bless, NFB, thank you for the opportunity.

(Applause.)

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you very much, Amy. We appreciate your service very much. And we're looking forward to having you in and amongst the convention for many decades to come! And thank you for keeping the presidential suite moving, also! Ha ha!

Was there someone else that called for the floor? JOHN FRITZ: Yes, Mr. President

I'd like to welcome you all to this convention, and it's been life changing in my life as well. 35 years ago. This is my 30-somethingth convention. And it's been a great time. I've learned a lot. It's made a big difference in my life as well as others. In addition to mentoring and working with many of you.

I'd like to reflect on my past years, 14 years ago becoming a board member. I really appreciate your support and dedication to working with each other and me to make this possible. But it is one of the things that is very important for us to do, is to work with and train and pass on the responsibilities and skills to others. And we know that as a parent. And reflecting on this, I'd like to talk about one of my children who happens to be blind, is a guide dog user. She was exposed to the Federation philosophy before she was born, while she was going through many medical challenges growing up, and learning how we work, interact with each other. And has become a leader herself.

In addition, she has learned to advocate for herself as a blind person in the career path she has chosen to take, and will be in the medical field dealing with the doubting of BVR, the professors saying a blind person has no business doing what you're doing, and the perseverance to continue on by herself, many of the skills she learned with us.

And I'm proud to say this year she graduated as a nursing student and will be taking her board soon (voice breaking with pride).

(Cheering and applause).

In addition, next week, she'll be changing to a new chapter in her life, getting married, and we're very proud of her.

(Applause.)

But as a parent, I just want to impress upon each of us, you know, in passing the torch and moving to our next chapter in our lives, it's our responsibility to help find the folks that have the skills, willing to take the responsibility, to keep moving on forward to our next phase of our organization.

And I appreciate all of your support and dedication to having your confidence in me as your board member over the last 14 years. And I just want to indicate I will not be seeking reelection.

(Applause.)

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you very much, John, for your service. Of course, a special place in my heart, being from the state of Wisconsin. And a big convention congratulations to the Fritz family. Thank you.

(Cheering and applause).

AMY RUELL: Amy Ruell.

MARK RICCOBONO: Amy Ruell.

AMY RUELL: Thank you, Mr. President.

Hello, everyone. I want to just say how much I've appreciated the opportunity to work with and for you throughout these past years. I'm very proud of our recent efforts to address the injustices of the past. And I strongly encourage this organization to continue on our journey while respecting the traditions and valuing the traditions of our past, to increasingly embrace the perspectives of all blind and visually impaired people, so that they are more reflected and better represented in our in our leadership and in our policies. Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you very much, Amy. You've made a great difference to this board, and I know will continue to make a difference in the work that we're doing, serving on a number of committees, including our Code of Conduct Feedback Committee. So thank you for your service. Let's give Amy another round of applause.

(Applause.)

Now, often at these board meetings, at least since 2015, when we've had a chairperson of the board, we have the last word at the board meeting be from the chairperson of the board. Except that we come to the part of the agenda where we get to hear from our host affiliate.

(Whooping).

And it happens to be, our host affiliate happens to be led by the chairperson of the board!

So here for comments from the chairperson of the board, but also from our spectacular NFB Louisiana host committee, here's Pam Allen!

(Lots of cheering and applause).

PAM ALLEN: Good morning, and welcome to New Orleans!

(Cheering).

Your Louisiana crew is truly honored and delighted to be your host for 2022 National Convention. As we welcome you to the Big Easy, where there's something for everyone! From our world renowned restaurants, more than 1500 within a few steps and miles of our hotel, to our vibrant night life, to our rich cultural heritage and music.

To those joining virtually, we want to say a special hello to everyone joining us and also to our first lady, Melissa, who cannot be with us. Or if you're here in person, isn't it refreshing to step out of our daily routine and join together at this convention? The world's largest gathering of blind people? In a spirit of unity and love, as we work together to share our message that blindness does not stop us from living the lives we want!

(Applause.)

President Riccobono, your unwavering faith, your steadfast commitment to listening to our members, your attention to hearing all voices and experiences, your openness to change and growth, and your democratic and loving leadership have moved our organization to the next level.

During the past three years, since we last gathered in person, we have faced challenging and difficult times. And our transformative work is more far-reaching because of your leadership, President Riccobono, and because of the courage and the work of so many.

As demonstrated in the history of New Orleans, diversity and resiliency have made us stronger. And like this incredible city, steeped in so many diverse tradition, the most important part of our Federation is the people. Our diverse members who are the driving force behind our revolutionary work.

I want to say a special hello to all our first-timers. If you're here for your first convention, please give a cheer.

(Cheering).

We are so excited to welcome you to Rookie Roundup the other night -- I want to thank Tracy Soforenko and our Jernigan Fund committee and all the others who helped out. And we're so excited that you're here with us.

As everyone experiences this week all that New Orleans has to offer, you will notice the influence of our multicultural history -- Native American, Akkadian, African, French, Spanish, Irish, Italian, Haitian. This rich history is reflected in the food, architecture, and music of our city. Whether you are sampling some jambalaya or etouffee or a po' boy or muffuletta, or beignets, delicious fried squares covered in powdered sugar at world famous Café du Monde with a cafe au lait, or out in the French Quarter listening to a concert like no other, we're sure this city will keep you coming back and again, just like keeping connected with our Federation family does every year at Convention. It's been revitalizing connecting with everyone, and we've enjoyed chatting with all who stopped at our information table in the lobby, or stopped by the hospitality suite, which is room 2164, to pick up all our welcoming goodies, from Louisiana snacks to hand sanitizer, city guides, and Mardi Gras beads. We also encourage to you check out our table in the convention hall, where we're selling convention T-shirts, designed with gold and black writing with the NFB logo on the front with a beautifully drawn paddleboat drawn by Meredith, with the river, the skyline, and "laissez les bon temps rouler", which we will be doing it week.

(Applause.)

And President Riccobono, we have shirts for you and Melissa, to take home to her as a souvenir.

And I want to extend my sincere gratitude to all our dedicated members, LCB alumni who are so generously giving of their energy and time. All of our members and friends have been working so hard this week around the convention. And I'm truly grateful. They exemplify the heart of our Federation family. I thank them for their hard work.

We are carrying out the work of those who came before us who are no longer present, and we heard so many of the names this morning, including in Louisiana, two long serving board members, Tolita Mitchell and Don Manning. But their example and leadership give us hope.

Our commitment to our belief in what is possible is restored here, and we hope that you will be energized and your commitment will be renewed, and you will take that spirit home as we work each day in our chapters and affiliates to listen to one another's stories and to help transform the dreams of all blind people into reality.

Thank you all for being with us this week and taking part in our convention. You are the reason that we are here. Laissez les bon temps rouler, and let's go build the National Federation of the Blind!

(Applause.)

President Riccobono, we were talking about the dance tomorrow night, so we'll talk a little bit about that at opening ceremonies. But we do have a special welcome reception that you'll be hearing more about, so we encourage you, I know it's a busy time in New Orleans, you've got to juggle your activities, but please make sure to come tomorrow evening as well to our welcome party. You won't want to miss it! And stay tuned for more tomorrow.

MARK RICCOBONO: I'm not trying to give away any secrets!

(Laughter.)

Thank you so much, Pam, and to our Louisiana members! Great job at this convention.

(Applause.)

You know, the DJ in the lobby on July 3rd was a little much...

(Laughter.)

A little much, but I know that was the hotel's fault! If you guys didn't arrive for the Essence Festival, that's probably okay. Probably a little more New Orleans than you needed on the first day.

(Laughter.)

But what a great city, and what great members we have here in Louisiana, huh? Yeah!

(Applause.)

Absolutely!

So, this convention works for many reasons, and one of them is the hundreds of volunteers that make the convention run. Another reason is that the Federation has a tremendous staff of individuals who are dedicated to this movement.

(Applause.)

Yeah! Give them a BIG round of applause!

(Cheering).

You'll find them in and around the convention. They're mostly wearing magnetic name tags. But probably you won't find them around the convention, because they're moving things behind the scenes to make it happen in ways that you don't even know! And so they definitely make things happen.

Our chairman for convention arrangements has been in this position for a number of years. His first year in the position, we told him "it will be a normal convention except that we're going to break a world record". And he worked out the logistics for that, along with the staff of the Federation. And then in the midst of planning a convention two years ago, the board said, well, we're gonna take it all virtual. And it sounds easy, but when you consider that our 2020 convention, we had 10,000 unique participants in Zoom, and it was better produced than almost any event I've been to...

(Applause.)

... during the COVID time! And this year, of course, we have the in-person convention. We have COVID testing. And we do have a great virtual convention experience, which we're hoping to build on in the future. Here to talk to us about convention arrangements is our chairman, he's executive director of operations for the National Federation of the Blind, here's John Berggren!

(Cheering, applause, and pounding on the table".

JOHN BURGGREN: Good morning, everyone. It is so good to be back in person!

(Cheering).

It has been a fantastic start already. And I do have to echo President Riccobono's words. Our staff of volunteers and our NFB National Office staff, outstanding. It doesn't matter what hiccup may come their way. They rise to the occasion. And it makes our convention experience just fantastic. One of a kind.

So, we finally get to talk about things that don't solely focus on Zoom!

(Laughter.)

Let's see if I remember what those things used to be like...

(Laughter.)

So, in some ways, if you got here in time for the DJ back on the 3rd, it may seem that convention has already been underway for days now. If you waited on the early wristband distribution line, it may have seemed like THAT lasted for days!

(Laughter.)

But there's still lots to go. So where can you find the agenda? Where can you find out what's going on? If you have access to our website, there are a broad array of agenda formats. You'll find it, of course, in HTML. But you can also download an epub, a Word document. We have the agenda in Spanish. There is a BRF file on the website. And of course, you can access the agenda through NFB-NEWSLINE.

I would also remind you that we have a mobile app called Crowd Compass. This was super useful in our virtual years, but as it turns out, very useful in our in-person years! So there is a link listed in the back of the convention agenda. If you haven't yet downloaded it. Or you can just go to the app store, whether it's Google or iOS, and search for National Federation of the Blind, and you'll find our convention app there.

Crowd Compass allows you to customize the agenda. Once you've logged in, you can identify the sessions you want to make sure you don't miss, and use your focused agenda to get you through the week. So I strongly encourage you to consider that option.

For our virtual convention experience attendees out there, hello online. Please do register. And we'll continue to push out content specific to our virtual convention experience throughout the week. Folks can also listen on YouTube and Amazon devices. And again, NFB-NEWSLINE.

Let's see. Y'all remember from a few years ago, we used to have something called a banquet. And finally we get a chance to do it again!

(Applause.)

So this is pretty exciting to be back in person. One of the prime reasons. For those of you who have purchased banquet tickets, keep in mind, you have purchased a banquet meal, but not yet a place to eat it. So if you want to sit down while you enjoy your banquet meal, you need to go to Banquet Exchange. Banquet Exchange is going to open after the board meeting, out in the Acadia ballroom foyer. And it will be open at various times throughout the week in the agenda. Banquet Exchange is where you get, as I said, a seat. You're assigned a table number. So if you're dining alone, you'll want to know in advance before you walk through the doors where you're sitting. If you're dining with friends, with an affiliate, gather your banquet tickets together and go to the Banquet Exchange so you can all sit together at the same table or tables. And that's really important. Even more important: If you have a special meal request, if you are a vegetarian or you require a gluten-free meal... there are a number of other options... it's important that you make that request, ideally, today. To ensure that the hotel can fulfill that request. Unfortunately, we have a weekend between now and our banquet, and they need time to order the appropriate meals. So I encourage anyone who has a meal preference to take care of that today.

Let's see...

Guide dog relief areas, for those of you with guide dogs. Being that this is our third day, I suspect by now you've already found a relief area.

(Laughter.)

Sympathies to your dog if not.

(Laughter.)

But importantly, 5th floor, there is a relief area between the two towers out on the pool deck. Not poolside, I'm sorry.

(Laughter.)

But out those doors, out those doors you'll find a relief area, as well as outside of the hotel's valet entrance. They call is the port de cocher, a fancy French word. And if you go out to the right at a 45-degree angle, you'll find the relief area within the Iberville sidewalk. You're still on hotel property, there's a gate between there and the street, and there you'll find a relief area.

Big thank you to the National Association of Guide Dog Users.

(Applause.)

They've done an outstanding job of making sure we've got bags available, making sure folks know where the relief areas are, and not the least importantly, they are funding the maintenance of the relief area throughout the week. We've got a local vendor who's helping us out. So I want to thank the division for really pitching in this year. Thank you.

(Applause.)

Just a couple other items before I turn it back over to President Riccobono.

Also, we've talked about the banquet, but there's no reason to starve between now and then. There are only a couple of restaurants in the hotel, and I encourage you to check them out. As well, the pantry is open late for easy options. But at lunch and dinner time on the second floor, essentially right below us, at the top of the escalators, the hotel is providing grab-and-go lunches and dinners. Food looks pretty good, actually, it smells really good. Lunch is available from 12:00 to 2:00, and dinner from 5:00 to 7:00, and it's at a very hotel friendly price -- $12 for lunch, $15 for dinner. And you get an entree, a side, and a bottle of water, and I think a cookie. So it's really good if you need to grab something quick on the way to meetings, you can go there and pick something up.

And lastly, I would echo President Riccobono's sentiment at the beginning of the session. Please everyone, let's do our part to keep everyone healthy. Wear your masks in hallways, meetings, and the lobby. We want to send everyone home in as good condition as when they arrived.

There is one more day of COVID testing. Everyone in here, I'm sure, has already gotten their negative COVID test. Their orange wristbands confirming that test. But if you know anyone who still needs to grab that negative test before registering for convention, Salon D throughout the day, testing is still available.

Thank you very much, President Riccobono. Welcome, everyone, and let's have a fantastic week!

(Applause.)

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you very much, John, and you can find John in and amongst the convention if you have any operations concerns.

We are offering the convention to our virtual convention attendees on Zoom, so if you have to leave the room, of course, you can get on Zoom. Not encourage you to leave the room, but if you have to. But also, you can get closed captioning there. So if for some reason, you're in a place where you can't hear as well -- how's the sound out there, by the way?

(Cheering).

Okay, good!

Of course, everybody who didn't know what I said didn't clap, so I guess, you know...

(Laughter.)

But you can also get the closed captioning on Zoom if you need it, and we also are offering Spanish, and here to talk to us about our Spanish interpretation is the chair of our committee from Texas, Daniel Martinez!

(Applause.)

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Hello, my Federation family, yes, I'm chairing the interpretation services for this convention, and I'm also on a panel, so I'm quite busy, but happy to be able to provide this service for Spanish speakers. For everyone who is here, or if you have a friend back home who is a Spanish speaker that is not currently connected, please send them my email, dmartinez@nfbtx.org, and we can provide the codes we need.

Now a Spanish message: (Repeating announcement in Spanish).

Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you very much, Daniel, and to all of our members who are helping out with Spanish interpretation at this convention, it's one of the many ways that people contribute to making the convention work. So thank you for that.

Here to talk about the corps of people helping the convention to work in this first year coming back together in three years is the chairman of our Ambassadors Committee. It's an important year for our ambassadors, especially because there are a lot of factors to this year's convention. By the way, we mentioned the staff -- we have 20 fewer staff at this convention than we did three years ago. So we're all operating with a little extra effort in many realms. Also because of COVID, our partners at UPS don't have the participation here at this convention that we sometimes have. But the committee that's helping take care of all that is the Ambassadors Committee. And so from Colorado, here's Dan Burke!

(Applause.)

DAN: In-person convention, right here, in person convention right here!!!

All right, it's great to be back in business, President Riccobono, and it's great to be with all of you. Shoutout, first of all, to my co-chair this year, who, by the way, I'm sure this is an approved message, President Riccobono, Corbo Connor is at the assistive listening devices table straight in the back of room. And thanks to all of the folks who volunteered this year. We had some great volunteered out there this morning. But if you want to volunteer and help make this convention as pleasant, as free of stress as possible, as we can make it, you want to help your fellow Federationists out, you can find me at 7:45 a.m. right out these doors every morning. And we can get you placed. Did you have some great volunteers this morning?

(Applause.)

And we have specific folks volunteering to help at the exhibit hall and the Independence Market areas. So let's just continue to, you guys are amazing, you know? It's great to be back. And I think everyone is really happy, President Riccobono, to be back. I know there were some rough times waiting in the lines, but people really lent each other grace and support. Let's continue to do that. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you, Dan. And encouraging people to jump in to help our convention ambassadors. Let's see. When we have general sessions, we'll take announcements regarding convention matters at the podium. Convention announcements -- we're an organization run by blind people, so the announcements must be in braille!

(Laughter.)

Barbara Lose of Nebraska is going to be screening messages for us.

(Applause.)

On the platform. So bring your messages up. Also, a reminder again that you should come by the presidential suite, which is 4022. The hours are in the agenda, but would love to have you stop by and visit with you, but also other Federation leaders. And thank you again to our Federation members that are helping out in the presidential suite.

So, one moment you've all been waiting for... wondering about the attendance at this convention!

(Crowd shouting "yeah"!)

I'll give you the top 10 states. It's an interesting top 10. At number 10 is New York, with 70 individuals. (Light applause)

Number 9, Georgia, 76!

(Light cheering).

But they're right on the heels of number 8, which has 77... that's Virginia!

(Some cheering).

Come on, Georgia, you can do it!

Number 7, with 81 individuals registered, is Colorado.

(Cheering).

Number 6, with 91, is Florida.

(Cheering).

Top 5... number 5, with 97 registered, Arizona!

To get in the top 4, you've got to be over 100. At number 4 with 124 registered is California.

(Loud cheering).

Number 3, with 151 registered, Texas!

(Loud cheering).

Number 2, with 205 people registered... Maryland! (Cheering)

Come on, Maryland!

And number 1, with 209 people registered, not too far away... Louisiana!

(Loud cheering).

Top 10 still up for grabs, Maryland! You can...

(Laughter.)

It's going to be interesting to see how it comes out. So I encourage people to register for the convention. But with a few more registration opportunities open, the total registration thus far at this convention... where's my drumroll?

(Board members banging on the table).

There we go --

2,322 people!

(Applause.)

How about that?

Now, we're not done with this convention. But we will have a future convention, and many future conventions. And our 2023 convention will be held from July 1st to July 6th in Houston, Texas!

(Applause.)

The rates for that convention will be $119 for singles, doubles, triples, and quads. And I know that Houston has been waiting for us since 2020, when we were supposed to be there! So I know it's going to be a great time we'll see if the attendance exceeds that of New Orleans. We'll find out!

But we're in the convention now, so let's enjoy this one. But make your plans to be with us at the next convention. But don't -- you can't make your reservations yet.

(Laughter.)

Norma Crosby says she'll be there! So...

(Laughter.)

Now, in addition to being in an amongst the convention, a lot of positive stories being shared on social media. Use the hashtag #NFB22 to share your convention photos, highlights, learning. It's a great way to promote the work that we're doing and get people interested in the convention.

Especially now that we're back in person, remember that we have presenters from various backgrounds. Our audience is known for being a tough audience, but also very respectful. We treat individuals who come to our stage with respect, even when we're very annoyed with them! Keep in mind, that includes politics. So if we have a presenter who's not of a party that you prefer, we treat all of our guests with respect, because they've taken the time to come to our stage.

(Applause.)

Now that we are back in the person, we do have a portrait studio, and we encourage you to come by the portrait studio to get your picture taken. It's helpful for us when you write a story for the Monitor, or work that you're doing is in the news, we can share pictures of you, for our annual report, that sort of thing. You can come by the portrait studio, which is open after the board meeting until 2:00 p.m., and it will be open throughout other times during the convention. Let's see -- the portrait studio will be open tomorrow before the opening general session. On Saturday, it will be open during the lunch break between the general sessions. And I think the time that's most popular for folks, it will be open before the banquet from 5:45 to 6:45. So come by and get your picture taken at the portrait studio.

It's close?

(Laughter.)

Just outside this ballroom. Just outside this ballroom. So across from the efforts. Just outside the ballroom where you enter.

The Braille Monitor is our flagship publication.

(Applause.)

And we do invite members to write stories for the Monitor. We need articles. Things you're thinking about. So please write for the Monitor, and also we encourage you to read the Monitor, get it in the many forms that it is available. I think we've made it available every way we can think of. So keep in mind that the Monitor is our flagship publication and we encourage to you participate in it. Last year, we rebranded our time in October as Blind Equality Achievement Month. And this is a time when we work together to promote the integration of the blind into society on terms of equality. It's a time for chapters to start figuring out how to get back into the world, and to share our message of hope and opportunity for the blind. So now's a great time to start thinking about Blind Equality Achievement Month for this year. In and amongst the things we will be doing is, earlier this year, we had brought the presidential release live here to this hotel, back in May, and Pam and I were thinking that it would be cool to take it on the road again for Blind Equality Achievement Month!

And so your chapter can give us a proposal to host the presidential release live for October.

Now, we're interested in, you know, how you're going to make it a snazzy event and bring attention to the work of the National Federation of the Blind. So we're asking chapters to give a brief proposal of how you would make it a snazzy event for the chapter and use it as an opportunity to build the Federation. We would come to the location that you specify. Obviously we will need the ability to set up on Zoom. So we will need capacity wherever that's going to be, so if you propose to be in the middle of a park somewhere, great. We just need to know how we're going to get on the internet.

You can e-mail your proposals, and don't do it today, because you should think about it, make them thoughtful, e-mail them to membership@nfb.org, and we will be considering them. We'll take proposals through the end of August so that we have time to select a chapter, and make the plans. So there are many other activities we should be thinking about for Blind Equality Achievement Month, and if you have new ideas about what the Federation should do, obviously, it's our month, so please share those and use it as an opportunity to build the Federation.

Now, we have an extensive code of conduct in the National Federation of the Blind. All of you should have affirmed your knowledge of it during the registration for this convention. The code of conduct confirms in writing our commitment to each other and our commitment to appropriate conduct in Federation gatherings, the largest of which is this convention, which is the supreme authority of this Federation. I do want to call your attention to the code of conduct, and ask you to be aware of it and to use it as a guide in appropriate behavior in and about the convention. You can find braille and print copies of the code of conduct in the free literature area across the street in front of the exhibit hall. You can also find all of the information at nfb.org/codeofconduct, all one word, and you can even find the information to file a report of an incident if you want to do that. Of course, if the incident is such that requires law enforcement, we would ask you to do that as well.

You can find the reporting form there. You can also call our national office with a report of a code of conduct issue. The number, 410-659-9314, extension 2475.

And those reports will be dealt with.

Now, over the last year or so, we've done extensive work on our code of conduct. I want to thank all of the members who have given significant input into the major revision of the code of conduct that we made in late December that became effective in January of this year.

Last year, as part of our efforts, we, in February, the board lifted any restrictions on time for code of conduct reports as part of our investigatory work. And so I have some statistics from the period of December 2020 to now in terms of code of conduct reports that we've investigated. So keep in mind that this includes a lot of reports that go back as far as 1940. Well, not literally 1940, because we didn't get any reports from 1940.

So, from the period of December 1, 2020, to -- I guess these were sometime this month, last week, basically. Don't have the exact date, but July 1st. July 1st of this year. Total number of code reports that we received were 131. Relating to sexual misconduct or abuse, 94 of the 131 were in that area. Of those 94 reports, 8 of them led to people being expelled from the organization. 24 people being suspended. 5 people being put on probation. 7 reports resulted in other disciplinary conditions put on membership. And 34 of the 94 reports were not substantiated or did not result in any discipline by the board. One report was withdrawn, and 7 reports ended up in people being banned from participating in the Federation. Banned is a term that the board uses when someone is not a member, but we've found that someone has been harmed in the course of the Federation by someone who is not a member. We use "banned", because we can't send them away from membership because they're not members. We still have 8 pending code of conduct reports that are being processed, and as you know from our work, code reports in this area are investigated by Tanya Bonya, who is our external investigator. She is at this convention, so I hope you get a chance to meet her.

41 of our reports have been in the area not in sexual misconduct, so they've been dealt with internally to the organization. A lot of times, these items get sent back to affiliates, because they're really matters that state affiliates should deal with, and we support them at the national level as needed. And those reports, only 1 has resulted in an expulsion, 3, suspension, and 1 person that has had their membership put on probation.

This work continues, and in the last year, we have done extensive investigation on a lot of historical incidents. So these numbers represent a lot of history. We continue to have a strong commitment to making sure that conduct within our organization is of the highest standard.

We have a code of conduct feedback committee that is -- has a number of sessions at this convention, and will be gathering feedback during this convention and afterwards. We need the members of this organization to drive what we want this process to look like and give feedback on it. And I want to acknowledge the many, many people, especially our survivors, that have done tremendous work to support safety and support within our organization.

(Applause.)

I should also add that this convention directed the board to establish the SAFE Fund last year. This fund is to support individuals who we may find have been harmed in the course of participating in our organization. You can find information about the SAFE fund at nfb.org/codeofconduct. Prior to this convention -- so we have established an SAFE Fund. We have a third party administrator that handles all of the details. The Federation does not get any of the information about who utilizes the fund. We simply get the aggregate information about how many people and how many dollars the Federation has established a procedure, and the board has identified what the support shall look like.

Before this convention, we -- our external counsel and our external investigator reached out to 66 individuals, inviting them to utilize the SAFE Fund. Now, just because they've been invited does not mean that they will. It's their choice. It will remain available to them. And so, so far, we haven't distributed any funds from the SAFE fund, because it really just got up and running right before this convention. But everybody is invited to participate

Furthermore, the fund remains. If anyone experiences misconduct in the future by anyone in the organization, which we hope doesn't happen, but if it should, the SAFE Fund remains as a positive support that the Federation offers to individuals to create healing within this organization. I think it's a very positive step. I'm proud that our organization has taken it. And I hope that those who need it will take advantage of it. So thank you to this convention for directing that action to happen.

(Applause.)

Okay. We will be considering a constitutional amendment that's being recommended by the board of directors to the convention. We will be considering that later in the convention, probably on Saturday. We will read it tomorrow at the general session. You can find it in the Braille Monitor. The constitutional amendment is meant to support or work on the code of conduct and to clarify the process and some of the questions that have been raised over the last year. I encourage you to read it for consideration later in this convention. The convention decides what we do and how we do it. And so, if this approach is not the right one, then the convention should decide what is the right one.

The board, however, supports the constitutional amendment and recommends it to the convention.

Now, I've talked about our commitment to diversity and inclusion, and that's more than words. It has to do with the actions that we take in our organization. One of the components of that is recognizing that we should plan our events to not conflict with major holidays that are being celebrated by those in our Federation community. To support that, the Federation, with support of our DEI Committee, has developed a five year calendar so that Federation affiliates and chapters, when planning events, can be aware of what holidays might potentially cause a conflict. It turns out that this convention, because of COVID and many things, ends up falling on a significant Muslim holiday. And so we would avoid that in the future, and we have worked extensively with our blind Muslims group on that. You'll see a number of their activities in the agenda, but I do have an announcement here, which reads as follows:

Muslims are currently observing the 10-day Islamic Holy Days in commemoration of Hajj, or pilgrimage. The last two days are even more special, because they include the Day of Standing, which is tomorrow, and Saturday is the Day of Sacrifice, known as the Day of Eid al-Adha. As part of the celebration, Muslims will offer the Eid al-Adha on July 9th at 7:30 a.m. in Marriott studio 9. Please note that the July 10th agenda item has been cancelled because the holiday is now on July 9th.

So, would encourage anybody who is interested in that prayer session to attend. There are also, you will find in Crowd Compass, there are daily prayer spaces made available, and thank you very much to our Blind Muslims Group for putting these events together.

(Applause.)

The DEI work is coordinated by our Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. And I wanted to give an opportunity to one of the co-chairs of the committee, Shawn Callaway.

(Applause.)

SHAWN CALLAWAY: Hello, my Federation family. As my dear friend Jeannie Massay would always say.

First of all, I want to acknowledge the other co-chair of our DEI efforts, Mr. Colin Wong.

(Applause.)

We work very hard in this space. And I'm just happy to say that, number 1, our DEI efforts have, number one, helped build the Federation, continue to help build the Federation, but also build inclusive spaces where all our members feel that they are part of this organization. I want to acknowledge one individual, Mr. Malcolm Green, who has been hired to be our coordinator of our DEI efforts on the national level. So, Malcolm, thank you for your hard work.

(Applause.)

In this space as well.

I also want to acknowledge many of the individuals from our DEI Committee who have assisted in many of the programs that we've had at the convention this year. We had several different DEI programs that were well-attended, and people, from what I understand, are extremely happy with the programs that we presented. Now, if you have any questions or concerns from a DEI perspective, please contact us at diversity@nfb.org.

Also, you can contact Malcolm Greene -- he has an E at the end of his Greene, at mgreene@nfb.org. Have a great convention. Thank you, President Riccobono.

(Applause.)

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you, Shawn. Here to talk about our membership efforts from the great state of Illinois, I'd like to recognize Denise Avant.

(Applause.)

DENISE AVANT: Good morning, Mr. President and fellow Federationists. I wanted to first acknowledge my co-chair, Tarik Williams, who is also here. We wanted to recognize first Jeannie Massay. And her name will ever be synonymous with the phrase "Federation family". We know she was the driving force behind the continued work and formation of the Membership Committee.

And every day, Tarik and I have in our hearts and in our minds her spirit as we build the National Federation of the Blind.

And what we are seeking to do, our mission is twofold, is that we want to access what is already available to us, that Jeannie and others set up, and then we want to expand and innovate. So we know that we have the chapter presidents calls, and there are two sets of them, four times every year. And so what we have been doing is setting up our calls around themes. So on July 28th and 31st, we are inviting Pam Allen to come and talk about Blind Equality Achievement Month with us so that we can get geared up for that celebration, as well as to talk about the upcoming state convention season. Then at the end of the year, because we know that this is important for chapters in early December, we will have meetings that will center around planning the future for your chapter for the next year. So this is a tool that we have been given, and we want to see the chapter presidents participating in these calls. We also want the chapter presidents to use the listserv to share ideas. When we had our meeting yesterday, there were some great ideas from the chapter presidents. And we want the chapter presidents to stop hiding those ideas and share them with your other Federation family members!

We have our open house calls, and please, chapter presidents, remember to invite people to those open house calls, because those are the places where new Federationists and maybe some older Federationists come and ask us questions about the National Federation of the Blind. When we say that we want to expand and innovate, we mean that we want to hear from you. We want you to send e-mails, an e-mail to membership@nfb.org letting us know ideas of how we can build the National Federation of the Blind. We also are asking that affiliate presidents, because it's my understanding that half the convention now has new presidents, please send us your membership chairs so that we know who they are.

We know that together, with love, hope, and determination, that we can go out and we can find new members to our organization, blind people that need us and that want to be part of our Federation family. So let's go build the National Federation of the Blind!

(Applause.)

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you, Denise. I have my membership coin on right here. Wearing it around my neck.

For a presentation on the Distinguished Educator of Blind Students, Carla McQuillan!

CARLA MCQUILLIAN: Good morning, fellow Federationists! I'd like to begin by thanking the members of the committee who selected this year's recipient of the Distinguished Educator of Blind Students award. We had Emily Gibbs from Texas, Michelle Chicon from New Mexico, Paul from California, and Conchita Hernandez, who as we speak is giving dance lessons to kids in NFB camp. Thank you very much, committee, and I'll start by saying that when we met to discuss the several applications that we received for this award, I kept my thoughts to myself, because our recipient is someone I have known for many years, and he without a doubt stood head and shoulders above the other nominations we received. Back in late 1990s, early 2000, we had a totally blind student at our Montessori school. I later found that in this person's early years of his teaching career, he worked with this student and on through his high school. So I met him when he drew the short straw and had to present for the Department of Education at our state convention! And he was warned by his colleagues how ruthless and horrible we would be to him. And he confessed later that he found just the opposite to be true, and we developed a wonderful, collaborative relationship, focusing on the importance of education for our blind students.

He also chaired a fund that we had in Oregon, established after the closure of our Oregon School for the Blind, and we received $5,000 for our first BELL Academy in 2014. I served with this individual on the Oregon Commission for the Blind, and when he applied to be the superintendent of the Washington State School for the Blind, I was contacted for my recommendation.

I give two types of references: One is glowing to the extent that one believes no human being is capable of such accomplishments. And the other is "my attorney has advised I say nothing to you on this person".

(Laughter.)

You might guess which I gave for this individual.

So, his state president, Marci Carpenter, said that at the school for the blind, they had a contest to see how many digits of pi the students could recite. And the winner got to throw a pie in the superintendent's face!

(Laughter.)

And I wish I'd have been there for that.

Marci says "I have pictures!"

(Laughter.)

We'll post them!

The other thing that I find particularly great about this individual is, he attends the state conventions entirely, through the end of the business sessions on Sunday. And I know, because I've been there.

So, Oregon is going to claim part of this guy, because he lives in Oregon, he works in Washington, so go Northwest, right?

(Cheering).

The National Federation of the Blind honors Scott McCallum, Distinguished Educator of Blind Students.

(Applause.)

For your skills in teaching braille -- oh, I have a plaque, I should show the plaque, huh? Sorry, Susan.

For your skills in teaching braille and other alternative techniques of blindness, for graciously dedicating extra time to meet the needs of your students, and for empowering them to exceed all expectations. You champion our movement. You strengthen our hopes. You share your dreams (voice breaking) July 7th, 2022.

I also have a check for $1,000 and Scott will be presenting at the meeting of the Parents of Blind Children this afternoon. So now, Scott, a few words.

(Applause.)

SCOTT MCCALLUM: Thank you, Carla -- I wasn't going to cry (voice breaking) -- and you started it.

(Laughter.)

Okay, I'll get through this. Phew. Thank you, Carla, President Riccobono, and members of the National Federation of the Blind, for such incredible recognition and award. It's really hard to read my notes through my tears here --

(Laughter.)

As was stated during the introduction, my name is Scott McCallum. I'm currently living -- I actually moved, Carla -- and working in Washington State, serving in my seventh year as the superintendent of the Washington State School for the Blind. I'd also like to recognize and thank my good friend Marci Carpenter.

(Applause.)

Yeah, give her a round!

(Applause.)

Many of you know her as a very engaged member of NFB and president of NFB Washington. She serves on my ex officio board of trustees representing the National Federation of the Blind. Marci, thank you for nominating me for this very distinguished award (sniffling, voice breaking). I'm so very grateful to be named as this year's Distinguished Educator of Blind Students.

While there are many awards in education spaces that recognize impactful teachers and educators, being recognized by the largest and oldest organization led by blind people is incredibly important to me. I work hard to recognize the voices of the children we serve, as well as the blind adults at WSSB. So this recognition from you is not taken lightly. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Cheering and applause.

Oops, I still have more to say !

(Laughter.)

I've spent 25 years in the education of blind children, and I've loved every step of the way, from educator to administrator to superintendent. I've had many experiences that have helped me grow, learn, change, and develop my craft. Thank you to everyone who has supported me along the way. I especially offer my heartfelt appreciation to all my current and former students (voice breaking) who have taught me every bit as much about life as I have taught them. Thank you to all the families who have trusted me to work with their most precious resource, their children. Thank you to all my colleagues who have constantly supported, challenged, and inspired me. And finally, while they aren't here with me today, I'd also like to thank my mother and my wonderful wife, Jennifer. Thanks.

(Applause.)

Thank you.

Both my mother and my wife have been there to provide support at critical times behind the scenes that have allowed me to flourish and thrive in my professional roles. After finishing my undergrad in elementary education and my graduate training in education of blind children at the University of North Dakota, I started my career in the late 1990s working as an itinerant teacher of blind students in schools across a county in Oregon. During those years I immediately saw the need for and pursued additional training, eventually earning my master's degree in orientation and mobility in 2000. I enjoyed my career as an O and M specialist. I would like to recognize and thank Carla McQuillan. Who happens to own and operate a few Montessori programs in the area where I happened to be teaching. And one of my first students of braille started their education at Carla's school. I remember her from the early days of my teaching career. She was a strong advocate for students and a fantastic example of a blind adult living their best life for everyone else involved. She also had the opportunity to serve on the board of directors for the Oregon Commission of the Blind. Carla, you've been an excellent role model for me and so many others. Thank you.

(Applause.)

I served as a teacher and O and M specialist until 2010, when I made the transition to administration. I was hired to coordinate one of Oregon's 8 regional blind and low vision programs and manage the implementation of legislation that had resulted in the closing of the Oregon School for the Blind. As an administrator, one of my proudest accomplishments was helping create the first online assessment accessible to braille readers.

This development led to a braille embosser capable of producing tactile graphics, a 40 resolution braille display, and refresh able braille readers for every student in Oregon schools.

(Applause.)

Serving at WSSB has allowed me to have a statewide and national impact on improving services and supports for blind children. At WSSB we are able to provide the full continuum of services and supports, all in the name of accomplishing our mission of empowering blind individuals to reach their full potential.

We offer a wide range of short and long term service options which include but are not limited to residential, day, short courses, online as well as itinerant, direct, and indirect options to meet the needs of students we serve. We also partner with others to provide a range of transition options as well as a materials production and distribution center that reaches well beyond the borders of Washington. Today, while I serve as superintendent of WSSB, I also continue to learn as I work towards a doctorate in educational leadership.

This fall, I hope to begin the formal dissertation stage of my program as I aim to complete a qualitative study about the educational experiences of blind children of color in the Pacific Northwest. My study will seek to center of voices of these young adults so we can learn more about the complexities associated with their intersectional identities and lived experiences.

(Applause.)

I'm almost done, I promise!

(Laughter.)

It's been quite a run for me so far and I look forward to the future. I'm fortunate to have the opportunity to serve and positively impact blind children for the entirety of my career. I've loved and appreciated every opportunity I have had, and I couldn't have done it without the support and guidance of others, such as all of you, the NFB, as well as my fellow teachers and administrators and the regional and national partners that exist in this space. Oh, and a little update about that student that attended one of Carla's Montessori schools. He's in college pursuing his dreams of studying biology and chemistry and becoming a doctor someday.

(Applause.)

He published an article entitled "strategies to protect against age related mitochondrial decay through derivatives". I have no idea what that means, but I know it means he's doing pretty well.

(Laughter.)

And I enjoy being a mentor and friend long after the days I served as his teacher and O and M specialist.

In closing, thank you for choosing me as the 2022 Distinguished Educator of Blind Students. It's an incredible honor to be nominated, let alone chosen to receive this award. I can't thank you enough, and I'll cherish this moment and award as affirmation that I'm headed in the right direction. Thank you.

(Applause.)

(Cheering).

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you, Scott, thank you, Carla, to the committee. Everything you said was worth it, so don't worry about that!

(Laughter.)

SCOTT MCCALLUM: I have one more thing.

(Laughter.)

The $1,000 check, which I'm grateful to receive as a gift, I'll be donating that back to the Washington State chapter of the National Federation of the Blind.

MARK RICCOBONO: Very nice, thank you!

(Applause.)

I'm sure Marci will take it!

(Laughter.)

Okay, today is sometimes known as board meeting day, but in other ways, division day. Our divisions will be meeting today. And I want to remind our divisions that changes in officers should be e-mailed to Beth Braun in the office of the president. Her e-mail address is bbraun@nfb.org. Or you can bring them up at any time in braille during the convention. I'll serve as her reader. But we'd like to know about changes in divisions as soon as possible.

Also, divisions are an integral part of the National Federation of the Blind. They operate within the Federation and their purpose is to build and strengthen the organization, not divide it. The board of directors has established standards for divisions, and that includes asking each division to submit, after this convention, an annual report. Seems like when there are transitions in leadership, we hear that people didn't know about annual reports! So you all know! There will be an annual report due to the Office of the President no later than August 15th of this year. We have not sent the divisions the report format. But it will be the same as it has been. It's basically asking for information from the annual meeting.

Also this year, we changed the membership year for the divisions to be the calendar year, so that all Federation memberships were on the same calendar year cycle. So divisions should keep that in mind.

We have a number of committees in the National Federation of the Blind. And committees are appointed by the president with the exception of the Nominating Committee, which will be appointed tomorrow by the convention.

We invite people to express their interest in committee appointments. You can do that at the information desk, or we have an online form that you can fill out on the website, and we had hoped last year to change the pattern of committee appointments to post-convention, but we went with the calendar year again, so I'm not making any promises this year! But we do need to know your interest in being on a committee. Committee appointments are available to any blind person -- well, any person in the organization who is a member in good standing.

We have a number of partnerships to celebrate at this convention. It's a good opportunity to thank all of our sponsors and exhibitors at this convention!

(Applause.)

One of the interesting organizations in and around the convention, thanks to Everette Bacon, is Netflix!

(Applause.)

And Netflix wants you to know that they will be hosting an exclusive screening of Stranger Things, season 4 -- (cheering) -- for this convention, tomorrow evening, July 8th, at 7:30 p.m., in the Pretamia Theater in the shops at Canal Place. It's about a 6-minute walk from here.

This exclusive screening, I'm told, will include free concessions and exclusive NFB Stranger Things swag! (Cheering).

I don't know what that means...

(Laughter.)

But having watched season 4, I'm horrified.

(Laughter.)

I'm not gonna be a spoiler, though, not giving anything away!

So, if you're interested in going, you can go to Netflixscreenings.splashthat.com. Or Netflix says you can just show up with your convention wristband and tag to attend the screening. I encourage you to sign up online, but if you don't, you can head down the street to the theater. I think Everett will be there

EVERETTE BACON: I'll be there!

(Laughter.)

MARK RICCOBONO: So, another important partnership from this last year has been our continued work with the World Blind Union. And -- yeah!

(Applause.)

 -- absolutely! We have been a long-time member, since the beginning of the World Blind Union, and this year, extra special, we got together with the World Blind Union to help provide relief for blind people displaced by the war in Ukraine.

(Cheering).

And there's a new CEO at the World Blind Union. We've had previous CEOs on the agenda. And we wanted to invite the new CEO of the WBU to be together with us at this convention, at this board meeting, to celebrate our work on the effort to establish the Ukrainian Unity Fund of the World Blind Union. Now, it turns out that Marc Workman, who's the CEO, had a little encounter with, uh, a certain virus...

(Crowd groaning).

While he's been traveling around the world. So he's with us on Zoom. Marc, I hope you're here.

MARC WORKMAN: I'm here.

(Cheering and applause).

MARK RICCOBONO: You're here, great! So if Marc had been here in person, we'd hand him an envelope with a check, but we'll send it to the WBU. But I'm happy to announce to Marc Workman, to contribute to the effort of the fund, we've sent along to the WBU $59,318.94!

(Applause.)

So, Marc, the floor is yours.

MARC WORKMAN: Thank you, President Riccobono, good morning to all the board of directors, Federationists, and all of you listening in around the world. I'm actually in New Orleans at the moment, but can't be there in person quite yet. As President Riccobono noted, I've been traveling a lot lately, and I guess it was it was probably inevitable that I ended up contracting COVID. I did self-isolate the recommended 5 days before traveling here, and I'm still experiencing some mild symptoms. I'm hoping I will test negative very soon and can join the convention in person. So I don't want to take up too much of your time, but I know you've got some work to do, but I did want to share just a few comments along with my thanks for the generous support.

So this is not actually my first NFB convention! I was, back in 2006 in Dallas, and I've always wanted to attend again, and I'm so pleased to be here -- well, sort of, anyways!

I was a university student back in the early 2000s, studying at the University of Alberta. And I always love to point out to Federationists that Dr. TenBroek was a fellow Albertan of mine, probably one of Alberta's greatest exports, in my view.

(Laughter.)

Now, I was taking some philosophy courses in the early 2000s, and out of curiosity, I typed the words "philosophy" and "blindness" into a sort of new website at the time, with kind of a strange name. It was called "Google".

(Laughter.)

And this site pointed me to a bunch of speeches from an organization that I had never heard of called the National Federation of the Blind. Long story short, I spent probably the next week or so reading pretty much every banquet speech that was available, and I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that my encounter with the National Federation of the Blind really changed the course of my life. I would not be in the role that I'm in today if I hadn't encountered NFB.

Now, I want to share one more really quick story. I was in Poland last week -- it feels like a month ago, but it was last week -- and I met with some representatives of the Polish Association of the Blind. And I just happened to mention that I was coming to this convention, and they told me that some of their staff had attended NFB training centers in the late '90s. In fact, the only blind orientation and mobility instructor in ALL of Poland learned his skills at the National Federation of the Blind Training Center.

(Cheering and applause).

Why am I sharing these stories? Because whether intentional or not, the NFB is having an impact all over the world. Whether it's a kid at university in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, or an orientation and mobility instructor in Poland, the NFB is impacting people all across the world. And my message is that the world needs more National Federation of the Blind.

(Applause.)

In my role at the World Blind Union, I'm looking forward to continuing to work with NFB leadership to make sure that this happens.

So this incredible donation from the NFB is an example of the tremendous good that results when the Federation turns its attention towards an issue. So thank you so much to the generosity of hundreds of Federationists to the staff and leadership, and of course, to President Riccobono. Thank you to all those individuals. Because of you, thousands of blind Ukrainians inside and outside Ukraine are going to receive support and assistance that they would not have otherwise received. So please, look out for us, the World Blind Union, on Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube, whatever you prefer. That's the best way to keep in touch with us and hear the latest on the Ukrainian Unity Fund. Thank you to everyone, thank you to President Riccobono. And I hope to be able to join you in person very soon.

(Applause.)

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you very much, Marc, I hope you recover quickly, and thank you for taking all the responsible steps to take care of yourself and others. Thank you for that. Such a pleasure to be part of the World Blind Union, and to be part of these partnerships. If you have not tuned in to the concert, it is still available, I'm confident, at mushroomfm.com. You should listen to it, maybe not at this convention, because it is almost 12 hours!

(Laughter.)

But there's a lot of great content, and by many performers, including many from our performing arts division!

(Cheering).

So, yeah, great work.

Here to give some updates on our outreach efforts is our director of outreach. She helps steward many of our partnerships. Patti Chang.

(Applause.)

PATTI CHANG: Thank you, Mr. President, and thank you to the convention. I want to begin by thanking our partners. We have sponsors and exhibitors at this convention, and I want to make sure we stop by the exhibit hall, and as you see these vendors in the halls, please thank them for sponsoring us.

At the top of the sponsorship pyramid is our elite sponsor, and this one is new to us. It is Kellogg's, as in the cereal company.

(Applause.)

And our platinum sponsors, Essential Accessibility. Google. This is another new one -- horizon Therapeutics. Microsoft. UPS -- that's a long standing partnership, please especially thank UPS. Vispero, another long standing partnership. Wells Fargo. Our gold sponsor, Amazon, Brown, Goldstein & Levy --

(Applause.)

 -- Oracle, Target, Waymo.

Silver: AIRA, AT&T, Cruise, Humanware, JP Morgan Chase, that's the bank, Market Development Group, Pearson.

Bronze sponsors include the following: American Printing House, Chris Park, Spectrum, ETS -- Educational Testing Services -- McDonald's, as in you go to McDonald's to get the burger.

(Laughter.)

Mobile Voting Project. Vital Source Technologies.

White Cane sponsors: The Chicago Light House. Clusive. D2L Corporation. Democracy Live. Another long standing partner, Duxberry Systems. Envision Inc. Good Maps Inc. HIMS. Smart cities. Independence Science Tactile Engineering. Leader Dogs for the Blind. Lyft. McGraw-Hill. National Industries for the Blind. Personal AI. Rosen, Bien, Galvan & Grunfield.

And that concludes our sponsor list. Please do thank them, though. This is a big part of what we do. It helps support our programs, not just the convention.

(Applause.)

And these partners often partner with us on other things as well. So stop by the exhibit hall, and the first thing you should say to people is, thank you for sponsoring our convention, we appreciate you.

Another thing that we did this year that's really made a difference is we have a new donate page. Many of you have noticed this. The new donate page directly integrates with our, not just our processor, but into our connections database.

We do still have a vehicle donation program. And I want to have you encourage people, friends, family, yourself, if they want to donate a vehicle, you can call 855 -- and the rest of this should be familiar -- 659-9314. So just put an 855 in front of our main office number and you've got the number for vehicle donations.

Green Drop -- we are taking household goods. Please, gently used household goods!

(Laughter.)

And this program is in 7 states. I'll just quickly read them: Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey, New York, and District of Columbia.

The number for Green Drop is 888-944-3767. 888-944-3767. If you don't live in those states, I'm sure you know people who do. Green Drop does both pickup and dropoff sites.

And finally, I want to talk to you about something that's near and dear to my heart, which is our Legacy Society. We have our Legacy Society. It's called the Dream Makers Circle. Many of us have gained immeasurable things from the National Federation of the Blind. I for one want to pay it forward, and pay it back. One of the easiest ways to do that is to join the Dream Makers Circle.

Legacy giving is normally giving that you give after you pass. And it can be as simple as going into the bank and filling out a form and telling them that you wish to leave a percentage of that account to the National Federation of the Blind. It can be complex, too, depending on your circumstances. But it's easy for most of us.

Please visit our planned giving page, or give me a call -- my extension is 2422 -- to discuss. There will be a Dream Makers Circle table in the back of the general session room. You can visit it at any time.

Now, for those of you that are already a Dream Makers Circle member, please do two things. First, come get your ribbons! They'll be at general sessions. And we will also have them at the second thing that I wanted to mention, which is our Dream Makers Circle recognition event. For those of you who are already a member, and I guess if you make a decision quickly, you can become a member in the next day, we have a special event planned where you can come and do a Q&A with Dan Parker, who broke the record for fastest blindfolded driver ever. That will be July 8th. If you need any information, please reach out to me. July 8th, Dream Makers Circle members, come to the recognition event. That's all I have, Mr. President, thank you.

(Applause.)

MARK RICCOBONO: All right, we have a few items left, but they're very important. Here to talk about the White Cane Fund is, from Utah, Everette Bacon.

EVER LEE HAIRSTON: Thank you, Mr. President. Hello, fellow Federationists, it's great to be here with you in New Orleans. I'm here to talk about an important campaign, the Give 20 campaign. How many you know what the Give 20 campaign is? How many of you have already given 20?

(Applause.)

Okay! If you haven't, you still have an opportunity to do this. Give 20 is basically a way for you to give back to the Federation, and you could be entered into a drawing to win a fabulous trip to Houston, Texas, to attend the National Federation of the Blind 2023 Convention!

(Applause.)

You will get airfare for two. You'll get hotel accommodations for two. And you will get $1,000 walking around money! So, pretty darn cool.

Now, if you do win and you decide that you don't want to come to convention, which I don't understand why anyone would want to do that, there is a cash prize you can get instead.

So, the cool thing about that is, you now have a chance to tell your friends and family to also give 20. They can be entered into the drawing. So maybe you have a friend or family that might not want to come to a convention, but they want a chance to give money and they can be entered into a drawing to do so. Well, now is their chance! So Give 20. We're pretty excited, because we were given a generous match by Humanware of $50,000. So we have a chance to raise $50,000, and Humanware would match that $50,000. We can do that, can't we, Federationists?

(Applause.)

Okay! So right now, this has been going on since May 1st, it's going to go all the way to July 10th at 3:00 p.m., so at 3:00 p.m. we'll stop taking the donations, but you have still plenty of time to do that. Right now, we're at a total of 19 thousand $600 raised, so we're just under $20,000. 253 people have donated. Pretty good. I think we can get a lot better. I think we can get to that $50,000 mark. There are lots of ways to give. You can give online, in Crowd Compass there's a link to Give 20. You can give 20 dollars to whichever fund you choose. You have many to choose from, the White Cane Fund, which I'm chair of, which is our general fund -- this funds many of the different programs and resources that the National Federation of the Blind does. Just to mention a few: The BELL Academy. The STEM Q. Of course, our white canes, and all kinds of other things. But you can also give to the other funds you're going to hear about -- the Jernigan Fund, the tenBroek Fund, and the SUN Fund. $20 gives you one drawing. If you want to give 40, 60, 80, 100, it goes up from there. With each $20 you get another chance to win. You can also call 410-659-9314 -- you know that number -- extension 2340. And that will get you to where you can leave a message and someone from our great staff will call you back and take down your information. That's another way you can give, through phone call there. Lots of ways to give 20. It's a pretty exciting program. I hope you'll take advantage of it and enter into that drawing, and one last thing, Mr. President. I'm proud to serve as the president of the National Federation of the Blind of Utah. And I'm excited to bring to you today a check in the amount of $14,250. This is a generous trust donation that the National Federation of the Blind of Utah was able to get. I'll pass it down to Pam Allen and I'm sure she'll pass it down to you.

(Laughter.)

Thank you, and let's build the National Federation of the Blind!

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you, Everett. I almost said you can give it to Norma. Norma has been serving as our acting treasurer for the last few months. So thank you, Everette. Thank you to all our Give 20 donors. We really appreciate it, and we appreciate the spirit of sharing, which is what we do in the National Federation of the Blind, and we always honor those affiliates that split bequests that come with the national organization.

Another fund that's been mentioned is our SUN Fund. This is our rainy day fund that we have. And here is the chair of that fund, from Virginia, Sandy Halverson.

(Applause.)

SANDY HALVERSON: Good morning, National Federation of the Blind members and members of our board of directors. Times have changed, and in this report, just remember that we are working on the calendar year from January 1st through May 31st. And as our president said, SUN is our rainy day fund. And the cool thing about SUN is you can give monthly, if you wish. You can give annually at this national convention if you wish. And there are other ways we can talk about giving. And I would say to my fellow board member, Tracy Soforenko, we're gonna change a little bit about how we do things next year! Because this report does not show Virginia as number 1, and that's just wrong!

(Laughter.)

However, you don't have to listen to all of the states that are not contributing yet, but I know they will.

So, number 13. Contributing $25 is the NFB of Texas. Now, you know, this is just January through May. So the year isn't over. 12 is Virginia, with 50. 11, Nebraska, 50. 10, Iowa, 50. 9, Illinois, 50. 8, Florida, 50. 7, Colorado, 50. 6, Oregon, 75.

(Applause.)

5, Washington, 100, go Marci. 4, Arizona, 100. 3, Idaho, at 350.

(Applause.)

2, Ohio, with $500.

(Applause.)

And number 1, South Carolina, $1,260.

(Applause.)

So that gives us a states total from January 1st through May 31 of $2,710, an amount not attributable to states is $1,085. So our grand total of those figures is $3,795, and our total SUN assets are $1,601,599.64.

Our rainy day fund is something we obviously hope we will not need. And I was impressed that with all of the work that we did during COVID when we did lots of things virtually, none of our SUN assets was needed.

(Applause.)

We don't know when or what it may be needed for, but if we don't have it, we can't use it.

Mr. President, it's a joy and delight to serve as chair of this committee. We'll have a table in the back of the room. We also have ribbons to hand out! So you can just make the rounds and collect all kinds of ribbon. Thank you very much.

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you very much, Sandy!

(Applause.)

On behalf of the PAC plan, we have from the great state of Colorado, Scott LaBarre!

(Applause.)

(Pac-Man theme song playing).

SCOTT LABARRE: HELLLOOOOO my Federation family! How ARE all of you?

(Cheering and applause).

This is your friendly PAC Man, Scott LaBarre. Normally, I'm joined by my fellow PAC-Man, Ryan Strunk, but he is dealing with a medical situation, and he will be back later in the convention, so you'll hear from him.

I'm here to talk to you about one of our most important fundraisers throughout our history, our Pre-Authorized Contribution plan! This program has literally raised tens of millions of dollars for the Federation over its many years. It is a critical program that helps us fund our national treasury so we can give scholarships, run BELL programs, help blind people through our legal cases, so that we can educate the public about what it really means to be blind, and that we can live the lives we want.

That's why PAC is important. Like the other fundraisers, we will have ribbons at the back of the room at our PAC table. And we need to do some serious work on PAC this week. So how does PAC work? It is a way for you to give to the Federation on a monthly basis to help fund our movement. And you can start out at as little as 5 dollars a month, and there is no limit at the top!

(Laughter.)

We do, believe it or not, we've got people on PAC who give several hundred dollars a month, very generous people. But every PAC donation, whether it's $5 or several hundred dollars, makes a difference. I also want to stress that not only can you give on PAC. Your friends, your family, anybody can give on PAC, including divisions, chapters, affiliates,

A lot of our affiliates, divisions, and chapters are on PAC, but not all of them. If you are one of those entities that isn't, please sign up this week. We need your PAC contributions.

All right, how do you sign up? Excellent yes. We have a virtual plethora of ways that you can sign up. And we can do high tech, we can do low tech. Let me talk about one of our highest tech ways to do so. We have a wonderful, amazing, totally accessible web-based form that you can access at any time of the day! 24/7!

(Laughter.)

At nfb.org. And you can guess what it's going to be... slash PAC. In fact, whip out your cell phone right now and go to nfb.org/pac and either create a totally new pledge -- now you can, from beginning to end, sign up on PAC totally online! Now, the other thing you can do is increase your pledge. So please go there right now!!!

Now, starting tomorrow morning, about 15 minutes before the general session starts, you can also sign up at our PAC table!!! Yes, indeed. And we will have friendly PAC assistants there who can hop right online and fill out the form for you. You can also phone us, and we'll call you back and get you signed up, especially for the folks that are out there in the cyber world and listening online, and aren't comfortable with the PAC form online. We can help you. Call us at our special PAC number -- 877-NFB (or 632)-2PAC, or 2722. I'll say the whole thing: 877-632-2722

Okay, there's one final way you can reach out for assistance, that's via e-mail, and we'll get back to you. That's simply pac@nfb.org.

So where are we in terms of overall giving? We're doing okay, but I'm kind of sad, and you don't want to see a PAC Man sad because that means the ghosts will catch up to me and eat me instead of me eating them. So please make the PAC Man happy.

(Laughter.)

Last year I predicted that we would collect well over $500,000 on the PAC plan, and guess what? We did in fact do that.

(Applause.)

But whether it's because of the economy and everything that's been going on in our world, we are now only on pace to collect $474,000 this year. So that means we gotta get a-PACing! And I need your help. I'll give you at the end here some state rankings, but let me talk about some other things quickly. We do have various contests going on here, at convention, our traditional contests. We have Ryan, the PAC Rat, contest. This is for the state affiliate that does the most PAC business at this convention. What does that mean? The state affiliate that has the most increased pledges and new pledges in aggregate. And last year -- ha ha! -- guess where the PAC Rat came? Ryan, he's sitting in my basement still in Colorado, little Ryan! WE, Colorado, won the PAC Rat last year! Let's hear it, Colorado!

(Applause.)

That's kind of anemic! Come on, guys!

(Laughter.)

And we beat out Maryland, so I don't know about you, Maryland, I don't think you'll ever get Ryan back.

So we have Pare, the PACyderm, which goes to the affiliate that increases by the greatest percentage. I'm getting old, but I think it was New Hampshire last year. So, congratulations, New Hampshire.

Then finally, Scott, the PAC Mule, goes to the division with the most activity. And I think that was Parents last year.

So we were going to be awarding all of our PAC critters, as we call them.

Now, on an individual contest basis, we've got a couple different contests going on. First of all, overall drawings. All of those who increase their PAC plan this week will go into a drawing for $250 -- it's a gift card -- that will be given out at the banquet, okay? Then all of you who are starting a new pledge, same thing. $250 drawing in the form of a gift card. Now, every session we're going to be giving away some PAC prizes. We're going to be putting your names into a drawing. Everybody who does some PAC business during a session, as we define them, we'll be putting your names into a drawing, and five people will get $25 gift cards at this time. And I want to thank state affiliates for helping out with these contests. If you haven't helped out yet, please do send in a contribution to our national office. Attention, Bridget Burke, for the PAC contest

We do appreciate your help getting these various gift cards.

So those -- in fact, right now, we're in the middle of what we're calling our first session of PAC contests. So if you sign up now, a new pledge, or increase your pledge, you'll be entered into one of those drawings that I mentioned.

Okay, now, we're going to do two things. We'll mention the states that are over $1,000 in the PAC plan. And right after that, after I talk about number 1, or don't talk about number 1 as the case may be, we'll sing the PAC song.

All right, now, New Mexico, I wish I could mention you in this group. But you're at $967 a month on the PAC plan.

South Carolina at... 1026 bucks a month on the PAC plan!

Number 11, Nebraska! At $1,213 a month on the PAC plan.

Number 10, OHIOOOOO! Hi, Barbara!

(Laughter.)

$1,204 a month on the PAC plan.

Number 9, the state of potatoes, Idaho, $1,262 on the PAC plan.

Number 8, certainly you could do better, considering how many people you have here, but at 1$313 a month, that's Te-has -- that's Texas for all you non-Texan people.

Number 7, at $1,398 a month on the PAC plan, Missouri!!!

All right, number 6, at $1,357.50 a month on the PAC plan, California!

(Cheering).

At 1373 dollars a month on the PAC plan, we have, number 5, Louisiana!

(Cheering).

Come on... okay!

Is anybody from Louisiana here?

(Laughter.)

(Some more cheering).

All right. You're all working, okay, I accept that.

At $1,730 a month on the PAC plan, number 4, Virginia!

(Cheering).

Number 3, Minnesota! At $1,943 a month, go Minnesota, my native state!

Number 2... get ready out there... at $4,144 a month on the PAC plan, Colorado! And still number 1, but listen to this, they've kind of fallen, I don't know what happened to this state, maybe it's because they lost the PAC rat last year, but they're only at $4,589 a month, well within the sights of Colorado, look out, we're coming for you... Maryland!

(Applause.)

So, please, get back to the PAC table, virtually and otherwise, nfb.org/pac, so get on the PAC plan, sign up today! We need your contributions right away.

Funding our movement...

It must be done!

So all our battles can be woooonnnn!

(Speaking) let's go!

(PAC Man sound effect playing).

MARK RICCOBONO: Now, there's some contention about the division that won last year. The seniors seem to think they --

SCOTT LABARRE: Yes, the seniors! I'm almost a senior, and I had a senior moment.

(Laughter.)

Seniors, that's correct.

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you, Scott. Here to give a presentation on behalf of our Blind Educator of the Year award, from the committee, from the State of Missouri, Robin House.

ROBIN HOUSE: Thank you, President Riccobono. Good morning to each and every one of you. I'm proud to announce the recipient of the Blind Educator Award. I wanted to let you know that this award is a significant award, and has been announced for many years, and began in the Blind Educators Division, and continues, and it recognizes blind educators for their hard work, dedication, and commitment in the difficult and challenging field of education.

I want to thank the committee, the Blind Educator of the Year Committee, and those who served on it. This year's committee included Melissa Riccobono --

(Cheering).

Yes, and Dr. Edward Bell, Cayte Mendez, Adelmo Vigil, and Vernon Humphreys. Thank you. Thank you for serving on the committee.

I want to share a quote with you from Albert Einstein. He said that the supreme art of the teacher is to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge. And this year's recipient, and this award is given annually, if a suitable candidate is recognized and selected by the committee, and this year, we do have a person who has gone above and beyond in the field of education. I want to share a little bit about his background, and it is said about him that the students that he works with lighten up when they see him and talk to him, and he is always available to put the students' needs first and let them share and share who they are and become all that they can be. He encourages them to do that by listening, by sharing his experiences, by teaching them. He's there always to go above and beyond to meet their needs. He has compassion and love for his students, which I think he shares that with many of the previous recipients of this award. And I want to also share his credentials. He holds a bachelor's degree in history and social studies. And he also holds a graduate degree in orientation and mobility, and teacher of the visually impaired. He currently is the associate director of Transition and Residential Programs at the Washington State School for the Blind.

(Cheering).

They have some wonderful educators there, right?

(Crowd agreeing).

So please congratulate Corey Grandstaff.

(Cheering and applause).

Corey also is very active in the state of Washington. He serves on their state scholarship committee as the chairperson. He also is the chapter president of the Clark County chapter in Washington State. I am presenting him with a plaque and a check for $1,000. Let me read the inscription on the plaque.

It says: Blind Educator of the Year, National Federation of the Blind, presented to Corey Grandstaff. In recognition of outstanding accomplishments to the teaching profession. You enhance the present. You inspire your colleagues. You build the future. July 7, 2022. Congratulations, Corey.

(Cheering and applause).

Corey will now say a few words.

COREY GRANDSTAFF: I wasn't even this nervous when I went skydiving...

(Laughter.)

But here we go.

I'd first like to say that it's an honor to receive this award. I'd be remiss if I did not thank a few individuals in my life that have made it possible for me to sit here with you all today. First I'd like to thank my state president, Marci Carpenter, who nominated me for this award.

(Applause.)

I'm honored to call Marci a friend and a mentor in my life. So thank you, Marci.

(Applause.)

As was stated, I currently work at the Washington State School for the Blind. It sounds like a fancy title, but what I say it basically is is I'm the vice president during the evening time. I want to say, I thank my wife, Arabia, and there's many nights when I'm supposed to be home for dinner or we're supposed to go on dates or we're sitting down to watch our favorite TV show, and I get that call that says I need to come back to work. Or I need to stay later to handle situations. And she handles that all in stride, supporting me to the end, listening when I come home and share those stories about the struggles my students are having or the successes they've had, and even volunteering for my students. They love when she comes and does their hair and nails for prom

(Crowd awwwing and applauding).

Without Arabia, I would not be standing here today.

I want to share some stories about what make me who I am. I grew up on a horse breeding farm in Ohio, and let me tell you, the conversations we had around the dinner table were interesting, and honestly embarrassing if you had friends over, especially when you invited your first girlfriend over for dinner.

(Laughter.)

What I learned, and have to thank both my brothers, my sister, and my parents for, is "can't ""was not a word in my home. I was never told I could not do something." In fact, when I said I couldn't do something, the response I got was "you can. You just have to find a way to do it."

So I say the same thing to my students on a daily basis. "Can't" cannot be a word that is part of their vocabulary, because the world already expects that as blind people, we can't do things.

(Crowd agreeing and applauding).

I'm a proud alum of the Ohio State School for the Blind, and I want to talk about some teachers that influenced me as an educator. Dan was one of my teachers and he taught me that blind people can do anything we want to do. There was nothing we couldn't do, nothing that could hold us back. Another teacher I had, Jeff, was one of my sighted teachers, actually, and he always taught me to take it to the limit and always give it 110%

In my 10th grade of high school I had the opportunity to attend public school part time. During my junior year, I decided to take AP English. I honestly can't even tell you the teacher's name, but I remember the conversation we had. We sat down one day, because I was getting an F in her class, the first F of my life. And she told me, she said, you can go back to regular English and you can get an A, or you can sit in my class, and you're going to have to work very hard, and you may get a C, but probably not. And what I took away from her was that she held me to the same high expectations as my peers.

(Applause.)

It was the first time in my life I had a sighted teacher in a public school hold me to those same high expectations.

(Applause.)

I have one more story, it's kind of negative, but I want to share -- in grad school, I had a teacher, we'll call him Dennis, and he taught me a valuable lesson. Right before I took his class, we had a meeting. We sat down and he said these exact words to me: Corey, no matter how well you do in my class, no matter how great of a teacher you prove to be, I'm the one who approves student teaching and I will never approve you to student teach.

(Crowd reacts).

What he doesn't know is that when you tell us we can't do something, you just triple motivate us! We're just very determined individuals

(Applause.)

So while this was a negative experience, it taught me to encourage my students in whatever they want to do. I believe that blind people can do anything. I hope when I get on my plane tomorrow, my pilot walks into the cockpit with their white cane tapping.

(Laughter and applause).

So, again, this is an honor. What even makes it more of an honor is I have some of my coworkers and some of my former and current students in the audience today. And I've even had the honor of hiring some of those former students to work for me

(Cheering).

That was a goal of mine when I took this job. Blind people need to be employed. And I have the ability to do that, in the privileged position that I'm in. So educators, do not allow your students to say they can't. Encourage them in whatever their future goal is. Hold your students to those high expectations no matter what. Push them to that limit to give 110%, and don't hold them back. I'd like to thank you, National Federation of the Blind, for this great honor and for the ability to continue the life that I want to live.

(Applause.)

Thank you.

MARK RICCOBONO: Congratulations, and thank you to Robin and the committee for great work. It's so inspiring to observe recognition of these great educators.

I think there are other ones outside of Washington, though!

(Laughter.)

So this is a challenge to other affiliates! These awards will come around again next year. So... let's get some educators nominated.

A partner that we have at this convention and in the Federation is the American Action Fund for Blind Children and Adults, which again is making braille calendars exclusively available at this convention for 2023.

(Applause.)

Board members are getting them right now. But you can get them in the exhibit hall in the free literature area. Also, Federation affiliates are invited to order an allotment of up to 50 braille calendars from the Action Fund by August 31st. You can send an e-mail to actionfund.org. Individuals can order calendars starting in August on the Action Fund's website. Also, the Action Fund sponsors the Braille Book Fair, which will happen this evening. It was responsible for getting 132 boxes of books shipped here to the book fair.

(Applause.)

So go to the book fair and grab the braille books while they last and get them shipped back to your home. The Action Fund does operate the largest free braille books program on a monthly basis. You can learn more about that at the website. And many Federation affiliates participated in last year, and are encouraged to participate this year, in the Braille Readers are Leaders contest in the Action Fund.

(Applause.)

That will kick off in the fall. Information coming soon, but you can also read more in the Braille Monitor.

We have a couple more quick presentations before we get to our scholarship finalists!

Finally, we get to be in person with them.

Here to talk about our Jernigan Fund from Virginia is Tracy Soforenko!

(Applause.)

TRACY SOFORENKO: President Riccobono, members of the board of directors, and members of the National Federation of the Blind, the Jernigan Fund has for more than 20 years supported first time convention attendees to come to their first convention and experience the power of this movement. As part of that work, there's the work of our committee to make all of that happen. Just a few weeks ago, one of our leaders in that movement, Joy Harris, passed away. Joy for many years had supported her husband Allen, who had served as the chair, and for many years, they'd helped work tirelessly to help make it possible for so many people to attend their first convention.

Throughout this week, there will be first-timers, growing, learning, connecting, and surrounded by the power of this Federation family. During the convention, we are able to support 89 individuals and families attending this convention.

(Applause.)

If you are or were a Jernigan Fund award winner, we want to know your stories. We recognize that if you can take a few minutes to share with us something moving and impactful that happened at your convention, we would be really grateful. Here's how you do it. And this kind of sounds like a user story, for those who know what a user story is. You can share your message by sending an e-mail to rookie@nfb.org. You could share your message by calling 410-659-9314 and leaving a message at extension 2020. You could come back to the Jernigan table during general session in the back of the room and talk with one of our members of the committee to help document your story.

These stories will be used to help encourage others to give to the Jernigan Fund. You can give to the Jernigan Fund as part of your Give 20 campaign contribution! But as part of the process, the story might be something like my story.

As a blind dad, I was nervous about being a parent of my blind preschoolers. I came to the convention and met blind parents and observed the alternative techniques and attitudes and approaches blind parents were achieving, and I grew confident that I too could be a capable blind parent to my children. Thank you, Jernigan Fund.

(Applause.)

What is your story? How can we, can you share your experiences from your first convention with us? Rookie@nfb.org, leave a message at extension 2020, come to the Jernigan table to share your stories so we can contribute more to bringing you to your first convention. Thank you.

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you for the work of the committee. I've met many first time attendees, especially the Kenneth Jernigan Scholars.

One more fund to talk about is the tenBroek Fund. The chair of the tenBroek Memorial committee is Kathryn Webster

(Applause.)

She's coming this way.

So, while she comes this way, I'll tell you that the tenBroek Fund owns the land where our National headquarters is, and I think we have the best headquarters of any disability organization in the world!

(Applause.)

And we're in business again, so you can visit!

KATHRYN WEBSTER: I am here, good morning, everyone, Mr. President, everyone attending the convention in person and of course on Zoom. Thank you for coming! Can I get some energy in the room?

(Applause.)

President Riccobono hit the nail on the head that we have a beautiful headquarters that spans the block of a Baltimore street. We are doors open in our new normal and really excited to welcome as many members and prospective members as possible to our family in Baltimore. So keeping it short and sweet, since I am here between you and the best part, or one of the best parts of our board meeting, our scholarship students. But please support our headquarters. You can find me in the back of general session all day every day, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. And we would love individuals, affiliates, of course, to support us. But please, share the word, and we've got a lot of in-progress things at our headquarters. So please do support us! Thank you. Have an awesome convention!

(Applause.)

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you to Kathryn and to the members of our tenBroek board.

Okay, we've now come to a part of the convention which I know has continued to be interesting while we were in the virtual convention, but we really missed having it live and in person, and that's our scholarship program!

(Cheering and applause).

By the way, quick shoutout to our 2020 and 2021 scholarship award recipients who are here. Where are you?

(A few whoops and laughter).

They're all in the corner, or they're in the elevator! Maybe that's what it is.

(Laughter.)

They are here! I got to meet many of them in person for the first time at a reception last evening. So make sure you congratulate them as well. This is a dynamic committee. It takes a lot of work. And the person that coordinates it is from New York. She's an educator as well. And I can't say enough about the tremendous effort she makes to make this program fly. Even as we've thrown new changes at her this year, she worked through it all during the pandemic. She's a great chair. Here is Cayte Mendez!

(Applause.)

CAYTE MENENDEZ: Okay! Good morning, President Riccobono and members of the board. This is -- there are so many wonderful parts of convention every year, but this is one of my favorite. First thing I need to know is, can everyone hear me okay?

Talk louder? How about that!

Okay, I can do teacher voice! I just don't want to give microphone feedback because all the musicians in the room will judge me.

(Laughter.)

Okay, so, this is a program of which I was a beneficiary in 2001. It's a program that the board generously agrees to maintain and continue every year. The board voted to make some changes to the program that I think will make the program more about mentorship, more about making -- finding a home in the Federation, finding a place, and celebrating the folks that are honored by our named scholarships rather than worrying about what digits are before the comma.

(Laughter.)

So this year, the scholarship class is blazing trails with the new iteration of this program, and I hope that they're as excited as I am to be a part of this work.

This program honors academic aptitude, scholastic excellence, leadership, community service, creativity, mentorship, and all of the things that we value here in the Federation. So it is always my privilege every year to introduce these 30 finalists to all of you.

This year I'm going to start off -- oh, I'll announce the finalists by their first name, last name, their home state, and for some of these folks they've also asked that I identify a home country, and I'll do that as well. Their state where they're going to school, and their vocational goal. We have three folks in the class this year who are tenBroeks. Dr. tenBroek was a founder and renowned member of our organization. And we honor his memory by awarding folks who are receiving their second scholarship with the tenBroek fellowships.

Okay. First one of our finalists this year is Shawn Abraham, Maryland, United States, and, hold on a second... I do want to ask that, because we are a little short on time, please hold all your applause until the very, very end. I know we want to whoop and carry on for the folks in our state, but I'm going to ask you to hold it.

Now, the students were able to do this last night. I got a room full of 200 students to mostly follow that direction! I hope that all the adults in this room will do that as well.

(Laughter.)

So, Shawn, Abram, Maryland, United States, diplomat.

SHAWN: Hello, everyone. It's always been my goal to fight the limiting attitudes about disability in society, and I've done this through my intense passion for fashion, serving as a resident assistant on my campus, and competing in college wrestling at the national level. Mentoring youth and helping others has always been extremely important to me, in the blind community and beyond. I have a love for learning languages, a deep belief in cultural inclusion, and a strong pride in my own South Asian identity. This is why I'm focusing my education on international relations, to fight, to continue to fight the stereotypes we all face across the globe and to build a better future for everyone. So thank you.

CAYTE MENENDEZ: Okay, there we go! Nancy Aguilera, Missouri, Missouri, researcher and professor of political science.

NANCY: Good morning, everybody. I would say that one of my defining characteristics is determination. Determination has led me to raise two wonderful people in my life! Earned my bachelor's degree of political science and another bachelor's of psychology. And do the everyday mundane things that people think blind people can't do. You know, even things that are challenging, like traveling alone or riding trains. You know, crazy stuff like that, right? Why do you do it? And it's like, determination

I definitely believe that without this characteristic, I would totally be a different person. And I've enjoyed every minute of being so determined. Thank you.

CAYTE MENENDEZ: I'm going to have figure out what the sweet -- there we go, I've got to sit... it moves (microphone feedback), it's like whack-a-mole trying to figure out the sweet spot with this mic.

(Hotel PA announcement in the background).

CAYTE MENENDEZ: I'm sorry, WHAT?

(Laughter.)

They're announcing a lunch somewhere...

(Announcement continues in the background).

CAYTE MENENDEZ: Okay, so, everybody take 2 seconds and have a good laugh about THAT craziness, and let's get right back in. All right, Tasnim Aishuli is one of our tenBroek fellows this year, Arizona, Arizona, professor and consultant.

TASNIM: Hello, everyone, it's such an honor to be given this opportunity a second time. I'm studying for my master’s in education in technology and science, and STEM in general. My goals are always around diversity, equity, and inclusion for the blind and other intersectionalities. Also, I enjoy very much planning and organizing, and being involved in, hence I'm involved in various advisory boards, committees, and so on in the Federation as well as in my community. And specifically, I'm the chair of the NFB Muslims, an active member in Arizona, and scholarship recipient nationally in 2018, and the state scholarship of Arizona in 2017. Thank you.

CAYTE MENENDEZ: All right, Katelyn Beresic, West Virginia, West Virginia, social worker for LGBTQ youth and disabled individuals.

KATELYN: Thank you, everybody. I'm going to go ahead and start off by saying my pronouns are she/they and I identify as nonbinary and bisexual. I'm also on the asexual spectrum. Yes, there are LGBTQ people in West Virginia! Very shocking!

(Some laughter).

I will be an upcoming freshman this year at West Virginia University. I was newly diagnosed with RP about 4 years ago, and since then, I have worked in combination with my TVI, Megan Hoover, who works in West Virginia and Maryland, to learn more about myself. And she's the main reason why I am pursuing social work, as well as advocacy, for individuals with a range of disabilities, including but not limited to visual impairments, hearing impairments, and other mobility-related disabilities.

One thing that I do hope to do is learn sign language in the future, and I really, really want to work in combination with LGBTQ youth, as I do know that that is a large portion that kind of gets overlooked a lot, especially coming from West Virginia, where it's just not talked about at all.

CAYTE MENENDEZ: All right, thank you. Jovan Campbell, New York, New York, community education.

JOVAN: Good morning, everyone. How is everyone doing?

In 2007, I went from totally sighted to totally blind, and I was totally hopeless. And in 2011, I got sepsis and ended up as a partial wheelchair user. And I say all of this to say, I didn't know what I was going to do, but I knew I was going to go back to school. I didn't know how I was going to do it. I just had this promise to myself. And in 2021, I figured it out. How to go back to school. And my arduous journey with my health led me to my major of public health, my beloved major of public health, of which I want to educate my community how to not just live, but live a life of quality. Not just quantity, but quality. So I just thank you for the opportunity to meet all of you guys, meet my class of scholarship winners, and I'm honored and encouraged to just keep going, and not just keep my promise to finish this degree, but go on and get another degree and another degree. Thank you so much, guys.

CAYTE MENENDEZ: All right, Justin Champagne, Louisiana, Louisiana, professor of mathematics. Just a reminder, I know these folks have wonderful stories, but please hold your applause to the end, and a gentle reminder to our class, please, for brevity if you can, I know you have a lot to say.

JUSTIN: Laissez les bon temps rouler, New Orleans! I'm so excited to be here in my home state of Louisiana, and I'm sure that Pam had many protests -- no, I'm kidding, I love you Pam. I'm pursuing my PhD in mathematics from LSU. And my greatest passion is to make math accessible to everyone. So, you know, math is known to be inaccessible to blind people, but the truth is, it's inaccessible to everyone. And that's a problem that I want to help solve for everybody.

CAYTE MENENDEZ: All right. Jenn Doran, Virginia, Oregon. PhD to help vulnerable communities survive climate change.

(Cheering).

JENN: Hi, everyone. So my academic research actually involves sediment flux in the boundary layer. This is a fancy way to say I play with ocean muds. I picked my PhD advisor because he has open access books with everything we would every need to know about climate change, but it's not accessible. In fact, climate change data is not accessible. In 2020, I found myself in a very vulnerable position as Beachy Creek fire was not too far from me, Holiday Fire was on on the South of me, and Harrisburg just set on fire and my husband was not home. So I called my local ADA office and my local mayor, councils, all of that to see what happens if I'm an independent person living by myself, not in a group home or assisted living home, and I need to evacuate and there's nobody. Let's just say what I found there left a lot to be desired.

So my goal is to work with my PhD advisor to make this data accessible so that we can be empowered to advocate for policies to mitigate the dangers of climate change that we face so that no one in our community will perish because of climate change.

CAYTE MENENDEZ: All right, thank you.

Abbie Duffy, New Hampshire, New Hampshire, psychology and criminal justice.

ABIGAIL: Hello, fellow Federationists, I'm 18 years old, this is my 11th convention, my first was when I was 7 years old. I'm an alpine ski racer, and I will be skiing collegiately, and I'm also the current women's champion in three different para-alpine disciplines, so that's a fun fact. I've been a proud Federationist for most of my life, so I'm so happy to be here today. I'd like to thank everyone that I've met along the way for helping me to get to where I am now.

CAYTE MENENDEZ: All right. This class has representatives from several countries outside of the U.S. The first of these is coming up next, Teresa Fabre, currently residing in Illinois, but she's originally from Mexico and going to school in Illinois, vision rehab.

TERESA: Hello, my Federation family. When I graduated from college in culinary arts in 2013, I was definitely not planning to go back to school. Then in 2016, I moved to Chicago, and I had to find a new family there, so that was a lot of fun. And that helped me be aware of the importance of having a community. And then three years later, I lost my vision, and I decided that I wanted to go back to school because I noticed there was a lot of things that needed to be done regarding our blind and visually impaired community, but also the disability community in general. So one of my personal goals is to generate awareness within the general public about us. So we can have a conversation with them and sit with them at the table. So I want them to know us, know that we are people, that we have dreams, that we have goals, that we are not lesser people, and that we deserve equality and the same opportunities as they do. So that's my passion. Thank you all.

CAYTE MENENDEZ: Thank you. Ethan Fung, California, California. Operations management and environment al sustainability.

ETHAN: Hi, everyone, so I'm sure that many of you feel that many of the world's largest businesses and corporations are environmentally draining, self-serving, and cash-hungry cows. But rather than beating a dead cow, I would like to draw your attention to the progress we have made over the last few decades. Among our most innovative companies, we have those who are putting a new emphasis on environmentally sustainable practices, which is fostering not only economic, but social benefits as well. This is why I would like to dedicate my career to helping these forward-thinking companies achieve their goal of making this world more sustainable. And I implore you to help where you can and to join together and take responsibility of your future together. Thank you.

CAYTE MENENDEZ: Izzi Guzman, Florida, Florida, music educator, composer, entrepreneur.

IZZI: Hi, everyone, she/her, I'm diagnosed with albinism, I compose and play trombone music, but most importantly, I want to ensure that students from all cultures, backgrounds, and abilities have access to music education, that music education is accessible for everybody with jazz and popular music centered in the curriculum. Because when you think about it, what's the kind of music that you grew up with and you love? Songs that you listen to on the radio. Think about it. It's jazz and popular music. Songs from R and B, funk, pop. Those are the songs that I want to incorporate for students to learn music and fall in love with music education. Thank you.

CAYTE MENENDEZ: Michael Hardin, Indiana, Indiana, social work.

MICHAEL: Hell o, everyone. It's truly an honor to be here. I'd like to start by saying I'm an active member in the NFB Circle City chapter in Indianapolis. I'm a proud father and role model to three children. Prior to blindness, I worked 7 years as a diesel technician. Right now I'm transitioning into a new career where I plan to work as a generalist social worker upon graduation, with the ultimate goal of starting my own practice. And I would like to leave you guys with a famous quote from Helen Keller that says: The only thing worse than being blind is being sighted with no vision.

Thank you.

CAYTE MENENDEZ: Renae Hemmings, who is residing in New Jersey but is originally from Jamaica, going to school in New Jersey, psychologist and therapist.

RENAE: Hello, everyone, I will be majoring in psychology at university in the fall, and I hope to become a psychologist to help people achieve mental stability and be able to function on their daily and being able to heal from past traumas.

CAYTE MENENDEZ: Natasha Ishaq, New Jersey, New Jersey, and she has the longest vocational goal -- paleoanthropological studies... or law.

(Laughter.)

NATASHA: Hi, everybody! If I've learned anything over the last several years, it's that blindness does not have to translate to living a life of low expectations and ambitions. I've been studying paleoanthropology since my sophomore year and will shortly be taking place in my first excavation. I'm also interested in law and am starting an internship in law to get some experience in the legal field to see if it's a direction I want to go in. I'm also involved in activities on and off campus and am very fortunate to hold leadership positions in almost all of them, including a disability, accessibility, and advocacy organization. Thank you very much for this opportunity. I'm eternally grateful.

CAYTE MENENDEZ: Hunter Kuester, Wisconsin, Wisconsin, business -- brewery and kitchen owner.

HUNTER: Good afternoon, my Federation family. I'm studying hospitality management with a minor in real estate and business. I'm a board member of Wisconsin and newly elected board member of National Association of Blind Students. But the title I hold closest to my heart is five years ago I became a member of this National Federation of the Blind. And I look forward to seeing where I can go in this organization. Thank you.

CAYTE MENENDEZ: We have a number of parents in this group, including our next, Maura Kutnyak, attorney.

MAURA: Good afternoon, these are the lights of my life, three children, my husband, and friends. My expression in aerial dance, finishing my study at Buffalo School of Law, and being a teaching fellow with my constitutional law professor. And serving as president of New York Parents of Blind Children, secretary of my chapter. NEWSLINE outreach coordinator in New York. Among other things. For all of this I am tremendously grateful. Thank you.

CAYTE MENENDEZ: All right, Robert Lamm, Colorado, Colorado, environmental engineer.

ROBERT: Hello, everybody. Prior to my vision loss, I was one of the youngest certified master gardeners in Colorado. After my vision loss, that led me to deciding to become an environmental engineer, to scale up de salination processes, to try to fix the water crisis in the West. Secondarily, I want to work on pollution with microplastics. Besides giving back to the world, I look forward to giving back to the blind as well, so thank you.

CAYTE MENENDEZ: Katie Lester. I do want to say our Scholarship class comes from 26 states, large states, small states, states that would rattle if you shook them. The person from the farthest state is Katie Lester, student, social worker, therapist.

KATIE: Hello, everyone, I lost my vision in 2018 in my 30s, and have various personal experiences that led me to my degree to be able to counsel others who have lost their vision or have another disability who are struggling or wanting to work through and live the lives that they want.

So helping them to do that, and getting more access in the education arena on the college level, or any, if I can, are my goals.

Personally, I am just amazed at how quickly, and being able to remind myself through the personal experiences of everyone's help, that I'm never alone and there's always someone willing to help you and support you.

I am a board member of the Alaska division of the NFB, as well as volunteer at the Alaska Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Thank you very much.

CAYTE MENENDEZ: Casey Martin, North Dakota, North Dakota, speech languages therapist.

CASEY: Hello, my current research topic is people with disabilities' experience in the speech health care profession, and I look forward to an externship in a school for the blind this upcoming spring, as well as a clinical fellowship starting next summer. Through a number of different social science courses, one of my main philosophies is that personal autonomy and independence or freedom comes from choice, and in order to exhibit choice, we need to work on enhancing and empowering communication.

CAYTE MENENDEZ: All right. This next finalist is another one of our tenBroek fellows. I know it's going to be really hard for some of you in here, but I'm going to ask you again to hold your applause. Daniel Martinez, Texas, Texas. They're trying valiantly, but they're struggling, I can hear them there, educator of blind students

DANIEL: I was entered into the disability hall of fame from the national disability mentoring coalition in 2019, because of my efforts in mentoring. I value peer mentoring. At this convention, I'm mentoring students from the Texas mentoring program, the best program in the state, and in the nation, in the NFB. Led by Norma Crosby

And, well, I'm looking for mentors. I'm a student and I can help you, and I'm connected with all of you. But I'm a new parent, so I'm looking for parents to talk to.

Thank you!

CAYTE MENENDEZ: All right, Sarah Menefee, Texas, Oklahoma. Registered dietitian.

SARAH: Hi, everyone. I will be attending the University of Tulsa next year, majoring in biology. I was recruited to row on their division I team, and I'm very excited about that, because it was one of my more important goals in life. As a rower, I have achieved two national championships. And I enjoy hobbies such as ceramics, hiking, biking, swimming, just generally being outdoors, and I'm so excited to be here this week. Thank you.

CAYTE MENENDEZ: Selene Monjarez, Tennessee, Connecticut, mental health and therapist.

SELENE: I was the only student at my school to pass all my state dual credit exams. They're useless now because I'm studying out of state, so those credits don't matter.

(Laughter.)

But less than 2% of people pass exams like the world history one, and I was one of that 2% in my state that did. So I learned that I'm smarter and more capable than I thought I was before.

I had the honor of serving as vice president of our chapter of Special Olympics, served in key club, honor society, other organizations like that. And that taught me that I am capable of leading, and I shouldn't be afraid of that.

I don't really have a goal right now. I'm in this weird place where I'm about to start college in the fall. So I've finished high school, about to start college. I just hope that whatever I do, I can serve the world around me, and that includes everyone in this room. You are part of the world, and I hope to serve as best I can.

CAYTE MENENDEZ: Julia Murray, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania. Occupational therapist.

JULIA: Good afternoon, Federation. Growing up, I've had many supports, such as my teacher of the Deaf and hard of hearing who has taught me how to advocate with the world around me. I also had the teacher of the visually impaired and an O and M teacher that has taught me how to navigate the world around me, and also the director of the adapted sports program for the blind and visually impaired has given me so many different opportunities to play so many different sports, such as skiing, paddleboarding, and blind ice hockey. Because of these people, I want to be able to do the same they did for me for other people. So the reason I chose occupational therapy specifically is because their ultimate goal is to work with people with daily skills that they need every single day.

CAYTE MENENDEZ: Thank you. Okay, Finf Paynich, Washington, Washington, musical theater.

FINN: Hi, as stated, my name is Finn and my pronouns are they/them, and that's something that sometimes sets me apart from others. If it isn't my transness, then it's my blindness or my queer sexuality or my neuro divergence. I've been working on my pride in my intersectional identities, and safe spaces such as the theater community, Pride events, and this convention are really teaching me to take up space as a queer disabled person. In the presence of such great community, I often feel that I'm able to truly be myself. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to stand up here and take up that space, and for the opportunity to attend the arts school of my dreams. It will give me the skills I need to be a professional theater artist. I will use that platform as an artist to advocate for fellow disabled and LGBTQ people, as well as continue to be politically active.

CAYTE MENENDEZ: All right, Emily Schlenker, Kansas, Kansas, pharmacy.

EMILY: Hello, everyone. We had such an amazing and dynamic NABS session last night, and one of the things that was talked about last night was building bridges. And I want to share something with all of you that happened to me in the last two years that really brought this home for me. In 2020, I received a very clear denial of my application to pharmacy school based specifically on my blindness. I was pretty much told in this letter that there were three things I could not do. I could not give vaccines. I could not look at prescriptions. And I could not find errors in those prescriptions. So I called the National Federation of the Blind, and as we talked about last night, we're always building bridges in one way or another. But what I would like to say to go along with that is that every bridge needs shoring up, and every person building bridges sometimes needs shoring up. And I was so privileged and honored to have a meeting that was basically between myself and the pharmacy school, and Scott LaBarre and Tom Page, and they shored me up, and I had a very rare opportunity to advocate for myself to the same people who had denied my entrance into the pharmacy program. And I can also say now that not only am I a proud student of the Kansas University School of Pharmacy, but I have in fact passed three of those milestones they said I could not passed. I have given an injection. I have drawn and dosed the vaccine. I have also checked prescriptions, and I have also found errors and corrected them. Thank you very much

(Cheering and applause).

CAYTE MENENDEZ: Carla Scroggins is also a tenBroek fellow, California, California. Global security analyst and diplomatic strategist.

CARLA: Good morning, everybody. Board, thank you for this opportunity. I cannot tell you what it means for me to have the opportunity to once again be believed in by my Federation family and my tribe. I am just starting my master's program at Johns Hopkins University for a masters in global security, strategic studies. Some of the values we fight for so much in this organization come from our liberal values of equality, and that all comes from security to make it possible on a global scale, not just country or regionally specific. Thank you.

CAYTE MENENDEZ: Bhavya Shaw, originally from India, California, data science.

BHAVYA: Hello, I'm a regular geek, I'm majoring in computational science at college, a bunch of cool buzzwords, and when I'm not obsessing about code, I participate in debate. Very cool. I won the world championship, so people don't like to get into arguments with me, except my mother, and she always wins.

(Laughter.)

I care about giving back. I'm a long time contributor to the NVDA screen reader project and I also serve on my university's disability task force. And I also care about learning and growing and living my best life, which is why I moved halfway across the world from the corners of Mumbai to pursue studies at my dream school, Stanford University. Which is why I'm spending this summer acquiring blindness skills and confidence at the Louisiana Center for the Blind. Thank you.

(Cheering).

CAYTE MENENDEZ: All right, Kateyln Siple, Maryland, Pennsylvania, administrative leadership in not for profit ministries.

KATELYN: One of my goals this year is to grow in confidence and be a better version of me, which includes making decisions and being decisive in what I want. My goal is to travel and do what I love. Hello, Federationists, it's great to be with you. I'm 24 years old, a recent graduate of the Louisiana Center for the Blind, a senior at Lancaster Bible College, and my goal is to help people in what they do in nonprofit and social work. I set up a platform on social media to be a positive role model, to encourage, and inspire, and -- sorry, and thank you very much for this opportunity.

CAYTE MENENDEZ: Stephanie Valdes, Massachusetts, Massachusetts.

Interpreter and translating.

STEPHANIE: Good afternoon, Federation family. I want to start off by saying I was actually one of those sighted people at one point who thought that blind people couldn't do much. And when I lost my vision after graduating high school, I thought that my world had collapsed, and that was pretty much it for my life. I soon realized that was not it, and that blindness was not the characteristic that defined me. So, I am now a major in French, bilingual in English and Spanish, determined to break the barriers that are put in place by languages in society to give the opportunity for people to have a better quality of life and equality. At the same time, I strive to do that same thing for the blindness community with my everyday actions and changing people's perception of blind people one certain at a time, just by doing normal things like being a mother, being a wife, and attempting to launch my own business of self-care products.

I hope to be an example, an inspiration to not only current generations but next generations, by simply living the life I want how I want to live it. Thank you.

CAYTE MENENDEZ: Last but not least, Colin Wong, Washington, Washington, adult education and blindness education researcher.

COLIN: Thank you so much. I told myself I wasn't going back to school, but life has a way of doing that today. In fall I'll be pursuing a PhD in teaching and leadership with a concentration in adult education and professional development. My greatest accomplishment so far has always been my national orientation and mobility certification, because it has provided me with an opportunity to witness how an quality education can change the trajectory of a student's life. It also has taught me that there are many students who do not get the opportunity to get a quality education that they deserve, and that there are gaps in education that are not discussed outside of this room, including the gap of quality educators needed in rehabilitation education and nontraditional students who are adults with and without disabilities.

So my goal is to become a university professor and develop research to improve the educational system in both of these concentrations. Thank you.

CAYTE MENENDEZ: All right, Mr. President, members of the board --

(Applause.)

 -- I present to you the class of 2022.

(Cheering and applause).

MARK RICCOBONO: Congratulations to our finalists, and thank you to Cayte and the committee for an excellent selection of a class and for the work that's being done to mentor these young folks throughout the convention. Let's give them another round of applause.

(Applause.)

I wonder how the board feels about continuing the program next year.

It's been seconded by many to continue the scholarship program next year. Any discussion? All those in favor say aye.

(Many board members saying aye).

Opposed?

(Silence).

All right, it shall be done.

If we have Scott LaBarre, we have one other item for this board meeting and that's a quick set of announcements from Scott LaBarre, who serves as general counsel to the Federation. We do a lot of legal work, but we try to do that work very strategically to make sure that we're placing our resources in the right place, and I wanted to give Scott a quick opportunity to talk about some of the legal pieces that we're pursuing at this convention. So here's Scott LaBarre!

(Applause.)

SCOTT LABARRE: Thank you.

Trying to get... thank you very much, Mr. President.

It is indeed my honor and privilege to serve as this organization's general counsel. We run a multimillion dollar legal advocacy program. And we have a great team of people. Many of you know, of course, Valerie Yingling.

(Cheering).

Who unfortunately could not be with us this week, due to some family matters she is pursuing. And the major thing you need to know about our legal program is to get in touch with us either through Valerie at 410-659-9314, extension 2440, or vyingling@nfb.org. Or get a hold of me, slabarre@nfb.org, or 410-659-9314, extension 2424. I should have sold my extension to Vanda Pharmaceuticals, but they're not here this year.

(Laughter.)

I'm going to talk quickly about areas of interest that we have, and we want your help if you've experienced barriers or have information about any of the following: USA Hire is an employment agency online that tries to get people jobs, and they do preemployment assessments. Our understanding is those assessments are inaccessible. If you've encountered barriers about USA Hire, please let us know.

Section 508. How many here work for the federal government, say aye.

(Noise from the crowd).

How many of you have experienced barriers in technology from the federal government?

(Louder cheers).

I need to hear from you to know what they are. I've spoken with two women from Florida yesterday experiencing awful barriers. You'd think it would get better some 38 years after the law was passed. It's getting worse. We need your stories. We're acting not only at a legal level but at a Congressional level. And you'll hear about that this week.

All right, how many deal with the Social Security Administration? Say aye.

(Ayes from the crowd).

Well, they promised that all their kiosks would be accessible, and then the pandemic happened and their offices closed. They still promised us the kiosks would be accessible. The offices are open again and guess what? The stories we're hearing are that they are no. -- not.

If you have experienced an SSA kiosk when you check into your local field office, etc., please let us know what experience you have been having.

Now I want to turn quickly to some of the tools that we have. These are all available, by the way, at nfb.org/legal. We have a self-advocacy in higher education toolkit. A self-advocacy in employment toolkit. A high-stakes testing toolkit. A blind parents essential guide to effective communication toolkit. Woe then have legal surveys that we want folks to take to find out what's going on. All of these are available off our legal webpage. Access to COVID-19 vaccines and testing survey.

A ride share survey.

Access to digital libraries survey.

Education technology survey.

These are learning platforms, used now especially during the pandemic era.

Unemployment insurance survey. A travel survey. A transportation survey. We need you to please go to our website, fill out these surveys. That data is what we use to figure out where we're going to set our legal priorities.

Now, about the cases we're working on -- all I can recommend to you is this. Listen to something called the presidential report that we will hear tomorrow. You'll hear some of those cases. You can also tune in and drop by the lawyers' meeting this afternoon, where we're going to talk a little bit about our cases.

Again, it is a privilege and honor to work for you, to assert our right to live in this world, and make the world a better place.

Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you very much, Scott, and appreciate everybody helping out with collecting data for our legal efforts. I know that it's been a long meeting. We've been apart for a number of years, and people have forgotten how to keep it short! That's okay!

(Laughter.)

No, no, that's okay. It is still very exciting to be together! So thank you all for coming to the board meeting. We will stand adjourned until 9:30 a.m. tomorrow.

(Gavel banging).