# National Federation of the Blind

# 2022 National Convention

# General Session IV

## July 9, 2022

## 1:30 p.m. – 5:28 p.m. CT

## \* \* \* \* \*

## This is being provided in a rough-draft format. Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) is provided in order to facilitate communication accessibility and may not be a totally verbatim record of the proceedings

## \* \* \* \* \*

MARK RICCOBONO: Do we have a door prize to kick things off?

BENNETT PROWS: Hey, what a great idea! We have a virtual one first, going to Martha Andres of Texas. $25 Independence Market certificate.

Our door prize in person is for 50 bucks and it goes to Jermaine Nelson, South Carolina. Not there? How about Sharon Blanks of Delaware? We don't see her. We don't recognize her. You have to ask her...

Okay. How about Ron Brown from Indiana? Mr. Second Vice President.

[Cheering]

MARK RICCOBONO: He knows how to win a door prize.

Happy anniversary, Ron. First one in 30 years, he says. Patience pays off.

[Laughter]

Now, yesterday we didn't get a chance to do this, but now I believe we only have one person at this convention that came to the convention in the 1950s. I don't know if he's in the room. Tom Bickford, are you here? There he is, in the back. Tom is going to turn 90 later this month!

[Applause]

He was here in the 1950s. Congratulations, Tom.

Now who came to the convention first in the 1960s? They're all on the right side of the room over here. Small group. But we talked about Jan at her 61st consecutive national convention.

[Applause]

Now who first came to the convention in the 1970s?

[Applause]

Okay. Okay. Little bigger group.

How about the 1980s?

[Applause]

They're all in the back of the room apparently.

How about the 1990s, like me?

[Applause]

How about the first decade of the 2000s?

[Applause]

Okay. How about sometime before 2020?

[Applause]

Okay. Now who has only before this convention been to the virtual conventions?

[Applause]

Okay. So where are our first timers at this convention?

[Applause]

Okay! It's a big group. It's a big group.

And before we introduce our first speaker of the afternoon, let's give one big Federation cheer!

[Applause]

[Cheering]

There we go. Everybody!

All right. It's a true honor to introduce our next presenter. He's in his first term representing the second congressional district of Louisiana in the United States House of Representatives. He has an extensive history which I could read to you. He is the youngest of six and he is a product of the local Orleans parish public schools, and he has dedicated considerable time and service to the local community and state. He was the first African-American to be elected from the 102nd district of Louisiana.

[Applause]

And was the youngest ever floor leader representing the city of New Orleans. He has extensive other political credentials, including serving on the New Orleans city council.

He has continued to stay rooted here in his home communities. And in doing so, before getting to Congress and now in Congress, he continues to be particularly a champion of civil rights and eliminating economic disparities.

[Applause]

I got a note just shortly before we started, if I understand this note right, that says that the congressman's cousin came to a chapter meeting, maybe joined the Federation last month. I think I have that right. So he's part of the Federation family by extension.

We're really proud to welcome to our stage the Honorable Troy Carter!

[Applause]

(Music playing "Born on the Bayou")

TROY CARTER: Good afternoon! Good afternoon and thank you so very much for allowing me to be with you today. I'm Congressman Troy Carter, and welcome to New Orleans.

[Applause]

New Orleans is my home and your home for the next few days, and hopefully maybe you consider making it your home permanently at some point. We certainly welcome you. The food is good. The people are great. The culture is incredible. The weather is kind of hot. But three out of four ain't bad.

We certainly appreciate that you're being here enjoying our incredible food. New Orleans is a very special place. It is indeed an honor to be here with you on the occasion of the National Federation of the Blind's annual conference. Your organization has been a long-leading voice in the nationwide fight for equality and accessibility. I've enjoyed working with NFB Louisiana members when I was in the State Senate to advance civil rights issues for the blind in our state. I've enjoyed working with NFB Louisiana members when I was a member of Congress. Today I serve in Congress trying to achieve the dream in Louisiana and America where everybody has a chance and opportunity and need support services to be available for them.

Too often people with disabilities are not given what they need to live their lives, and not just safely, but also the way they want to achieve their personal dreams, just like anyone else.

[Applause]

And that's just in good times. We need to ensure that even in times of uncertainty or disaster, such as hurricane season, like here in Louisiana, that everyone's needs are still planned and that no one is left behind.

Accessibility is essential, and it cannot be an afterthought. It must be a forethought. It must be a present thought. It must be an always thought.

[Applause]

The risks are serious, and require plans to keep everyone safe. In Congress, I'm committed to continuing to fight for civil rights and for the policies that support blind Americans, whether that is in fighting against discrimination, rehabilitation supports, accessible technology, or for more employment opportunities. They all are incredibly important. We need solutions that serve our entire community. I was proud to vote for the infrastructure law last year, a landmark bipartisan bill bringing some $7 billion to the state of Louisiana and $1.2 trillion in infrastructure dollars for our entire country.

[Applause]

Transit is important. Bills that include billions of dollars for funding to expand transit accessibility services and efficiency are needed across our nation. I know that broadband access is critical. We know that it is no longer a luxury, but a necessity. We know that broadband is a critical resource for many in the blind community, and thanks to the bill, many Americans are now eligible for free internet through the infrastructure law Affordable Connectivity Program.

[Applause]

You can check availability at getinternet.gov.

The past few years have taught us the importance of telehealth access. To help make services easier and access to appointments easier to make. I'm proud that the American Rescue Plan helped to normalize virtual and phone telehealth services for all Americans, expanding the reach of our healthcare professionals. Your organization's advocacy and awareness in raising efforts at every level of government is so important, and it really has made a difference. So to all of the advocates who visit with us, who talk with us, who push forward those issues that we may not have enough information on, we say to you, thank you. Thank you. Because it is making a difference!

[Applause]

Here's an example of the advocacy of NFB. I am now a proud sponsor of three of your top priority federal legislations.

[Applause]

We want technologies to be more affordable and functional for blind Americans. Now more than ever we must tear down barriers to employment so that everyone wants can join the workforce and contribute to our economy and our communities.

[Applause]

I've been working throughout my career to expand workers' rights, safe conditions, and good wages. That's why I'm proud to sponsor the Transformation to Competitive Integrated Employment Act to increase opportunities for blind Americans who want to join the workforce.

Additionally, I will continue to fight to raise minimum wage for everyone across America. Work is work and everyone deserves a fair living wage to fair compensation, which is at a minimum at least $15 an hour.

[Applause]

I'm so honored to be with you today. I can't tell you how much I appreciate your tenacity; your commitment, and your perseverance. I cannot tell you how proud I am to see your dreams become reality. To see you stand and provide and lead.

Before I leave you today, I want to share just a little bit of a personal story. It was mentioned earlier in my introduction that my little cousin is in the audience. He's an inspiration to me. And to most when they know his story. As many of you are to people who know your stories. But if you will bear with me a little bit today, I'm going to brag on someone that I love greatly. I'm going to brag on someone who grew up with me as my own little brother, two sisters' children. I'm going to brag about Derone Walker. Derone is a young man who lost his sight but found his life. Let me say that again. He lost his sight but found his life.

[Applause]

Derone is my baby cousin, who in a pledging accident in undergraduate school lost his sight.

Now, you might imagine for a young man who was the life of the party, losing your sight in a senseless accident, he could have very easily did a woe is me. He deserved it. What happened to him was horrible. He could have retreated to a corner and said life dealt me a bad hand. He deserved it. It was a horrible thing that happened to him. No one would have begrudged him for being depressed or sad about his great loss. No one would have begrudged him for the pain that he suffered in losing his sight.

But remember, I said he lost his sight but he found his life.

[Applause]

My little cousin, who I did not know would be here today until I ran into him in the lobby, he did not know I was going to be here until I pulled the hair on his chinny chin chin in the lobby. He didn't know I was going to say this. And I didn't until I pulled up. It is not in my text. But I want you to know Derone Walker, who lost his sight in a senseless college undergraduate pledging incident. Who went on to complete his undergraduate degree.

[Applause]

Because he wasn't going to let losing sight end his life.

And then he did something else that was pretty incredible. He went back to school and got a master's degree.

[Applause]

He didn't let losing his sight interfere with his vision.

And then he did something really, really, really amazing. He went back to school and got a PhD.

[Applause]

That's my little cousin, Derone Walker, who lost his sight but found his life.

Then he went on to Washington to work for the Department of Transportation, United States Department of Transportation, doing what you might imagine? Helping other people who lost their sight. That's my little cousin, Derone Walker. Give him a round of applause.

[Applause]

I bring that message to you today not because I'm bragging, although I am, about how much I love my little cousin, how proud I am of my little cousin for his tenacity, perseverance, and unwillingness to quit, unwilling to accept the fact that he couldn't see made him any less a productive American. Just like all of you. Just like all of you. We appreciate and we love and we respect. We all have differences. We all have shortcomings. But I promise you, not one of us is any better than anybody else.

[Applause]

So your issues are very personal to me and you can count me as a full partner now and forever more. Anything that I can do to advance the causes, the interests, the resources, the planning, the programming, the dollars, the research, you can count on Congressman Troy Carter.

[Applause]

I know that this event is especially important this year as COVID has kept many of us from gathering together. So happy to have you back, in person, here in New Orleans to enjoy our food, fanfare, and people. I hope this year's conference has been a chance for you to not only learn and engage but also to build connections and expand your community and connections, all while having a little fun in the best city in the world.

[Applause]

Now, I may be a little bit biased, this is true. This is home for me. And I love this community. Thank you for your attention. Thank you for your advocacy. Thank you all for what you do to help make our world a more equal and accessible place. I am proud to be your partner in this work and extend equal opportunities to all, and I stand ready to assist in every possible way.

God bless you, and thank you for the opportunity to be with you today.

[Applause]

MARK RICCOBONO: It's good to have a friend and champion in the United States House of Representatives!

[Applause]

How about a door prize for the congressman?

BENNETT PROWS: Sounds like a great idea. We have a new wonderful door prize, Cue Health monitoring kit, which makes tests accessible and it comes with 10 cartridges that you can use for COVID testing.

MARK RICCOBONO: Most negative door prize you want to win.

BENNETT PROWS: But I'm positive somebody would like it, though. So the answer is Wednesday Wheat from California. As opposed to Thursday Pineapple.

MARK RICCOBONO: I took my COVID test, got my wristband on the Cue Health reader. Fully accessible, independent use. It's like a $500 door prize right there.

BENNETT PROWS: Yeah, that's about right. We got some to give away this weekend.

How about Mike May, Kentucky?

MARK RICCOBONO: He was here earlier.

BENNETT PROWS: Not here. Okay. Lisa Warren of California.

MARK RICCOBONO: Hard to give these door prizes away.

BENNETT PROWS: Cheryl Rhodes? Indiana.

I bet this guy is here. How about Jim Marks from Montana? Jim is here.

MARK RICCOBONO: Okay. We got him. Nice.

Okay. For a long time we have worked to ensure that blind people lead the way in the development of the audio description industry. Oftentimes this has been thought of as something that's a charity for blind people, and we for many years have worked to put blind people in the leadership to decide what audio description should be, where the priority should be, and how it should be done, starting with many years ago making sure that the first thing we would have access to is critical emergency information that scrolled across the bottom of screens.

In many of the audio description area, blind people are not a part of the creation, the quality assurance, the leadership. In many places it's still considered a charity rather than an important part of the art of entertainment. We want audio description to be part of the art. We want it to be a magnificent part of the entertainment experience, not just for us, for everybody. You know, when I get together with my 15-year-old and we bond over things like Stranger Things, we turn on the audio description. And my 15-year-old is not blind but really enjoys, in fact gets a lot of information out of the audio description, and often makes fun when the audio description is not that good.

[Laughter]

How do we put blind people more in the leadership to make this an art, not simply a charity in the industry? One of our leaders that spends a lot of time on this for us is our President of the National Federation of the Blind of Utah, he is now secretary elect for the National Federation of the Blind, here to lead our panel on who owns this story, is Everette Bacon!

[Applause]

(Music playing "This is the Greatest Show").

EVERETTE BACON: I was really wondering what song I would get as my wake up. I thought I might get the bacon song. That's nice. My own affiliate will definitely do that to me.

It's a pleasure to be here with all of you tonight. I'm going to get myself warmed up. You know, it's an honor to be able to work in the field of audio description on a volunteer basis the way I do. I was really honored when President Riccobono asked me to represent the National Federation of the Blind on the FCC Disability Advisory Committee, which mainly handles audio description issues for the FCC. We'll talk about how to make audio description more widely available, we'll work on the quality of audio description, with the different broadcasting companies that are out there. I've gotten a chance to work with the National Association of Broadcasters, and I've gotten a chance to work with many different companies such as Netflix, such as HBO Max, such as Warner Bros. Entertainment, Comcast, Peacock, and so many others. So it's been an honor to work with all of these different companies and talk about audio description and exactly what President Riccobono said. Audio description is an art form rather than just a charity, which is how it was viewed for so many years.

I'm really lucky to have a very distinguished panel. I'm just honored that they all agreed to do this. They are all three outstanding individuals in the field of audio description. So I'm going to introduce each of them to you one at a time, let them tell a little bit about themselves to you, and then we'll go on to the next person.

The first person I want to introduce is Elisa Beniero, who is the dubbing title manager for all of Netflix. So give her a round of applause, please.

[Applause]

ELISA BENIERO: Can you hear me? This one seems to work. I am Elisa Beniero, part of the dubbing team at Netflix. We are responsible for the creation of audio descriptions. So if you have any ideas, I am the person you should come to later, what we can improve. But I'm real excited to be here representing for the team. We are handling a lot of initiatives related to audio description specifically. Very humbled to be here. And thank you for having me.

[Applause]

EVERETTE BACON: Our next presenter is a blind entrepreneur. He has been in the field of audio description for many, many years now. He's developed, started, is CEO and founder of his own company Audio Eyes. So please give a warm Federation welcome to Rick Boggs.

[Applause]

RICK BOGGS: Thanks, Everette. I've been an advocate for equal opportunity for blind people for a long time in many fields, all sorts of areas of advocacy. In the '90s that included making audio production accessible to blind aspiring audio engineers making pro tools accessible for blind people at that time. It was a 3-year effort that I'm very proud of and a lot of blind people around the world are having careers in audio production. That led to my involvement in audio description. I initially was volunteering as an advocate with a media access group in the '90s. In 2002, some of you may have heard of WCTV. We've been producing description for ABC television all this time plus nine other networks at various times.

I think the most important thing I could say, if I only said one thing today, is this: As a totally blind entrepreneur who was leading the way and helping to shape best practices and procedures in audio description from very, very early on, even before the mandate in 2002, I would just say this. We really need to make sure that this industry is accountable to blind consumers. That's right. Remember, audio description was created by two blind people, right? Margaret and Cody. Audio description was first on TV because of a blind person. We need to continue that. We can't just let the ball go now. Because what happens is, as it becomes more popular and widespread, then all of a sudden people who were never interested in it enter the industry. I know TV networks and studios, you have to be inside that business to be able to do this. They had no interest. But now that it's bigger business, it's globalized, now all of a sudden all these sighted people's opinions about what descriptions should be are creeping in. So I'm here to speak up and say, you know what, don't let it get away from us. Blind people may have different opinions about what audio descriptions should be. That's fine. Let's have our discussions ourselves. But let's present a united front on one thing, and that is, we are the authority and nobody else and they're not going to tell us how it should be.

EVERETTE BACON: Thank you, Rick. You can tell he's passionate about this subject.

The next panel, I think you might recognize his voice. He'll tell you he doesn't always want to be recognized by his voice but you might recognize it. Roy Samuelson is the founder of the Audio Description Network Alliance and Kevin's Way. I got to know Roy a few years ago when I got to do a podcast with him. We connect on a regular basis and I'm so excited to have him here. So Roy, tell us about yourself.

ROY SAMUELSON: Thanks so much. Thank you to NFB for having this panel. I'm a white tall man, plaid button down shirt. I've done audio description, but my passion is making sure blind professionals are included in every aspect of this work and I can't wait to share some of the specifics that we've gotten into.

EVERETTE BACON: All right! Well, we're going to ask you all a few questions. You saw the questions ahead of time so we might not get to all of them but we'll try our best to get so some of them. And I'll probably just go to each one and let you discuss each one and give your viewpoints on it.

Access to audio description in the world of streaming has now become almost a given. How do we look and create audio description or get audio description to be thought of in this industry now that it's blown up in streaming, how do we get audio description to be thought of as an art form? And how do we grow professionalism in this field of audio description?

Elisa, do you want to take that first?

ELISA BENIERO: Sure. This is a great question. I've been thinking about it. And I wanted to share my personal experience as to how I've seen it evolving within a company such as Netflix.

I started in 2018. So it's been only a couple of years. But at the beginning when I joined the organization, we were commissioning audio description, letting the audio description vendors be the only subject matter experts. And we were just sitting back in a way and not knowing what was coming back almost. But since then we have evolved in these 4 years to be more involved in truly understanding and being accountable for what is being created and taking part in the conversation. And I think that has brought growth within my own team, for example. More people are understanding what we are doing, what is needed for audio description, how did we get there, by engaging with the community, as you were saying. Like we need to listen to the people that benefit from audio description, and we have done so by doing focus groups, understanding what level of quality we need to achieve, what we need to change in our style guides to deliver better audio description or what should be described, how, which voices should voice it. And we have done a lot of growth ourselves trying to learn. We have a lot of work to do. Even as a team, a lot of people do not know what audio description is. So the very first thing that we do is like step back and do a couple of trainings on audio description. What is it, who is it serving, why are we advocating for it. And the next training that we do actually goes into the details of like how do we make it better, what can we ask filmmakers or productions to give us so that we can deliver a good audio description. So I'm bringing just the experience from a streamer, and this is like where we are growing. We are trying to educate ourselves, recognizing that we need the support of the community and listening carefully to what is being told to us. We are going to do things wrong but that's where we are accepting that we are not perfect. We need to keep growing. And I'm seeing this explosion of knowledge across all the vendors as well. There are so many passionate people that are not shy to share feedback with us, telling us what we should do better or different. And all these people talk to each other, talk to different companies, and bring this knowledge with them. So there is massive growth happening everywhere. So it's not just audio description growing in availability, but like the understanding of audio description.

[Applause]

RICK BOGGS: Having produced over 600 hours of content described media for Netflix, I have a lot of experience with the organization and I give them credit for giving the industry the shot in the arm that it needed by a competitor because the government can tell producers or networks what they have to do and they'll be resistant. But when a competing studio decides that they're going to embrace it and give it their all and put it out there and set some standards for themselves and pay a reasonable rate, then all the other studios start copying. I give Netflix a lot of credit for increasing the rate of production of description.

[Applause]

Some things you want me to, and I mean I've had my conflicts with Netflix QC department. There are times I've argued, they've wanted me to describe things that any blind person would know without a description, things like that over the years. But you know what, in the end, they did a survey. Many people in this room participated in it. It made a big difference. Net any of them is single-handedly responsible for the very important step of developing industry-standard methods of providing credit. So now we know who described something. You know who narrated it, who read the description, who voiced it, who wrote the description, and what company did it, and that's because Netflix did that research and set that precedent and everybody followed it.

[Applause]

The answer to your question, in one sentence, is the way to make this professional, the way to make this -- I'm a little afraid of the word "art" because of certain constitutional issues. But the way to make this professional and for the industry to embrace it as an important experience for the blind, the way we hear this stuff is through description. They spend tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands on making the picture perfect, so then why not make the description for our experience be just as good? How do we get that across? By showing that what doesn't work and what does work, by speaking up and saying, this sucks, that's great. And giving that feedback. You see what Netflix did. It does work. When you can get a dialogue with studios. So let's encourage producers to have a consultant for their show. An audio description consultant who is blind who tells them how to do their description or not. That's one way.

EVERETTE BACON: Awesome. Thank you, Rick. Thank you very much.

And Roy?

ROY SAMUELSON: Oh, I love this. This is my favorite. Out the gate, one of the things I find fascinating about audio description is how in the last few years technology and culture have changed our experience. If we look at the mandate that the FCC gives, it's for broadcast to have audio description, a certain number of hours, a certain number of quarters. I won't go into the details there, but what is important is if you look at all the content that is audio described in the sense of film and TV on the entertainment side, 95% of that is on streaming and not on broadcast. So if we're looked at the forced thing that's happening, it's only accounting for 5% of what we're experiencing in audio description. That tells me that companies like Netflix and others are opting in to this and recognizing something. To the title of our panel here, not being a charity, these companies have good intentions but they also have selfish intentions. And we can use that to our advantage. The way that we can use that to our advantage is as we've all said on this panel, making sure that blind professionals as well as consumers, but I would like to focus immediately on the professionals, those people like us -- I'm a sighted person so I'm advocating for blind professionals, to make sure that blind professionals like Rick and like others who are working in this field are given prominence and given the leadership position. If I may, there's one or two more points that I would like to add if I have a moment.

EVERETTE BACON: Go for it.

ROY SAMUELSON: One of the other things I really am excited about is how the conversation has shifted from do we have it or not when it comes to audio description to how great it can be.

[Applause]

With that implication, it's so exciting to see our audiences care. We formed an audio description Facebook group a few years ago. And the conversations there have influenced the culture, that we are shifting from, hey, look how cheap we can make this, it's not that much, we should you do it. To now saying, we deserve an experience that's the same as what sighted people are getting when it comes to the immersion, to be able to feel those feelings. We shouldn't have to futz with the volume up and down. And Rick will address this. We shouldn't have to laugh or cry or jump before everybody else or after everybody else. We shouldn't have to be put to sleep because someone is droning on like -- oh, I'm getting some laughs from the whole panel here on that one. But I'm biased. I'm a voice talent. And because of my experience in learning what I do and how I deliver scripts using a microphone, it's affected how I perform. And the performances that I've given in audio description, I give the care and focus that many other people who are blind and sighted can give. What we need to do is make sure the opportunities for the training that I had, as a privilege, because of my sight, I was able to experience those connections and networks much easier. Back to the first comment I made. When it comes to the technology and culture, the technology and culture are changing. Accessible training things like AD training retreats. 2 days ago we spoke with Colleen Conner, the founder of audio description training retreats for the performers' division. She shared her experience. She is a blind woman who had experience in coaching.

You know I can go on so I'm going to stop.

EVERETTE BACON: Thanks, Roy. I tell ya, I couldn't pick three better people with more passion about this subject.

So Rick, this question is going to come to you first. Typically in the history of audio description, the audio description is always done after the fact. The movie has been written, the movie has been made, all of the actors have done their part. The production value has been done afterward to create the film. And then it gets sent off to some company to do the audio description. Which is fine and great. But at the same time, it would be wonderful to see audio description become part of the creative process from the beginning so it's kind of built in rather than built on. That's what I would like to see audio description eventually become and I know many of you have the same viewpoint.

I also believe this could help with the problem where audio description, the track doesn't always get carried across platforms. We might see a problem moving from one platform to another. Can you address this topic, Rick?

RICK BOGGS: I don't think you'll like my answer, Everette. Recognize you've asked someone who has produced hours and hours of audio description and participated in lots of research, etc. So it's an educated point of view that I present here.

The most important part of my education is my experience direct conversations with network executives, producers, writers, and an inside understanding with 15 years of working with the Screen Actors Guild and blah, blah, blah. Point is, it's an educated viewpoint that I'm presenting here, which is, there is a great danger in what you are presenting. The idea that description would be created or considered or part of the production process means it will now fall under the jurisdiction, review, and authority of the producer of the TV show. And if the blind people in this room could hear right now what producers think audio description should be, and if I could take the time to share with you the personal discussions I've had with producers, my clients, who write me bad letters afterwards telling me that I should be much more collaborative and so forth because of the kind of description they want for us, that is description that contributes things that sighted people don't -- how many people in this room want their audio description to tell you what the characters are thinking in their mind as they -- real life example from a real show from a real conversation with a real producer, okay? On the screen, you just see a girl dribbling down the basketball court. She's going to take a shot. She's been having a tough time. All right? He wants the audio description to tell you what she's visualizing in her mind, how she's going to picture herself -- now, none of this is on the screen. No sighted person is getting that kind of -- they want to tell the story differently to us blind people because we're too stupid to understand or we don't deserve -- I'm telling you. Because we don't deserve to draw our own conclusions about what this character may be thinking based on the fact that we've been paying attention. Do you want the audio description to tell you after a man's wife dies and in the next scene he's crying alone in the room, does your audio description need to tell you why he's crying? As though you didn't watch the previous scene? This is what producers want description to be. They don't know what it is, and it's too big of a job to educate the entire industry about what good description is.

When the entertainment industry wants to make a TV show or movie about a period piece, World War II or the Civil War or King Henry the VIIIth or something, they hire experts. Every cop show on television, you know how many there are, they hire retired police officers and people from the force to verify and make sure that their scripts and things are accurate so they don't portray these things in a bad way, okay? Why can they not hire a blind person to say what the description should be or should not be?

[Applause]

They do it for everything. They do it for representations of all kinds of things. Why can't everybody in this room receive the training, like the training we did at the NFB in Baltimore in 2012 where a 50-hour intensive course taught a blind person what does a writer have to consider, the standards, the pressures, what choices this very to make, and how can you as a blind person improve the quality of the script. Why can't blind people go through a training course like, that receive a certificate from this organization, which 10 of us did, and then be eligible for work in the industry as special consultants for audio description?

[Applause]

That's how it will be seen as a professional endeavor. That's how it will earn the respect. If you want to earn the same respect that other things get, then have us treated the same way. And the description, by the way, Everette, it does have to be done after all that's done. You can't describe something that's not finished. It has to be finished. The audio has to be there. Because think about it. Sometimes they give us rough cut. Most of the time from network TV we're working from unfinished video. But so you write some nice description for a 15-second hole in the dialogue. But when they finish the work, they have a narrator that they put right there so now we have to cut that description out. It's harder to fix your description and changer it all around after they've done editing. And they edit all the way up to the show goes to air. We're the last ones to touch it and you really shouldn't describe it until the whole thing is finished and done. But then you need blind professionals saying what needs to be happening.

EVERETTE BACON: Thank you, Rick.

[Applause]

Elisa, would you mind talking about the problem with cross-content production and why audio description is not carried from let's say one network to another?

ELISA BENIERO: Yes. I can try to address to the best of my knowledge. I can speak to what we do at Netflix. For example, we have our own production. For those we are going to create audio description always in the original language. It's always going to be available. We have worked really hard to make sure that all type of content would be covered such as even stand up or concerts, documentaries. We are really working to make sure that is available.

It is a different thing when it comes to content that is not Netflix that we are licensing from someone else. So what happens is that we are tied to contracts. So what we try to do and have included in our agreements with the partners from whom we license the content is that if audio description was created, they need to deliver it to us.

Now, at time there's is not available. They may not be able to source the original track. And depending on the terms of the contract, we may be able to create audio description at our own expense and have it available on service. But as a company, we have like a massive catalog as you probably know. We are actually focusing more and more on the Netflix content because that's what is staying on our catalog and not disappearing maybe in a month or in a year because we don't have the rights to keep it there or to show all the assets that were created. So it has a lot to do with all the legal things. I'm not an expert in those contracts that are drafted. But the one thing that I know we are trying to do is like if we can, we do try to add audio description or we try to source it, figure out where it is because sometimes we know it's available but no one knows where it was saved so we're like can we try to source it.

And the other thing we are trying to do is like okay, can we now expand beyond the original language, can we create audio description in other languages as well. So we are focusing more on that and less so on like trying to outsource or create more audio description for things for which we may not have the rights to show for a long time.

I hope I answered the question.

EVERETTE BACON: Yeah. Thank you. Thank you.

So hey, Roy, this next question is for you. Because I know this has been a real passion of yours and mine and we've had many discussions about this so I kind of wrote this question with you in mind. Text to speech is becoming more prevalent in companies to fill back content of AD that wasn't available. They're using text to speech to do that. What do you see as the pros and cons of this? And how do you feel like the organized blind should accept this or should we demand better?

ROY SAMUELSON: I think this also ties in to the previous question, and if I could support some of my colleagues here on the panel, that the obstacles that we're addressing here also reflect with as a voice talent, I have no interest in reading your Twitter feed or calendar appointments. That seems like a job that works really well and it's working effortlessly and why that works is because it's informationally based. It's content that's just state the facts.

When we talk about a film or TV show, even a documentary, there's emotional elements to it. There's a story being told. And that story deserves the respect of that emotional investment, that immersion, where you get sucked into the story.

You made an illusion earlier to how I want my voice to disappear. If you're listening to an audio description track and you're thinking about the voice, the AD narrator, you're probably not in the story. But if you're thinking about all the things happening and the excitement and passion and tension and the characters' interactions, that means the voice talent and writing and the mix have all served their point. And I think that Netflix is exemplary in that. Just in the last year there was a Wall Street Journal article, compliments to you, Netflix, where the audio description was rewritten for an entire season plus the new season was adapted, that these kinds of conversations are happening because of the inclusion of the professionals who are working in the film industry.

To answer your question, the involvement that I've had in the last 10 years has been on a television academy. If you've heard of the prime time Emmy awards, that's them. We worked behind the scenes to make sure voice talents can now qualify their credits on television shows to be able to vote for the prime time Emmys. What that means is there are now people at the table who do audio description who are blind who are now being able to be a part of this organization that is making decisions about film. And these blind professionals are able to say, we need access when we have a screening for voting to be able to see what's happening. And how we see is using audio description.

We also want to make sure that the film industry is hiring professionals. With all due respect, Rick, I believe I complement your perspective on this. There's also the fact that when it comes to a professional working for the film industry, that they trust their professionals. When we have organizations like AudioEyes and others who are trusted and vetted and understand what they're doing and who also primarily include blind professionals, that does make a difference. I can't imagine some productions audio description that I've heard did not have included the production. There is no way that they could have described like the sci-fi descriptions of what these ships are called and so on. They are included in the process.

I think the important distinction is making sure that the blind professionals are in charge and leading the cause, and that's something that I think helps when it comes to including whether it's the television academy or other organizations that do have influence on film.

So to tie it back, I believe when it comes to that, our voices matter. If you hear something that you really like, say something. Do something. It shouldn't be our job to do that. Other people who are watching the film don't have to. But by us complimenting Netflix, by us complimenting those other companies who are giving that immersive experience that we value, or when we find an experience that's subpar. If I may, I believe in the Netflix publicly available quality control, it says that you don't want a narrator that is sing songy or flat. That makes an impact on our experience.

EVERETTE BACON: Thank you so much for that.

[Applause]

We only have 5 minutes left so I want each panel member to be able to give us kind of a wrap up of this discussion because there's so many other ways we can go and I know they all have some great things to say. So I'm going to actually wrap it one this kind of thought to you. Blind people face so many barriers to employment, to inclusion, to equality. And it's my belief that audio description can help change some of that. I believe audio description gives us a leg up, knowing what's going on in pop culture. Knowing the latest episode of Stranger Things goes a long way in this world. And I believe it does in so many other areas. And audio description adds to this. So how can we improve this? And where do you see the future of audio description going?

We'll start with you, Elisa and go down the line.

ELISA BENIERO: I'm a positive person in general. I believe the future is bright. I see so many more people invested, understanding, and educating themselves. Not necessarily from the blind community. And this is I think the involvement that we need. I think to break down the barriers we need society to fully change the perspective they have on disabilities in general. They're generally seen unfortunately still to this day as something bad, something inferior. And I think the more people get educated, the more people there are out there advocating for the community, whether they have a disability or not, this is going to make a big, big, big difference. Seeing yourself represented on screen, represented accurately, makes an impact. Having access to audio description to content makes a difference. Like entertainment opens up windows to worlds and realities that you wouldn't have access to otherwise. I learn myself every day so many things just by watching content, watching documentaries. I'm a woman. I'm an immigrant. The amount of things I've learned about this country just watching content. And imagine, if everyone has access to that content, if everyone can be part of the conversation, just democratizing the access to audio description in general makes people aware there are other communities out there, there are people that deserve equal opportunities, equal access to everything.

So I'm just seeing this as a beautiful beginning. And I'm only hoping it's the beginning of a beautiful, bright future.

[Applause]

RICK BOGGS: It's a matter of law that 100% of all media will eventually be described. That was settled years ago. 2010, to be exact. Signed into law.

A lot of effort was put into the effort to get Congress to actually make a specific law because the FCC rule was overturned. I mean, that's the future right there. That has to happen.

But I want to point out something that does need to continue to change. We've started the process, but we have a ways to go. All too often, and I'll be biased because this environment I feel like I can speak pretty freely, being a Federationist myself, especially among people that aren't Federationists, but I'll say, you know, in all fairness, probably from all walks of life, there are blind people who are still just too darn grateful and happy to be getting anything at all. Too much. Well yeah, but don't you remember, we used to have -- yeah, but you know, there's only 7 hours required out of 168 hours on each broadcast network and not every network, only 10-15 networks, have to have that. So what if sighted people could only see 7 hours of the 168 hours of content on the television?

[Applause]

Right? The law was passed in 2010! The law itself, you can read it. It says that there's going to be an expansion every 2 years. How come there's only been one expansion in 10 years? Why did we jump from 3 hours to 7 and now that's it? And we're all supposed to be happy. Remember when we didn't have it? Well, we still don't have it! And instead of being grateful, oh, great, this show has description! We need to be more offended when it doesn't! What the hell is going on here! Why is there no description on this show!

[Applause]

Expect it, folks. You need to expect it and demand it. That's the only way we ever got it.

Is the future bright? I agree with you, it is. But I would like to live long enough to see it fulfilled. So let's get a move on and be a bit more vocal. I don't know, and I've been trying to figure this out. The FCC, they spanked the parent and chastised and penalized the networks for not doing what they're supposed to. But who disciplines the FCC when they don't do what they're supposed to? That's what I'm trying to figure out. Sorry. I hate to be -- but let's face it. It's not like we're a year too late and I'm complaining. It's 2022. It's 10 years and it's happened once. I think I can say something. And you guys should know, I risk retribution from my clients because my clients aren't happy that I come out and say stuff like that. So there's conflict when you're producing the stuff and your clients are the networks and you come out and say the networks aren't doing enough, it's tough. I gotta have some courage to do what I'm doing. I expect all other blind people to show as much courage too. Don't leave me hanging out there on my own! I can't do it on my own, man. There's no way.

[Applause]

EVERETTE BACON: Roy, you get the last word on this topic.

ROY SAMUELSON: I feel like our roles in audio description will lead to raising the expectations of removing the obstacles, and here's how. There is a catch all term "describer" that kind of waters down the many roles of audio description. Each role of audio description, whether it's the writer, the editing of the writing, the directing, the casting. We've addressed the engineering, the voice talent, the quality control. Now many people can do multiple roles. Rick here can. Some people do writing, others do voicing. But each of these roles, if we distinguish them and start calling them as they are, it's kind of clunky. Audio description narrator. Etc., these things get clunky. However, the goal of that is that it educates not only us but also the industry to honor this work and the multiple roles that it takes to create this work.

And if I may, the final note of this, from this particular question, is that by naming names, as Netflix has done so clearly, and giving credit to those multiple roles by knowing who is writing it and who is voicing it, that that will give us the inspiration of saying, I want to be like that person. I want to be like that blind voice talent who has been doing that and I love what she did on that show. Oh, that Roy Samuelson, that voice sounds like my ex-boyfriend, I can't stand him.

[Laughter]

These conversations allow us to go beyond and elevate the discussion to the quality that it needs. And I encourage all of you to find those opportunities that you see, whether it's in audio description or other places, to follow those dreams and pursue it, because this organization will support new that as well as your colleagues.

EVERETTE BACON: Thank you. Thank you so much, panel! Let's give them all a big round of applause. Thank you.

[Applause]

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you very much to our panel.

BENNETT PROWS: I think that calls for a door prize, Mr. President. We have for a virtual participant, Paige Rackly of Ohio, if she emails prize@NFB.org within 30 minutes, she gets a $100 gift certificate at Independence Market.

MARK RICCOBONO: Nice.

BENNETT PROWS: We have a mixed bag of goodies from a lot of people in this group for a person, Jack Bock from Wisconsin. No Jack?

Let's try another name. Raymond Ray Wayne of New York. He's here. We got him. Thank you.

MARK RICCOBONO: If you want to learn more about legacy giving, please visit the Dream Maker Circle table in the back of the room says Patti Chang.

Sandy Halverson is recognized.

SANDY HALVERSON: Having a little structured discovery up here, surrounded by speakers and I have no idea where I am. No, I really do know.

Let me start by saying that a lot of times we hear about oh, good grief, they're after money again.

Well, if we didn't have supporters like HumanWare who has agreed to most generously give to us a $50,000 match for our Give 20 campaign, we all know from our presidential report that we heard yesterday the kinds of things that that money helps us do. So at this point in our Give 20 campaign, we have received 393 donations giving us a total of $28,403.

[Applause]

Now, you can clap. That's great. But that isn't anywhere near $50,000. But you, and many of you in this room have helped us do this, you can help us get there. If you go visit the Dream Maker Circle, you can take your $20 bill, your two 10s, your 20 ones or variations. Our Dream Maker Circle team will help you do what you need to do to get that information directed where it needs to be. So you can of course give to the sun fund. The sun table is not here but it's in the back of the room. And you can give to our tenBroek memorial fund, which keeps the headquarters of the National Federation of the Blind in the pristine condition we all flow it to be. You can give to our white cane fund which gives us the money to do what our President may need to do between now and next year's convention. Or you can give to our Kenneth Jernigan fund which has helped bring many of you not only to this convention but to past conventions. If you can, you may also do our 2020 online form in which you designate the amount you wish to contribute, the fund or funds to which you wish those dollars to be distributed, and all of that will get tallied and credited to the funds of your choice.

So I really hope that you will do this. You can call our national center. And I don't remember the extension. But we all know the number. (410)659-9314. We'll find out what the extension is so that if you want to call and have someone return your call and collect your information from you and complete the form, that is an option as well.

Thank you very much. I hope we all work harder to reach this $50,000 match. Thank you.

[Applause]

MARK RICCOBONO: Okay. Before we move to considering resolutions, we need to consider our advocacy and policy program. We have with us this afternoon our advocacy and policy leads. They're also supported by a number of staff who work in our national office. And of course the thousands of on the ground members who are our strongest advocacy tool. This is "Owning the Change we Want," a report from our Federation's advocacy and policy department. I will let the next gentleman introduce the rest of the group. He has been now a long time Federation member. He has served as an Executive Director for us now for 15 years. Here's John Pare!

[Applause]

(Music playing, "It's a Song about Justice").

JOHN BERGGREN: Thank you, President Riccobono!

F Scott Fitzgerald once said, never confuse a single defeat from a final defeat. Mr. Fitzgerald's first book, "This Side of Paradise" was rejected by publishers 122 times before Charles Scribbs Sons Media recognized its potential. Fitzgerald then went on to write several more books, including the Great Gatsby, considered by many to be one of the greatest novels ever written.

While Fitzgerald initially faced rejection after rejection, he did not allow these initial setbacks deter him from pursuing his goal.

Political advocacy, much like publishing, requires that we have the patience, clarity of mind, and determination to realize that a single defeat or setback does not mean we are finished.

There have been times when the outlook for our legislative priorities looked grim. There have been difficult and tense negotiations, flat out refusals, and much lively discussions. Things have not always gone our way. But we have kept fighting, because perseverance, determination, and tenacity are three characteristics that encapsulate the National Federation of the Blind!

[Applause]

Times are tough, but we are far from finished. Because of that perseverance, our legislation now has more momentum than ever before. On January 3, 2021, the first day of the 117th Congress, we had no sponsored legislation. On January 21, 2021, Representatives Thompson and Kelly introduced the Access Technology Affordability Act. We now have 158 cosponsors.

[Applause]

On February 3rd, Senators Cardin and Boozman introduced it in the Senate. We now have 37 cosponsors.

[Applause]

On April 5th, 2021, Representative Scott and McMorris Rodgers introduced the Transformation to Competitive Integrated Employment Act in the House. We now have 54 cosponsors.

[Applause]

On November 18th, 2021, Senators Casey and Danes introduced the Transformation to Competitive Integrated Employment Act in the Senate.

Given that it's been 5 years since we had a companion bill in the Senate, this is a significant accomplishment.

[Applause]

On July 29, 2021, Representative Schakowsky introduced the medical device accessibility act in the House. We now have 58 cosponsors. We have also been making good progress on the website and application accessibility act and expect it to be introduced in the House and Senate later this month.

[Applause]

Along with the National Federation of the Blind, 19 other groups support this legislation.

In addition, our affiliates continue to rack up successes at the state level. Regarding voting, 28 states have passed legislation to allow for electronic ballot delivery for blind voters, and 8 states have provided both electronic ballot delivery and electronic ballot return.

In the spring of 2020, the National Federation of the Blind of Illinois began working on this issue. They began by working with the Governor and state legislature because a bill designed to provide absentee voting for the 2020 election only provided the ballot in Braille and large print for blind and low vision voters. Missing was the ability to cast the vote privately and independently using access technology.

Initial efforts to contact the Governor and state legislature were unsuccessful. But the National Federation of the Blind of Illinois did not give up, and formed the coalition of interested organizations, including equip for equality, the state's protection and advocacy agency, and the Illinois council of the blind. They were successful in their efforts but only for the 2020 election. The coalition then began working on a more permanent solution.

In 2021 bills were introduced in both chambers of the Illinois General Assembly, but did not pass. The legislature referred the matter back to the State Board of Elections for further study and hearings. But the coalition redoubled its efforts and worked throughout the summer and fall to make sure and ensure that the State Board of Elections held the hearings required by the legislature. In the spring of 2022 bills were once again introduced in both chambers of the Illinois General Assembly. When the passage of these bills seemed in doubt, the National Federation of the Blind of Illinois took decisive action. On March 9th the affiliate conducted an informational protest in front of the state of Illinois building in Chicago. The story was picked up by the local CBS radio affiliate WBBM news radio. I am happy to report that on May 13, 2022, Governor JB Pritzker signed it into law.

[Applause]

18 states have passed legislation to either limit or completely eliminate payment of subminimum wages for workers with disabilities.

[Applause]

15 states have passed legislation to help protect the rights of blind parents.

[Applause]

All of this success would not be possible without the perseverance, determination, and tenacity of the members of the National Federation of the Blind!

[Applause]

Whether at the state level, the local level, or the federal level, National Federation of the Blind members make it happen!

[Applause]

20 years ago this month I registered for NFB-NEWSLINE. Since then I have used NFB-NEWSLINE almost every day. Initially over the telephone, and more recently using the iOS app. I listen to national news, local news, magazines, and the weather. NFB-NEWSLINE is what first alerted me to the National Federation of the Blind. I would have never attended my first chapter meeting, Tampa, my first affiliate convention, Florida, or my first national convention, Georgia, if I had not learned about the National Federation of the Blind by using NFB-NEWSLINE. It was created 27 years ago and has provided essential news to tens of thousands of blind Americans. It is available via the telephone, the web, the NLS digital player, the victor reader stream, the Amazon Echo, and the iOS app.

There are 542 publications, and some portion of NFB-NEWSLINE is accessed every 1.86 seconds on average. Recent additions include J14, Forbes, the Tuscaloosa news, the New Mexico Demming Headlight, etc. There are also TV listings for every cable and satellite provider, 7-day weather forecasters, emergency alerts, and job listings. If you do not already use NFB-NEWSLINE, I urge you to sign up.

Sean is our new manager of the Independence Market. He was once a Randolph-Sheppard vendor, and he brings an exciting entrepreneurial spirit to the market. You can browse our catalog online and order items by calling our main number. We have over 400 items including white canes, Braille and audio watches, kitchen aids, measuring tools, and games. The Independence Market also helps distribute our free white canes and free slate and stylus. Over the past year we have distributed 5,763 free white canes.

[Applause]

And 703 slate and stylus.

[Applause]

We also have NFB logo’ed shirts and jackets. I regularly wear my NFB logo'ed attire because I am proud to demonstrate my commitment to the National Federation of the Blind.

[Applause]

And I am proud to think about the successes of the many Federationists that came before us, demonstrating their commitment by relentlessly advocating for the rights of the blind. Those Federationists knew, they understood, that no matter the circumstances, they had to press on. They demonstrated the perseverance, determination, and tenacity that described Federationists then the same way it does now.

To paraphrase Fitzgerald, "So we labored on, boat against the current, because we understand that an initial defeat was not a final defeat." There have been times when societal inertia, industry opposition, and political forces seem too powerful for us to overcome. There have been times when we have been told to accept inadequate Braille instruction, lack of employment opportunities, and accessibility barriers as a fact of life. But we, the organized blind, have labored on. Sometimes our proposals, ideas, plans have been rejected, but we are not deterred!

[Applause]

We will work together to improve educational opportunities, to expand employment opportunities, and to protect the civil rights of blind Americans. We have had many successes in the past and we will have even more in the future. We will build on the foundation of the Federationists before us. We will pass our voting rights bill in every state. We will pass our 14C bill in every state!

[Applause]

We will pass our parental rights bill in every state. We will pass the Access Technology Affordability Act, the Website and Application Accessibility Act, the Medical Device Nonvisual Accessibility Act, and the Transformation to Competitive Integrated Employment Act and get them to the President's desk! This work will not be easy, but we are up to the task! We will work together with love, hope, and determination. We will build our dreams into reality and we will live the lives we want!

[Applause]

[Cheering]

Thank you.

All right. As President Riccobono said, so our team, the most important part of the team are all of you sitting right here. But we also have two really good government affairs specialists and we'll hear from each of them right now. Let's start with Jeff Kaloc. Jeff used to be a staffer. He was probably one of the people you used to have to talk to to convince people to sponsor our legislation. Well, guess what? It helps to have him on our team. So please welcome Jeff Kaloc.

[Applause]

JEFF KALOC: Thank you, John.

As we gather at this year's convention, we focus on our objectives and prioritize our goals for the coming year. It is important to prepare for the future but also reflect on the past, to take into account the accomplishments and review our current standing.

The foothold we have built did not come easily or quickly. It required time and patience, hard work, and sacrifice. We stood on the shoulder of giants as these leaders guided us to greater depths and helped us pursue a path towards a better tomorrow. During the Federation's last convention in New Orleans in 1997, Dr. Jernigan in his banquet speech said, "Equal responsibility as well as equal rights is the very essence of the NFB's philosophy. It's what we set out for in 1940, it's what we have fought for every step of the way, and it is what we are now close to achieving and what we are absolutely determined to have. Equal responsibility, equal rights."

Dr. Jernigan's words from the 1997 convention were as true then as they are now. It is the very reason we are advocating for our legislative agenda. All the bills we advocate for promote independence and accessibility. But by asking for those concepts there's an understanding that responsibility is part of the agreement. An agreement that solidifies an investment that we at the National Federation of the Blind know will benefit all parties involved. The Access Technology Affordability Act will put more access technology in the hands of blind people. The bill does this by providing a $2,000 refundable tax credit over the course of 3 years for qualified access technology such as Braille notetakers, screen reading software, or Braille embossers. It provides the freedom and flexibility for individuals to choose which accessible technologies fit their needs. Some may need a refreshable Braille display while others need an embosser. This legislation equips blind Americans to seek employment and excel at their job.

We expect this legislation to increase the federal government's revenue in the form of taxes and reduced dependence on SSDI, Medicare and Medicaid programs. The federal, state, and payroll taxes will grow as more blind Americans enter the workforce. Social security disability insurance, supplemental security income, and other programs will be better funded as the use of these programs decreases. For all these reasons this legislation has gained bipartisan support in both chambers of Congress. It presents itself as a win win in many respects and we must continue to push for its passage.

Advocating for legislation cannot and will not be possible without expressing our voices and casting our ballots. Again, it is the responsibility of all individuals to exercise their civic duty to vote. Therefore, we must seize every opportunity and focus our efforts to ensure that every ballot is nonvisually accessible and provides the blind voter the same privacy, independence, and ease of use as other voters.

[Applause]

It is imperative that we engage with all of our elected officials on this important matter. If we were to seek the changes necessary to overcome discrimination. That is why when we engage with our policymakers we must express to them the significance between casting a ballot privately and independently. This is not unattainable. Various states have enacted into law ensuring these concepts are put into play. Because of these efforts several states have accessible remote voting that allows voters privacy and independence, from casting a ballot to verifying a ballot. We cannot and will not stand silent while we know this opportunity awaits. That is why we must take action to mobilize and educate our lawmakers so that accessible voting isn't only available in a handful of states but every state.

[Applause]

Now 25 years after Dr. Jernigan's speech, we reflect on the words that he spoke. If equal rights are to be given, then we must accept the responsibility. Well, we do accept responsibility and continue to do so each moment we educate lawmakers, grow our membership, and come together as an organization, because when we mobilize and flex our strength, there is nothing we cannot accomplish together.

[Applause].

JOHN PARE: Thanks, Jeff.

Next is Justin Young. He's not new to the NFB. He has been a member of the NFB New York affiliate. He's been in the leadership of the Rochester chapter. He's been the legislative director for the state of New York. He's been to numerous national conventions, numerous Washington Seminars. Please welcome Justin Young.

[Applause]

JUSTIN YOUNG: Good afternoon, everybody. In his 1967 banquet address, Dr. Jacobus tenBroek said, "The blind have a right to live in the world. That right is as deep as human nature, as pervasive as the need for social existence, as ubiquitous as the human race, as invincible as the human spirit."

To live in the world independently, we must have the right to access medical devices and be given the opportunity to earn a fair wage for the work we perform. At least year's convention, we passed resolution 2021-01, which urged the United States Congress swiftly to consider and pass the Medical Device Nonvisual Accessibility Act, thereby ensuring and protecting the independence, safety, and health of blind Americans.

[Applause]

On July 29, 2021, Representative Jan Schakowsky from Illinois introduced the Medical Device Nonvisual Accessibility Act. This bill would amend the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act related to class 2 and 3 medical devices with a digital display. Some medical devices that apply to these categories would include continuous glucose monitors, blood pressure devices, chemotherapy, in-home dialysis machines, and many more.

After amending the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, it would require the FDA to begin a 3-year rulemaking process. After this rulemaking process, the manufacturers of these devices must make them accessible. Without accessibility, we will not be able to independently and safely use critical health maintenance and monitoring products. It's time we be allowed to use the medical device we want, not the only one that might be somewhat accessible to us.

[Applause]

We have made great efforts related to our legislation to end the payment of subminimum wages. There has been a two prong approach on this initiative over the past several years. We have worked on federal legislation like the Transformation to Competitive Integrated Employment Act, and there has also been a push at the state level also. In total, there are 16 states that have begun limiting the use of 14C certificates. Three of them happened this year. On April 14th the Governor of Tennessee signed a law that would make it illegal after July 1st for businesses to pay subminimum wages.

[Applause]

On May 23, South Carolina's Governor signed a joint resolution that would phase out subminimum wages by August 1st, 2024. On June 15th, the Governor of Rhode Island signed a law that would immediately repeal sections of the state's labor law related to authorizing the payments of subminimum wages. The other 13 states are Alaska, California, Colorado, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, New Hampshire, Oregon, Texas, Vermont, and Washington.

We have made great progress, but the fight is not over until section 14C is once and for all gone.

[Applause]

To echo Dr. tenBroek all those years ago, we will continue to advocate for our rights to live in the world, and we will not stop until our work is done.

Thank you all.

[Applause]

JOHN PARE: Thank you, Jeff and Justin. I just want to say I appreciate when we put out the legislative alerts, you spring into action. It makes such a difference. As we build our coalition of activity within the National Federation of the Blind, as you heard from Representative Carter this afternoon, we have friends in Congress. We're going to do more working together under the skillful leadership of President Riccobono. Thank you.

[Applause]

MARK RICCOBONO: Let's hear it for our advocacy and policy efforts!

[Applause]

BENNETT PROWS: And let's have a door prize.

MARK RICCOBONO: Absolutely.

BENNETT PROWS: We have some more of these cycling socks with $50 in them. We have a plaque and chocolate covered espresso beans. That goes to Mark Companion.

MARK RICCOBONO: Oh, so close. Bennett.

BENNETT PROWS: Spelled differently, sorry. From Louisiana. Okay. We see him. We see his companion.

MARK RICCOBONO: I want to thank the Federation members for the tremendous work on our legislation. We have just been really making great progress this year. And this is an area where every single member makes a difference. So keep pouring on the pressure. Take the strength of this convention. Go home and pound on your members of Congress to get them on our bills.

Speaking of policies, we're going to move now to our resolutions. Resolutions are significant policy statements of the organization. If we decide to adopt a resolution, it becomes policy until this convention changes it. If we vote a resolution down, it is down and it doesn't create a policy.

Before we get to the resolutions, I want to give Scott LaBarre just one minute on the PAC plan.

SCOTT LaBARRE: Thank you, Mr. President. I've got some exciting news to report! Right now in the race for the PAC rat, Maryland and Colorado are in a dead heat! They are tied! So Colorado, get back to the PAC table online or in the back of the room! Montana, at first you were running away with the PAChyderm but now Vermont is sneaking up on you! Get back to the PAC table!

Based on the data I'm seeing, it appears that the only division that is actually loved and respected and is favored are the seniors. They are running away with the PAC mule!

[Applause]

Yeah. So if any other division wants a chance, get back to the PAC table. We stand now at $486,600. I want to get to $500,000 at this convention. We can do that by filling out the form yourself online. Www.NFB.org/PAC, or go to the table in the back of the room. Thank you very much!

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you very much, Scott.

[Applause]

Now I would like to turn it over to our very able resolutions Chair from Maryland, Sharon Maneki.

SHARON: Thank you. We have 18 resolutions to consider.

Resolution 2022-01 regarding the need for federal legislation requiring all websites and applications to be accessible. Whereas the activities of a vast number of employers, retailers, restaurants, other public accommodations, educational institutions, state and local governments, other public entities, and many other entities now occur in whole or in part through websites and applications. A shift that has been greatly accelerated by a global pandemic. And whereas according to a report with statistics covering the period from 2005-2020 conducted by the United States Bureau of Economic Analysis, the digital economy alone accounts for nearly 10% of the gross domestic product of the United States. And whereas according to a study published in March 20201 by the Pew Research Center, 85% of American adults visit the internet at least once a day. And whereas equal access to digital spaces is necessary for the blind and others with disabilities to participate in the mainstream of economics, cultural, and political life. And whereas the vast majority of the entities identified above want their websites and applications to be accessible and useable by all, including the blind and others with disabilities. And whereas the blind and others with disabilities constantly face access barriers to websites and applications as indicated by a recent survey of the 1 million most visited websites, which revealed that at least one access barrier exists on over 97% of those million websites. And whereas according to numerous news sources, the United States has approximately two open jobs for every unemployed American, yet unemployment and underemployment of the blind has not improved due in part to accessibility barriers. And whereas many including the Federation believe that Congress intended the Americans with Disabilities Act to apply to websites of those entities covered by the ADA when it said, quote, the ADA should keep pace with the rapidly changing technology of the times, unquote. And whereas despite such clear legislative intent, the court of the land varied widely in deciding whether the ADA covers websites, with some courts saying that websites and digital spaces of any entity are not covered by ADA. Others saying that only websites of covered entities with a physical presence are covered, and yet other courts saying that all websites of covered entities are covered regardless of whether those exist entirely in cyberspace, or whether they have both physical and digital locations. And whereas we had fervently hoped that the United States Department of Justice would clarify these legal uncertainties when in 2010 it published an advanced notice of proposed rulemaking with the intention of ultimately promulgating regulations clarifying that websites of covered entities fell within the scope of the ADA's protection, regardless of whether such entities existed entirely in cyberspace. And whereas to the great sorrow of the disability community and others, no further action has been taken on the proposed regulations since 2010. And, in fact, the proposed rulemaking was canceled in 2017. Whereas neither current law nor the proposed regulations from 2010 clearly cover applications used on mobile phones and other devices, and whereas many businesses, employers, educational institutions, and other entities rely on third party commercial entities which are not currently covered by the law to design and implement their websites and applications. And whereas it has become abundantly clear there is a critical need for federal legislation to clarify exactly who must offer accessible websites and applications, and how they must do it. Now therefore be it resolved by the National Federation of the Blind convention assembled this nice day of July 2022 in the city of New Orleans, Louisiana, that we urge Congress to adopt a law requiring websites and applications of employers, retailers, restaurants, other public accommodations, educational institutions, state and local governments, other public entities, and any other entity currently covered by the ADA to be accessible to the blind and others with disabilities through compliance with an accessibility standard defined by Congress. And be it further resolved that we call upon Congress to require those commercial entities that design and implement websites and applications and then sell them to all other covered entities to design and implement websites and applications which are accessible to the blind and others with disabilities in compliance with the accessibility standard defined by Congress. And be it further resolved that this organization urge Congress to direct the United States Department of Justice and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to develop and then promulgate an accessibility standard in which accessibility shall mean perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust websites and applications that enable persons with disabilities to access the same information as to engage in the same interactions as and to enjoy the same services offered to other persons, with the same privacy, same independence, and same ease of use as nondisabled persons. And be it further resolved that this organization urge Congress in the new law to include provisions that allow the law to be enforced by the EEOC and Department of Justice and acting on complaints filed with them or on their own initiative that private individuals and organizations may also enforce the law by instituting private causes of action in our courts with the full array of legal remedies and damages available to them. The committee recommends do pass.

[Applause]

MARK RICCOBONO: Moved and seconded to pass resolution 01. Is there any discussion?

Hearing none, all those in favor, say aye.

Opposed, say no.

The ayes have it.

[Applause]

SHARON: Resolution 2022-02, regarding state legislation guaranteeing fully accessible vote by mail.

SPEAKER: Whereas the ability to cast a secret ballot independently is a cornerstone of our democracy that enables citizens to vote their conscience without fear, and whereas Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in services, programs, and activities provided by state and local government entities, and whereas this requirement extends to voting privately and independently by mail, and whereas only 28 states require an accessible way to mark a vote by mail ballot. And whereas in 2022 as a direct result of the advocacy efforts of the National Federation of the Blind of Illinois, Access Living Chicago, Equipped for Equality, and the Illinois Council of the Blind, Illinois became the latest example when the state’s General Assembly passed legislation requiring that voters with print disabilities be provided an accessible way to mark their vote-by-mail ballot. And whereas only the states of Colorado, Hawaii, and West Virginia have passed legislation to require an accessible way for voters with print disabilities to mark and return their vote-by-mail ballot. And whereas voters with print disabilities in jurisdictions that do not provide an accessible way to mark and return their vote-by-mail ballot must either tell their choices to a sighted person and trust that person to mark the ballot as instructed, or they must go to a physical polling place to use an accessible ballot marking device. Now therefore be it resolved by the National Federation of the Blind in convention assembled this ninth day of July 2022 in the city of New Orleans, Louisiana, that this organization demand that all U.S. states, territories, and districts that have not yet enacted legislation to require an accessible way to mark and return vote-by-mail ballots pass such legislation so that all voters with print disabilities have the same opportunity to vote by mail privately and independently as voters without disabilities as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

SHARON: The committee recommends do pass.

MARK RICCOBONO: It's been moved and seconded to pass resolution 02.

Is there any discussion?

Hearing none, all those in favor, say aye.

Opposed, say no.

The ayes have it.

SHARON: Resolution 2022-03 regarding manufacturers development of accessible medical devices.

Whereas an increasing number of medical devices are being developed that provide individuals with the ability to practice independent self-care at home leading to better patient outcomes and whereas as stated in the study improved cost and utilization among Medicare beneficiaries dispositioned from ED to receive home healthcare compared with inpatient hospitalization, quote, not only is home healthcare more effective at improving patient outcomes, but it is also cost effective alternative to hospitalization, saving both Medicare and taxpayers money, end quote. And whereas most medical device manufacturers are not working to integrate nonvisual accessibility features into the design and development of these medical devices, leaving far too many of them inaccessible to blind individuals. And whereas many of these inaccessible devices, as insulin pumps, home dialysis machines, and chemotherapy machines are used to assist those with critical healthcare concerns, leaving the health, safety, and independence of many blind Americans in imminent danger. And whereas accessibility is relatively easy and inexpensive to implement when it is incorporated in the design of a product from the outset and results in a product with a multimodal interface is more useable by everyone. And whereas members of the National Federation of the Blind are actively working with some manufacturers who have come to realize that the active participation of the blind is essential in the design and development of devices that will be nonvisually accessible, usable, and useful to the blind. Now therefore be it resolved by the National Federation of the Blind convention assembled this 9th day of July 2022 in the city of New Orleans, Louisiana, that this organization demand that manufacturers work collaboratively with the blind to incorporate nonvisual accessibility in the design and development of their existing and emerging medical devices so that blind people can benefit from the improved quality of healthcare and cost effective alternatives to hospitalization that they offer. The committee recommends do pass.

MARK RICCOBONO: It's been moved and seconded. Any discussion in.

Hearing none, all those in favor, say aye.

Opposed?

The resolution passes.

SHARON: Resolution 2022-04.

SPEAKER: Whereas the bureau of justice statistics identified in 2016 that 11% of state and federal prisoners report having a vision disability, and whereas the Rehabilitation Act and Americans with Disabilities Act protect the rights of individuals with disabilities, including those who are incarcerated, and whereas the United States constitution guarantees citizens the right to due process of law and prohibits cruel and unusual punishment. And whereas blind prisoners nationwide have reported disparate and discriminatory treatment by departments of corrections, including the denial of necessary medical care and prescriptions, failure to provide accommodations and effective communication, lack of access to work programs and inclusion among dangerous prisoners. And whereas this disparate and discriminatory treatment has forced many blind prisoners to purchase their own accommodations or to rely on the help of sighted prisoners, causing the blind prisoners to be beholden to other prisoners to read and write mail, navigate to the dining hall and other areas, read posted prison rules, use the law library, prepare grievances, and complete commissary sheets, and whereas this has compromised blind prisoners' privacy and exposing them to extortion and harm, and whereas the lack to prison-based training and vocational programs has resulted in blind prisoners' inability to earn wages, reduce their sentences through participation credits, and engage in work release. And whereas blind prisoners who advocate for equal access and their other rights risk retaliation from prison staff and receive limited to no support from prison ADA coordinators, ombudsmen, and state and federal lawmakers. And whereas the National Federation of the Blind has sued on behalf of blind prisoners in Maryland and Colorado and secured systemic relief within both states. And whereas discrimination against blind prisoners persists outside of this relief, now therefore be it resolved by the National Federation of the Blind in convention assembled this 9th day of July, 2022, in the city of New Orleans, Louisiana, that this organization demand that state and federal prisons comply with requirements of the United States constitution Rehabilitation Act, Americans with Disabilities Act, and other state and national disability rights laws, and be it further resolved that this organization urge active state and federal oversight of the treatment of blind prisoners including the provision of medical care, accommodations, and effective communication, equal access to training and work programs, and separation from dangerous prisoners.

SHARON: The committee recommends do pass.

MARK RICCOBONO: It's been moved and seconded to pass the resolution. Is there any discussion?

Hearing none, all those in favor, say aye.

All opposed?

It passes.

SHARON: Whereas for generations blind employees have worked effectively in jobs that require travel by using mass transit and other forms of public and private transportation. And whereas the job postings of many employers require applicants to possess a valid driver's license to be eligible for the position even though the essential functions of the position do not involve operating an automobile or other mode of transportation. And whereas the Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits employers from requiring a driver's license unless one of the essential functions of the position includes driving. And whereas modern job application software can automatically exclude applicants who do not have a driver's license, denying the applicant the opportunity to discuss the possibility of a reasonable accommodation. And whereas these driver’s license requirements discriminate against blind people as a class because blindness makes a person ineligible to receive a driver's license. And whereas the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission is the leading federal law enforcement agency dedicated to preventing and remedying employment discrimination and advancing equal opportunity in employment. And whereas objective I of EEOC's strategic plan states in outcome goal 1a, discriminatory employment practices are stopped and remedied, and victims of discrimination receive meaningful relief, end quote, and whereas since at least 2006 the EEOC has prioritized the elimination of systemic discrimination when it created its systemic initiative which identified, investigated, and litigated systemic discrimination cases. And whereas having a systematic apparently neutral policy on driver's licenses that eliminates disabled individuals from consideration is discriminatory. And whereas on June 21, 2005, the EEOC issued a memo stating in part that driver's licenses can be required only where transportation of goods or people is the objective to be accomplished by the position. And whereas the EEOC guidance is not binding law. Now therefore be it resolved by the National Federation of the Blind in convention assembled this 9th day of July, 2022, in the city of New Orleans, Louisiana, that this organization strongly urge the United States EEOC to elevate the importance of eliminating the driver's license employment barrier by issuing a rule that clearly prohibits discrimination by employers who require a driver's license when driving is not part of the essential function of the job.

The committee recommends do pass.

MARK RICCOBONO: It's been moved and seconded to pass the resolution.

Is there any discussion?

Hearing none, all those in favor, say aye.

Opposed, say no.

The resolution passes.

[Applause]

(pig oinking).

Door Prize the Pig.

BENNETT PROWS: All right. We got a nice prize here. We have one of those magnetic plaques, and we have a pen that has been made by Dan Parker. It's a beautiful pen. Now, the winner is Brian Holly of Maryland.

How about Kristen Mackey of Arizona?

Is she there? Okay. We got her.

SHARON: Resolution 2022-06.

SPEAKER: Whereas audio description is an auxiliary service for blind movie and television viewers that provides narration of key visual elements such as actions, facial expressions, scene changes, costumes, scenery, on-screen text, and other purely visual elements of a film or television program. And whereas a growing number of broadcast and cable channels as well as streaming services are increasing the hours of audio description they provide in response to federal law and regulation, legal agreements, and expanding consumer demand. And whereas some providers such as cable televisions the Hallmark channel and streaming service Amazon Prime video are increasingly or exclusively using text to speech TTS voices rather than human narrators to verbalize scripted audio description. And whereas in some cases TTS may be appropriate, for example, in purely informational programming, but overall it is problematic for a number of reasons. One, TTS often mispronounces character and place names and other important story elements, creating confusion; two, TTS introduces awkward or incorrect phrasing; and three, the tone of the TTS narration is often at sharp variance from the tone of the content, e.g., an overly robotic delivery for a light comedy. And whereas, regardless of how well the AD script is written, all of these issues and others have the effect of jolting most blind viewers, distracting them from the content and forcing them to focus on the delivery of the TTS narration, there by defeating the purpose of enhancing the entertainment experience for these viewers that is the very reason for audio description. And whereas while some providers justify the use of TTS in the name of providing more hours of audio description, there are thousands of professional voice talents, including many blind professionals, who are willing and able to do this work. And whereas some defenders of TTS make the insulting suggestion that blind viewers ought to be grateful for the audio described programming that is provided rather than complaining about the methods by which it is done, but blind users have every right to expect a quality audio description experience just as sighted viewers have the right to expect full color, high definition, accurate subtitles and captioning, and other markers of quality and would never on expected to accept an inferior viewing experience. Now therefore be it resolved by the National Federation of the Blind in convention assembled this 9th day of July, 2022, in the city of New Orleans, Louisiana, that this organization demand that television channels and streaming providers deploy audio description using TTS, stop the use of this technology in the narration of audio description for content intended for entertainment, and be it further resolved that before resuming any use of TTS, providers meaningfully consult with blind Americans in determining whether and when its use may be appropriate.

SHARON: The committee recommends do pass.

MARK RICCOBONO: It's been moved and seconded to pass the resolution.

Is there any discussion?

SPEAKER: Fleet, are you for or against the resolution?

SPEAKER: I am against.

MARK RICCOBONO: Okay. Go ahead.

SPEAKER: This resolution addresses a growing problematic trend in the a, D field, the deployment of TTS with robotic delivery, confusing cadence, and failures of pronunciation. These problems are a subset of a much more widespread problem with QA, quality assurance. Content narrated by human voice talent can and does include mismatch of cadence, content, mispronunciation and more. Across the industry, QA is not keeping pace with the recent profusion of dubbed, sub titled, and repackaged content in general. Consider squid game which was criticized for having awkward translations. This here takes aim at bad TTS without pinpointing quality assurance as the elegant solution that it would be. Consider textual description has the potential to accelerate the description of an immense mostly inaccessible back catalog of pictures, as well as access to the current renaissance of international programming in the language of a blind person's choice. I urge us to decide together to use our power and our discernment with the authority of the many resolutions on AD that have already become policy, to invite and impel providers to commit to a rigorous QA process that flags low quality AD and hires broader talent, user tested implementation of TTS, and embrace cultivating voice talent as part of well-resourced productions, while leveraging TTS to describe the vast corpus of historical low budget and translated productions. This resolution is a hammer. We have a tool kit already. Let's don't. I hope you'll consider voting do not pass. Thank you.

[Applause]

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you, Chancey.

Everette Bacon, are you for or against?

EVERETTE BACON: I am for the resolution.

MARK RICCOBONO: Go ahead.

EVERETTE BACON: You know, sometimes in your tool kit you have a hammer. And you got to pull the hammer out and you've got to use that hammer to make waves to get in so you can discuss quality assurance, as my esteemed colleague Chancey Fleet pointed out. Text to speech is a great thing and we think it will be wonderful 10 years from now. But right now it's not a great thing. It's right now quite frustrating and quite embarrassing. When you listen to a film like Young Guns which is a great film, Charlie Sheen, Emilio Estevez, lots of action and comedy, yet the TTS description says "and now he gets on the horse. And now he pulls out his gun. And now he shoots the bad guy." It's ridiculous. It takes away from the entire view of the entire film. It makes it completely unbearable to listen to. I almost want to turn off the audio description which goes against everything I'm about because I only watch content with audio description.

We have a chance to get our foot in the door and demand better. As Roy Samuelson said up on that stage, this is our chance to demand better. And that's what I'm going to do and that's what this resolution is doing and this is why I believe it should pass.

[Applause]

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you, Everette.

Just want to note that we note there are a number of people without masks. So if you could please put masks on, that would be great. Brian Buhrow, are you for or against?

SPEAKER: Against.

MARK RICCOBONO: Okay. Go ahead.

BRIAN: Chancey is quite eloquent and I would be hard pressed to follow her and be as eloquent. But I think while I agree with everything that Everette says about the need for the blind to control and influence and to have a say in what kind of audio description we get, I think this resolution is the wrong way to do it and will not actually get us what we want. If there are tools, if the tools are available, as Chancey says, about quality assurance, then the examples that Everette cited in his argument for the resolution would have been fixed even with the use of TTS. His examples included bad language, which cannot be corrected by human readers if the script is inadequate. So I urge the convention to vote this resolution down.

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you, Brian.

I'm going to take Chris Danielsen and then I'll see if you all are ready to vote.

CHRIS DANIELSEN: Thank you, President Riccobono. My Federation family, one of the things I learned in my admittedly few years of practicing as an attorney is that you don't negotiate with yourself. If we say that we will accept text to speech under certain circumstances and we invite Amazon to please come and talk to us and hammer out the many steps of quality control that we would like for them to put in place in order to make sure that we don't get mediocre to awful audio description, then we will not get their attention.

We need to take a position, yes, there are problems with human narration, but the reality is, text to speech is low-hanging fruit that is consistently bad and it is a place to start the discussion and start it now. We need to lay down our marker and say what we will accept and what we will not. And if we want to talk about whether and when as the resolution says text to speech is appropriate, then the quality assurance steps that my esteemed colleague Chancey Fleet is talking about are part of that discussion. But only when we get these parties who have not meaningfully consulted with blind people at all about the deployment of TTS to sit down with us and discuss its shortcomings.

Please vote for this resolution.

MARK RICCOBONO: Okay. Let me just ask the crowd, are you ready to vote?

Sounds overwhelming in support of voting.

Okay. All those in favor of passing the resolution say aye.

Those opposed, say no.

Well, I think the ayes have it. But do you want a roll call? Okay. We're getting the roll call ready. Sharon told me there would be no controversy, though.

Okay. If I could have your attention please so we could hear the delegates.

Alabama.

They're still getting to a mic. You got a door prize over there?

BENNETT PROWS: Yes. We have a great door prize. We have a plaque, $25, a bag of coffee for those who are needing some coffee right now. And popcorn ball and the winner is Braiden Topping of New Mexico. Are you here?

Okay. Susan McCarty of Maryland. Susan, are you here?

She's here.

MARK RICCOBONO: She's part of our convention organization team.

All right. Alabama?

SPEAKER: Alabama, no.

MARK RICCOBONO: Alaska.

SPEAKER: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Arizona.

SPEAKER: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Arkansas.

SPEAKER: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: California.

SPEAKER: After a vigorous debate and tallying everyone on Zoom and at the caucus, we are a no.

MARK RICCOBONO: Okay. No commentary needed. Just yes or no.

Colorado.

SPEAKER: Unfortunately yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Connecticut.

SPEAKER: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Delaware.

SPEAKER: She's coming.

MARK RICCOBONO: Okay. Delaware is coming.

SPEAKER: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Who was that?

SPEAKER: I'm the alternate delegate, June Hunter Hardy.

MARK RICCOBONO: Okay. D.C.

SPEAKER: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Florida.

SPEAKER: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Georgia.

SPEAKER: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Hawaii.

SPEAKER: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Idaho.

SPEAKER: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Illinois.

SPEAKER: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Indiana.

SPEAKER: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Iowa.

SPEAKER: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Kansas.

SPEAKER: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Kentucky.

SPEAKER: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Louisiana.

SPEAKER: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Maine.

SPEAKER: No.

MARK RICCOBONO: Maryland.

SPEAKER: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Massachusetts.

SPEAKER: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Michigan.

SPEAKER: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Montana I'm sorry. I have trouble with the alphabet this year. Let's go with Minnesota. Was that a no? I'm looking for Steve's voice here. I hear lots of voices.

SPEAKER: Hold on a second. Hold on. He's coming.

SPEAKER: We got crowds around the microphone.

SPEAKER: Minnesota no.

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you.

Mississippi.

SPEAKER: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Missouri.

SPEAKER: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Montana.

SPEAKER: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Nebraska.

SPEAKER: No.

MARK RICCOBONO: Nevada.

SPEAKER: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: New Hampshire? Last call for New Hampshire. We'll come back.

New Jersey.

SPEAKER: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: New Mexico.

SPEAKER: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: New York.

SPEAKER: No.

MARK RICCOBONO: North Carolina.

SPEAKER: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: North Dakota.

SPEAKER: No.

MARK RICCOBONO: Ohio.

SPEAKER: Ohio votes yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Oklahoma.

SPEAKER: Oklahoma is yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Oregon. No Oregon? Is that a yes? Okay. Yes.

Pennsylvania.

SPEAKER: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Puerto Rico.

SPEAKER: No.

MARK RICCOBONO: Rhode Island.

SPEAKER: Mr. President, Rhode Island votes no.

MARK RICCOBONO: Okay. South Carolina.

SPEAKER: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: South Dakota.

SPEAKER: Not here.

MARK RICCOBONO: Not here.

Tennessee.

SPEAKER: No.

MARK RICCOBONO: Texas.

SPEAKER: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Utah.

SPEAKER: Slam dunk, yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Vermont?

SPEAKER: Vermont is a yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Virginia.

SPEAKER: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Washington.

SPEAKER: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: West Virginia.

SPEAKER: West Virginia says yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: And Wisconsin.

SPEAKER: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Is a yes. I think it's overwhelmingly yes.

[Applause]

39-10. We had a couple that didn't report in. We could take their votes, but the resolution passes.

Sharon?

SHARON: 2022-07 regarding the participation of individuals with disabilities in medical research. Whereas federal public health policies and resource distribution are based on data and whereas the Revitalization Act of 1993 and National Institutes of Health NIH created guidelines for including women and racial and ethnic minorities in medical research and whereas the Revitalization Act does not require inclusion of individuals with disabilities in NIH-funded studies, leading to an absence of data regarding individuals with disabilities. And whereas blind Americans have been denied participation in critical medical studies by research institutions based on an individual's blindness, inaccessible components of the studies, and the institution's refusal to provide appropriate accommodations. And whereas this denial of participation and subsequent lack of disability-related data prolong ableist attitudes about disability and further marginalize individuals with disabilities within the medical system. And whereas research institutions such as the Johns Hopkins Disability Health Research Center and Bloomberg School of Public Health have proposed strategies to increase participation of individuals with disabilities in medical trials including adherence to universal design principles, incorporation of auxiliary aids in research protocol, and establishment of a federal disability centered organization, similar to the office of research on women's health or the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities. Now therefore be it resolved by the National Federation of the Blind in convention assembled this 9th day of July, 2022, in the city of New Orleans, Louisiana, that this organization commend those research organizations that have voluntarily included individuals with disabilities in their definitions of inclusivity and related research procedures and have called for national guidance to increase the participation of people with disabilities in medical research and be it further resolved that this organization call upon Congress and the National Institutes of Health to mandate inclusion of individuals with disabilities in research studies and be it further resolved that this organization demand that all research institutions implement policies and processes that include and accommodate blind individuals in medical research, the committee recommends do pass.

MARK RICCOBONO: Any discussion?

Hearing none, all those in favor, say aye.

Opposed say no.

The resolution passes.

[Applause]

We do have the Ellume COVID tests available at the NFB information table out in the foyer. So if you need a COVID test you can pick one up. Thank you for continuing to mask.

SHARON:20 22-08 regarding consent culture.

SPEAKER: Framing statement. Pause and read this aloud whenever this resolution is discussed. Please note that due to the purpose of this resolution, it contains discussions of sexual misconduct. Its intent is that they be examples of why this resolution is necessary.

Whereas consent culture affirms and normalizes the following in both social and sexual interactions. That each individual has bodily autonomy, that the action of asking for consent is an expected practice. That boundaries stated in response are to be respected and that each person has the right to choose what is comfortable for them and that the lack of consent or a clear and affirmative response constitutes a no. And whereas consent violations, sexual misconduct, and sexual violence affect everyone, including blind and low vision individuals, and whereas the climate is assessment commissioned by the National Federation of the Blind and conducted by the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, RAINN, shows that of the respondents, 58.8% believe that sexual misconduct is somewhat of a problem or a big problem within the NFB; 55.7% have concerns about power dynamics; 53.1% have concerns about difficulty communicating, understanding, and respecting interpersonal boundaries; 46.1% have a lack of understanding about consent; and 48% are confused about what sexual misconduct is. And whereas many of these areas of concern reported in the RAINN survey are also concerns for the entire blindness community generally, including interactions not associated with Federation activities and whereas blind people are not only physically and mentally harmed when they experience sexual misconduct or consent violations within the blindness community; they are also restricted from reaching their full potential and living the lives they want in their quest to receive necessary blindness services. And whereas the National Federation of the Blind is the leader in advocating for, creating cultural change for, and promoting bodily autonomy for the blind and is actively working to establish a culture of consent through advocacy, education, curriculum development, and incorporation, consent language development, and the implementation of accountability practices. Now therefore be it resolved by the National Federation of the Blind in convention assembled this 9th day of July, 2022, in the city of New Orleans, Louisiana, that this organization call on all other providers of services for the blind to join the Federation in incorporating consent education an language into their curricula, policies, and procedures, to foster a more general understanding and confidence in the blindness community around matters of consent and bodily autonomy.

SHARON: The committee recommends do pass.

MARK RICCOBONO: It's been moved and seconded. Is there any discussion?

Hearing none, all those in favor, say aye.

Opposed, say no.

The ayes have it. The resolution passes.

[Applause]

SHARON: resolution 2022-09 regarding accessibility at home COVID-19 testing. Whereas the COVID-19 virus continues to cause significant illness and death. And whereas despite all efforts to mitigate this pandemic through vaccination and masking, COVID-19 continues to mutate and spread around the world. And whereas at-home tests are a critical resource in stopping the spread of the COVID-19 virus, and no one, including blind people, should be excluded from such important and potentially lifesaving testing opportunities. And whereas we appreciate the current administration's effort to offer free at-home COVID-19 tests to all Americans but are extremely frustrated that no effort has been taken to ensure that blind Americans have the ability to use any of the tests being distributed independently. And whereas the National Federation of the Blind has been able to engage with the administration and is currently collaborating on the development of home COVID-19 tests that have accessible instructions and their ability to be used independently by blind people. And whereas our experience has shown that given the proper commitment to innovation, most technology available on the market can be made accessible to those who are blind or have low vision, including at-home COVID-19 tests. And whereas unfortunately based on our testing to date, out of many home COVID-19 tests kits on the market, we have found only the Cue Health and Ellume's limited tests currently to be nonvisually accessible to the blind. And both these kits require the use of a smartphone, leaving blind people who lack the knowledge and/or the technology unable to use the tests independently.

And whereas accessibility is relatively easy and inexpensive to implement when it is incorporated into the design of a product from the outset and in collaboration with the National Federation of the Blind and results in a product that with a multimodal interface that is more usable by everyone. Now therefore be it resolved by the National Federation of the Blind in convention assembled this 9th day of July, 2022, in the city of New Orleans, Louisiana, that this organization strongly urge companies working to develop at-home COVID-19 tests to work with the National Federation of the Blind to ensure that the tests, instructions, packaging, execution, and test results are nonvisually accessible to blind Americans.

The committee recommends do pass.

MARK RICCOBONO: It's been moved and seconded to pass the resolution.

Is there any discussion?

Hearing none, all those in favor, say aye.

Opposed, say no.

The ayes have it. The resolution passes.

SHARON: Resolution 2022-10.

SPEAKER: Whereas the independent living services for older individuals who are blind program, ILOIB, is authorized under Title VII chapter 2 of the Rehabilitation Act and managed by the Rehabilitation Services Administration, RSA, and whereas according to the RSA's report on federal activities under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 for fiscal years 2017-2020, the ILOIB program allows grantees to, quote, deliver training and independent living services to individuals who are 55 years of age or older and whose significant visual impairment makes competitive employment difficult to obtain but for whom independent living goals are feasible, close quote, and whereas in the fiscal year 2020 the ILOIB program served 47,764 individuals nationwide with federal funding of $33,317,000 which is an average of $697.53 per person served. And whereas the RSA states in its report that these funds are used to provide services intended to promote adjustment to blindness and assist older individuals who are blind with, quote, managing activities of daily living and increasing their functional independence by providing adaptive aids and services, orientation, and mobility training, training in communication skills and Braille instruction, information and referral services, peer counseling, and individual advocacy instruction. And whereas the current level of funding provided through this program makes it impossible for the nation's vocational rehabilitation agencies to provide more than cursory access to adjustment to blindness training. And whereas the intent of the program is to preserve or increase independence and extend the quality of life for older blind Americans while offering alternatives to costly long-term institutionalization and care. And whereas an essential element for accomplishing this goal is allowing for access to meaningful long-term training like that offered at a residential center for the blind and whereas in order to make that option available to older blind Americans a substantial increase in funding for this critical program is required. And whereas prioritizing enhanced funding for ILOIB by the Department of Education and the Rehabilitation Services Administration could spur Congress to action on this issue. Now therefore be it resolved by the National Federation of the Blind in convention assembled this 9th day of July, 2022, in the city of New Orleans, Louisiana, that this organization urge the Department of Education to request additional funding for this much needed program in order to make substantive training available to older blind Americans. And be it further resolved that we urge Congress to amend the Rehabilitation Act to mandate that all older blind Americans be offered the opportunity to receive long-term adjustment to blindness training at a center of their choice so that they can reach the goal of preserving their independence, improving their quality of life, and allowing them to age in place as opposed to spending the last years of their lives in a nursing home or other care facility. And be it further resolved that we strongly urge Congress to provide funding sufficient to allow this choice to become a reality for all older blind Americans who wish to take advantage of the opportunity for true independence.

SHARON: The committee recommends do pass.

MARK RICCOBONO: Moved and seconded to pass the resolution.

Is there any discussion?

SPEAKER: Yes.

MARK RICCOBONO: Someone said yes. But no one is at a microphone. Please get to a microphone.

Good time for a door prize.

BENNETT PROWS: I was just thinking the same thing. Okay. We have a door prize. We have a plaque and coffee and popcorn balls and 25 bucks and that's going to go to Frankie Jones of Ohio. Apparently he's out. Oh, sorry about that. He's out there. We see him now. Stay up there. Don't sit down or you'll disappear.

MARK RICCOBONO: Got it.

Who wanted to speak on the resolution?

BENNETT PROWS: Raise your hand again, please.

MARK RICCOBONO: Encourage people who know they want to speak to a resolution to move to a mic early.

BENNETT PROWS: We lost our winner. Now we got him. Thank you. Sorry.

SPEAKER: Hi. This is Mona.

MARK RICCOBONO: Are you for or against the resolution?

SPEAKER: I'm not either for or against it. But what about people like me? I'm not 55 but there's no services for me.

MARK RICCOBONO: Well, we probably would mostly agree with you on that. But of course this resolution speaks to a specific issue.

SPEAKER: Yes, but what happens to me?

MARK RICCOBONO: It's a great question.

SPEAKER: I don't get services.

MARK RICCOBONO: It's a great question and it is something we need to work on. So I would definitely encourage you to work with your affiliate, but it sounds like you're not speaking to the resolution, so I'm going to see -- I don't see anybody else that wants to speak to this resolution. So we're going to take a vote.

All those in favor of speaking to this resolution, say aye.

All those opposed?

The ayes have it. The resolution passes.

[Applause]

SHARON: Resolution 2022-11 regarding access to cryptocurrency.

Whereas on March 9, 2022, President Biden signed an executive order ensuring responsible development of digital assets laying out a national policy for digital assets with six key priorities, consumer and investor protection, financial stability, illicit finance, U.S. leadership in the global financial system and economic competitiveness, financial inclusion, and responsible innovation. And whereas inaccessibility is a problem among the various cryptocurrency platforms and exchanges, as well as media platforms that report the performance of digital assets. And whereas most cryptocurrency platforms and exchange services do not offer blind or deafblind investors appropriate accessibility for sign up and account maintenance, nor are there infographics, charts, graphs, and other data and metadata accessible to the blind. And whereas blind and deafblind investors should have all the benefits of data available to other investors on cryptocurrency platforms to manage their digital assets. Now therefore be it resolved by the National Federation of the Blind in convention assembled this 9th day of July, 2022, in the city of New Orleans, Louisiana, that this organization call upon the administration to incorporate accessibility in any regulation of this technology, requiring that all major cryptocurrency platforms and exchanges in the United States develop and implement accessibility strategies, including web and mobile app accessibility and other components designed to be fully and equally accessible to blind and deafblind consumers. And be it further resolved that this organization demand that cryptocurrency platforms build their online and mobile applications in a manner that allows blind and deafblind users full financial inclusion, including the ability to access the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy with equivalent privacy, security, independence, and ease of use the same services offered to other users.

The committee recommends do pass.

MARK RICCOBONO: It's been moved and seconded to pass the resolution.

Any discussion?

Hearing none...

Okay.

SPEAKER: Hello. This is Ben from Minnesota.

MARK RICCOBONO: Are you for or against the resolution?

SPEAKER: I am for the resolution. I just wanted to ask if it would be possible to add on perhaps accessibility to investment apps as well since this is the same space.

MARK RICCOBONO: It's a great idea. By longstanding policy the convention has decided not to edit resolutions. We vote them up or down. I believe we already have a resolution, though, that speaks to the question you've raised.

Anybody else?

All those in favor of the resolution, say aye.

Opposed, say no.

The resolution passes.

SHARON: Resolution 2022-13. I'll point out that 12 was defeated by the committee. So now we're on 13. Regarding the continued denial experienced by service dog handlers when using the Lyft platform.

[Applause]

Whereas Lyft is a rideshare company which offers automobile transportation services. And whereas according to its own terms of service, Lyft riders cannot be discriminated against based on race, religion, or disability. And whereas despite attempted educational efforts, service dog handlers everywhere continue to experience ongoing and flagrant discrimination by Lyft drivers when traveling with their service dogs. And whereas these denials often result in the service dog handlers being stranded in unfamiliar areas, thus comprising their safety. And whereas these denials also result in service dog handlers being late to important medical appointments, work, or picking up their children from daycare, often leading to an added monetary cost and undue stress and frustration. And whereas the process to report a Lyft denial has become increasingly complicated due to the trip disappearing from the user's ride history. And whereas when service dog handlers attempt to report their denial using the Lyft platform, they are unable to provide pertinent information that will help to identify the driver accurately. And whereas many drivers claim that allergies, religious beliefs, or their fear of dogs prevent them from transporting service dog handlers and their dog, despite agreeing to Lyft's driver terms of service. Now therefore be it resolved by the National Federation of the Blind in convention assembled this 9th day of July, 2022, in the city of New Orleans, Louisiana, that this organization condemn and deplore Lyft's continued discriminatory practices against service dog handlers. And be it further resolved that this organization demand that Lyft not remove any denied or refused trip from the rider history and contact any person who submits a denial of service complaint within 24 hours and provide the person with confirmation that the report was received and will be addressed with due diligence. And be it further resolved that this organization demand that Lyft require prospective drivers to participate in mandatory service dog awareness training before being activated on its platform and that drivers be properly educated about the Americans with Disabilities Act with an emphasis on the two questions that drivers can legally ask service dog handlers about their dog. And be it further resolved that this organization demand that Lyft forbid their drivers from using allergies, religious beliefs, and fear of dogs as excuses not to transport service dog handlers and their dogs in their vehicles. And be it further resolved that this organization demand that Lyft permanently remove any driver from the platform who discriminates by denying service to a service dog handler.

The committee recommends do pass.

MARK RICCOBONO: Moved and seconded to pass the resolution. Any further discussion?

Hearing none, all those in favor, say aye.

Opposed, say no.

The resolution passes.

[Applause]

SHARON: Resolution 2022-14 regarding Uber and their continued denial of experiences by dog handlers. Mr. President, this resolution has all of the same information. Now, there is one whereas in this one that is not in the other one. Do you want us to read the whole thing anyway or just read the thing that's missing?

MARK RICCOBONO: Just give us the difference "whereas." It's been online for some time now.

SHARON: Okay. Whereas because Uber now offers a pet-friendly ride choice, many drivers insist that service dog handlers use this feature of Uber, which is discriminatory because service dogs are not pets and because it results in service dog handlers having to pay more for rides.

The committee does recommend do pass.

MARK RICCOBONO: It's been moved and seconded to pass the resolution.

Any discussion?

All in favor, say aye.

Opposed, say no.

The ayes have it. The resolution passes.

SHARON: Resolution 2022-15 regarding the accessibility of Peacock. Whereas Peacock is a streaming service provided by NBCUniversal which in turn is owned by Comcast Corporation. And whereas Peacock offers NBCUniversal shows and movies as well as original and third party content. And whereas live sporting events such as the Olympics and world wrestling entertainment programs are also part of the Peacock content. And whereas Peacock is not accessible to blind customers using a screen reader to access the service. Some examples of this include unlabeled buttons, lack of organization using headings, and play back controls that are not visible to a screen reader. And whereas even though Peacock offers auxiliary services like audio description for some of its content, these services are difficult, if not impossible, to access due to the screen reader issues mentioned above.

And whereas Peacock can be accessed with less difficulty on Comcast's own Xfinity and FLEX platforms but because Peacock is available to customers who do not have Comcast, blind users should not be forced to maintain a Comcast subscription to have equal access since this puts a premium on accessibility.

And whereas this popular streaming service has over 50 million free sign ups and 13 million paid subscribers and it should go without saying that the blind should have the same opportunities as the sighted to use its content. Now therefore be it resolved by the National Federation of the Blind in convention assembled this 9th day of July, 2022, in the city of New Orleans, Louisiana, that this organization demand that Peacock and NBCUniversal make a commitment to full and consistent accessibility across all platforms, including initial setup and using all aspects of the service. And be it further resolved that this organization urge Peacock and NBCUniversal to work with the National Federation of the Blind to ensure that all Peacock apps, its website, and all other access method as cross all platforms are fully accessible to the blind.

The committee recommends do pass.

MARK RICCOBONO: It's been moved and seconded to pass the resolution.

Any discussion?

Hearing none, all those in favor, say aye.

Opposed, say no.

The ayes have it. The resolution passes.

[Applause]

SHARON: Resolution 2022-16 regarding audio description in the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.

SPEAKER: Whereas for blind Americans the lack of equal access to information continues to be one of our greatest barriers to living the lives we want and whereas audio description can be an effective tool provide access to visual information in video presentations. And whereas in society today, especially in such arenas as education and employment, there is an emphasis on presenting information visually, using inaccessible screen sharing technology in both live presentations and online platforms and whereas even though audio description is a good solution to the information gap problem, many people overlook the importance of employing audio description when they display informational text or graphics, PowerPoint presentations, Word documents, spreadsheets, graphics, etc., via inaccessible visual-only means in training videos, educational presentations, business conferences, etc., because they view audio description primarily as a source for entertainment information for movies and television. And whereas presentations that rely on the visual display of information place blind people at a serious disadvantage in their ability both to participate and to acquire knowledge. And whereas the World Wide Web Consortium recognizes the value of audio description and has included a definition and examples of its use in the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines WCAG 2.1 but these guidelines are weak and imprecise. And whereas the current WCAG does not require the presenter to read shared documents, interpret graphics, or describe other written signs or messages that appear on the screen but are not accessible. And whereas if the identical informational text or graphics are presented in a nonaccessible manner in a video, existing standard WCAG 2.1 levels A and AA require that this information to be described only to the extent that those descriptions fit into existing pauses in dialogue, which may not allow enough time for all of the information to be communicated. And whereas the World Wide Web Consortium has the perfect opportunity to strengthen these guidelines since they are currently revising WCAG. And whereas according to its website the U.S. Access Board, quote, promotes equality for people with disabilities through leadership in accessible design and the development of accessibility guidelines and standards, closed quote, placing it in a position to help ensure that the revised WCAG guidelines grant greater access to information through audio description for blind people. Now therefore be it resolved by the National Federation of the Blind in convention assembled this 9th day of July, 2022, in the city of New Orleans, Louisiana, that this organization strongly urge the World Wide Web Consortium to revise its guidelines to enhance the use of audio description in live and recorded presentations so that blind people have the same access to all information as their sighted peers. And be it further resolved that this organization insist that the U.S. Access Board engage in dialogue to strengthen the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines to promote access for the blind to all visual information in live or recorded presentations.

SHARON: The committee recommends do pass.

MARK RICCOBONO: It's been moved and seconded to pass the resolution. Is there any discussion?

Corbb, are you for or against the resolution?

CORBB O'CONNOR: I am against. So I'm Corbb O'Connor. I lead a team that tests websites and apps with assistive tech and been working in the field for 14 years. And I support the intent of this resolution, I have no choice but to speak against it because a few of the whereases are just not accurate and we don't edit from the floor.

So the resolution says that the guidelines themselves include definitions and examples. But instead these definitions and examples are just articles on the website. They are not part of the standards.

Additionally it says the guidelines speak to how audio description is included. No. That's just one recommendation in an article.

The guidelines are not prescriptive about requirements as to how audio description is used.

So again, I support the intent of the resolution. Audio description is necessary and often misunderstood. But for us to be a solid as a partner as we can be, let's be sure that the details are precise and will allow us to have more success with this important goal. So I urge us to vote no.

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you, Corbb. Does anybody wish to speak for the resolution?

SPEAKER: Yes, sir.

MARK RICCOBONO: Carlton. Go ahead.

CARLTON WALKER: Thank you, sir. I am an attorney and have been so for a quarter of a century. And I do read regulations a whole bunch. Unfortunately the guidelines do provide definitions and these definitions are referenced in fact with ISO does reference the standard criteria in 40500:2012.

But the other problem is that where the -- the guidelines provide two definitions: Audio description and extended audio description.

Audio description may only be placed where there are existing pauses in dialogue. The more precise definition of extended audio description which allows audio that will be used in addition to the dialogue, a lot of times they'll stop camera and just talk over it, that is in criterion AAA. And it's a really common legal principle where there is a more precise definition and a less precise definition, the more precise definition is limited to that area. So the idea that expanded audio description definition would belong in level A or level 2A where it says only audio description is I believe a hope that doesn't -- that is unfounded. Because again, extended audio description is a different beast and it's only in AAA. And AAA is not commonly used. The audio description, the problem is it was based in entertainment. We had a fabulous panel today about audio description. It does not touch upon PowerPoints. It does not touch upon information. And information is different from entertainment. We need the information.

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you, Carlton.

Are you ready to vote?

Okay. All those in favor of the resolution, say aye.

Opposed, say no.

I believe the ayes have it.

The resolution passes.

[Applause]

SHARON: Resolution 2022-17 regarding the accessibility of TikTok. Whereas according to various websites such as investipedia.com, TikTok is a social media app dedicated to short-term videos of 15-60 seconds created by users emphasizing comedy and other forms of entertainment as well as self-promotion and information about fashion, personal finance, and cooking. And whereas TikTok is extremely popular with young people and claims to have 1 billion users and growing. And whereas to participate fully in society blind people must have equal access to the same social media platforms used by all to consume content and to contribute their own content if they wish. And whereas according to TikTok.com/accessibility, TikTok offers accessibility features including photo sensitive epilepsy toggle and warning, text to speech that reads embedded text, benefiting blind or visually impaired users, animated thumbnails and auto captions. But while these features are a step in the right direction, more features are needed to provide true accessibility. And whereas TikTok makes no mention of following or attempting to follow any accessibility guidelines or standards, including WCAG, the internationally developed and widely recognized guidelines commonly adopted by those wishing to make digital experiences accessible. And whereas blind and deafblind people are denied the opportunity to participate in this medium on an equal basis with their sighted peers because some buttons and controls within the TikTok app have not been properly coded to interact with screen readers, making it very difficult to access content and use features. And whereas blind and deafblind content creators are denied the opportunity to engage with followers during live broadcasts without delays or difficulty because of the lack of accessible navigation and controls. And whereas the accessibility barriers on the platform prohibit blind and deafblind individuals from creating content on social media as a form of employment, thus helping to perpetuate the nearly 70% of unemployment and underemployment rate among blind people. And whereas TikTok's website presents many other accessibility challenges, including unlabeled elements, automatically playing videos with no obvious mechanism to control them, and many others. And whereas too many videos on TikTok lack auxiliary services such as closed captioning and audio description, making many of them inaccessible to blind and deafblind users because content creators need more education about the need and use of these features. Now therefore be it resolved by the National Federation of the Blind in convention assembled this 9th day of July, 2022, in the city of New Orleans, Louisiana, that this organization call upon TikTok to commit to make all of its digital experience, including its apps and websites, fully accessible by developing the teams and processes necessary to comply with the industry standard WCAG 2.1 AA guidelines. And be it further resolved that this organization urge TikTok to eliminate the option to forego audio description, closed captioning, and other auxiliary services to creators and instead allow the end user to opt in or out of these services. And be it further resolved that this organization strongly urge TikTok to partner with the National Federation of the Blind to ensure that its efforts create and maintain an accessible experience for blind and deafblind TikTok users who consume and create content.

The committee recommends do pass.

MARK RICCOBONO: It's been moved and seconded to pass the resolution.

Any discussion?

Hearing none, all those in favor, say aye.

All opposed say no.

The ayes have it.

[Applause]

SHARON: Resolution 2022-18 regarding the European Accessibility Act and accessible ebooks.

SPEAKER: Whereas ebooks now represent over 20% of all publications currently sold in the United States with publishers reporting the percentage of ebooks sold increasing every year. And whereas it is possible for each of those ebooks to be fully accessible to the blind and other persons with disabilities through the use of nonvisual and other access technology. And whereas there is no law in the United States which directly mandates that all ebooks be accessible from the beginning of their existence. And whereas the European Union adopted the European Accessibility Act which requires that all ebooks among many other goods, services, facilities, be fully accessible to persons with disabilities by June 28, 2025, and whereas the law also requires the entire supply chain for ebooks retailers, e-commerce sites, hardware and software reading solutions, online platforms, digital rights management solutions, etc., to provide accessible content. And whereas United States publishers will be subject to the European Accessibility Act and its requirement that ebooks be sold in an accessible format. And whereas work is going on right now in Europe to plan how publishers will meet the requirements of the law by June 2025. And whereas it only makes sense for United States publishers to engage in similar work not only to be eligible to sell in the large European market but also to embrace inclusive publishing principles and thereby expand their markets. Now therefore be it resolved by the National Federation of the Blind in convention assembled this 9th day of July, 2022, in the city of New Orleans, Louisiana, that we urge Congress to adopt a law requiring that all ebooks being sold in the United States market must be fully accessible by June 28, 2025, and that the law also require the entire supply chain, retailers, e-commerce sites, hardware and software reading solutions, online platforms, digital rights management solutions, etc., to provide accessible content. And be it further resolved that we call upon United States publishers to work closely with their European counterparts to adopt the most robust standards assuring that all ebooks are born accessible wherever they are sold.

SHARON: The committee recommends do pass.

MARK RICCOBONO: It's been moved and seconded to pass the resolution.

Any discussion?

Hearing none. All in favor, say aye.

Opposed, say no.

The ayes have it. The resolution passes.

[Applause]

SHARON: Mr. President, as we come to the last resolution, I would just like to take this opportunity to thank all the authors and consultants and so forth for all their fine work. And I think that we should give Patricia Miller a round of applause for helping with the reading of all of this.

[Applause]

Resolution 2022-19 regarding disqualifying subminimum wage employers from Fair Trade certification.

Whereas since 1998 Fair Trade USA has empowered producers, promoted sustainable livelihoods, enabled more transparent business operations, and improved supply chain practices. And whereas the purchase of products with the Fair Trade certified seal has generated $846 million to farmers, workers, and fishers who have used those funds to directly improve their lives and communities. And whereas Fairtrade America is a similar organization offering similar certification with social standards typically at the co-opt or producer organization level which do not allow exploitive child labor or any discriminatory employment practices. And whereas when consumers purchase products which are Fair Trade certified by either entity, they commonly expect that fair trade principles have been monitored and practiced throughout the supply chain for that product. And whereas section 14C of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 as amended allows employers with special wage certificates from the United States Department of Labor to pay workers with disabilities less than the federal minimum wage based on their disabilities. And whereas paying subminimum wage to workers with disabilities is unfair and discriminatory. And whereas neither Fair Trade USA nor Fairtrade America include any mention of section 14C subminimum wages for workers with disabilities in their certification standards. Now therefore be it resolved by the National Federation of the Blind in convention assembled this 9th day of July, 2022, in the city of New Orleans, Louisiana, that this organization urge Fair Trade USA and Fairtrade America to include language in their certification standards to disqualify any applicants with Fair Trade certification who use section 14C special wage certificates, allowing employers to pay subminimum wages to workers with disabilities at any point in their supply chain.

The committee recommends do pass.

MARK RICCOBONO: Been moved and seconded to pass the resolution. Is there any discussion?

Hearing none, all those in favor, say aye.

Opposed, say no.

The ayes have it. The resolution passes. Thank you to Sharon, to Mrs. Miller, to the entire committee, and to all of you.

[Applause]

I don't know why we don't have a door prize.

BENNETT PROWS: Oh, I think we've got one great door prize to end this session, Mr. President.

MARK RICCOBONO: Okay.

BENNETT PROWS: It is one of the Cue Health monitoring kits and 10 COVID tests. And you know, the prices on these things it says is about 850 bucks or more. This is a wonderful, wonderful prize and we're going to give it to Heather Freeman from Nebraska. Are you here?

I hope she's not out getting a test.

Michael Smith from Kentucky. Are you here?

Let's keep going.

MARK RICCOBONO: We will start at 9:00 in the morning.

BENNETT PROWS: Ronald Lewis of Georgia. Are you here?

MARK RICCOBONO: Don't forget that if you have lost and found items, take them to the information table, please.

BENNETT PROWS: How about MM Mohan of Louisiana. Are you here? We got her!

MARK RICCOBONO: Okay, everybody. We will stand adjourned until 9:00 a.m. Be safe. Have a good evening.

(Session ended at 5:28 CT)