# National Federation of the Blind

# 2022 National Convention

# General Session V

## July 10, 2022

## 8:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. CT

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(Gavel banging).

MARK RICCOBONO: The morning session is now in order!

(Cheering and applause).

If I could have your attention, please, for this morning's invocation. We have with us the president of the Northern chapter of the NFB of Louisiana, the first vice president of the NFB of Louisiana, she's a teacher of blind students and she's also a member of Christ Church in Rustin. Please welcome Triva Olivero.

(Applause.)

TREVA OLIVERO: Good morning, my Federation family. Let's bow our heads. Dear lord Jesus, you are worthy of our praise and we just thank you that we are able to spend this time together in person at convention. Lord Jesus, we know that your word says you have a plan for us, to give us a hope and a future, and we thank you for that as we move forward to do the work that we do, for the rest of this convention and in the upcoming year. Thank you, Lord, for all that you've given us, in Jesus' name, amen.

(Applause.)

MARK RICCOBONO: How about a door prize?

(Cheering).

BENNETT PROWS: You want door prizes, we got door prizes. First of all, we're going to give a virtual door prize -- it's a real door prize for a virtual attendee. If she e-mails prize at nfb.org within 30 minutes, Gayle Bryant of Missouri will receive a $25 gift certificate to the Independence Market. So there you are. Now, first door prize of the day is $100. How about Lee Durham of Georgia? The early bird gets the worm...

How about Ellen Thomas of Alabama? Anybody here?

(Cheering and applause).

Okay, Caster Tapah of Utah?

Sorry if I -- well, okay, he's not here, so he doesn't care if I mess his --

(Laughter.)

How about Carol Peron of Illinois? This is going to be the longest day if nobody answers their --

(Laughter.)

How about Gary Mackenstat from Washington State? He's here.

MARK RICCOBONO: We do see him, yeah.

BENNETT PROWS: Somebody said he was here, but...

MARK RICCOBONO: We got him. We got him. We got him!

Keep waving, Gary. Keep waving.

We're good, Bennett.

Okay, if I could have your attention, please, I have a quick announcement. If you do not already have four pieces of origami paper and six index cards, please see your affiliate president or one of our NFB EQ crew in the back of the ballroom. It will be very important for you to have your origami paper and index cards. So please get them, says Natalie Shaheen. Dr. Natalie Shaheen!

We'll hear from her in a little bit.

Okay, if I could have your attention, please. I know there's a lot of jostling because of the paper, I'm sure.

This morning, we have an interesting presentation. I put this on the agenda before I knew we were going to have a resolution about crypto currency. But this is Owning Your Creative Content: Cryptocurrency Accessibility and the Organized Blind Movement. And the gentleman to give this presentation is a thought leader in many aspects of information. And because of his now 8 convention experience with the National Federation of the Blind, whatever he does, he's thinking about how blind people might participate and make it better.

He's presented, I think, at every one of our conventions since 2016. And he continues to prioritize during his summer coming to the Federation's convention! So he's here in person. He's a friend of the movement. Please welcome Suman Kanuganti!

(Cheering and applause).

(Intro music playing: "Through that struggle we made a star, you can do anything you want!")

SUMAN KANUGANTI: Good morning, National Federation of the Blind.

(Applause.)

My name is Suman Kanuganti. I'm the co-founder and CEO of Personal.ai. Previously, for many years, as the founder of AIRA.

I cannot begin, good morning, National Federation of the Blind...

(Applause.)

I cannot begin to speak without asking you all if you are an AIRA explorer, please make some noise.

(Lots of cheering).

I feel welcomed back, thank you!

(Laughter.)

I want to thank President Mark Riccobono for having me today to discuss the trends in technology that are critical for the blind community. After arriving at the convention yesterday morning, I ran into a good friend of mine, Paul Strader. In our conversation, he said: Suman, you are here for life now.

(Laughter.)

(Applause.)

I smiled and I said, of course I am, why shouldn't I? This is my eighth consecutive year at the convention.

(Applause.)

I started my journey with NFB in 2015. You, this community, have shown me a path when I most needed it. Have embraced me when I was most vulnerable. And guided me through building and developing experiences that were most novel, unique, and with a sense of connection. So, of course, I'm committed for life.

(Applause.)

Today, I want to talk to you about YOU. Each of you. And each of your roles in the next generation of internet evolution. If you use the internet on a day to day basis, say aye.

(Crowd saying aye).

If you want the entire internet to be accessible, say aye.

(Crowd saying aye).

Okay, is the internet entirely accessible?

(Crowd saying no).

Well, internet is about to celebrate its 40th birthday on January 1, 2023. And just like humans, it continues to evolve its phases.

Now, the first era of the internet was possible on huge mainframes, mostly available to government and institutions. There were just a few content and information on the websites. For the rest of humanity, this version of the internet, often referred to as web 1, was read-only and was about accessibility. The WCAG standards did not start until 1998, and the WCAG2 standards didn't come about until 2008. Friends, that's 15 years later the web is supposed to be accessible to everyone.

Okay, so, web 1 was read only, and web 2 was not only readable but writable. Over time, many of us started writing and uploading to the internet in the form of applications, social media, and even podcasts. I remember the days I sat with friends at the dining table and said, I think it would be cool to have someone read aloud my book any time, and one of my other friends said, oh, there's an app for that.

(Laughter.)

These apps increase the usability of the internet and created tons of utility for the consumers. But yesterday, John Pare, our John, said, application accessibility and usability is happening this year, it's fantastic, but that's almost 15 years later after the beginnings of the web 2 era.

There's another example, which is accessibility at Facebook and Meta, starting in 2012. That's 8 years after its inception.

So, if you are a creator, thought leader, writer, author, podcaster, entrepreneur, small business owner, or freelancer, say aye.

(Many saying aye).

Congratulations. You've been making big tech very successful with your creations. There's probably nothing wrong with that since there's tons of utility, but now people are aware of how valuable our data is and how algorithms can be insensitive about our privacy and how they can hurt society with misinformation. And how bias and discrimination these algorithms can get.

Something else was happening during this time. What was it? These apps were so good at exchanging information and promoting our thoughts that we didn't care about who is the owner of this data that every one of us creates. That's the evolution of big tech companies that we all experience today. Now, the question is, do you want to own the data on the internet that you create? Let me ask that again... do you want to own the data on the internet that you create?

(Cheering).

Welcome to web 3, my dear friends. That's web 3.

So to recap, web 1 is readable and it's all about accessibility, yes, which we're still working on after 30 years. And web 2 is all writable and all about usability. And it looks like we're making progress after 15 years. Web 3 is ownable, and it's all about ownability, which is still in its infancy stages and we should be making progress on it now. In fact, the term web 3 gained popularity and meaning only in the last 2 two 3 years. Before the term, the industry was shaping it in terms the blockchain, NFTs, and cryptocurrencies, which, no, are not all the same thing.

A few NFB members already recognize that and are at the forefront of it. They joined my session yesterday. Some people are Reese, William, Aaron, they all showed up to the session and they're passionate about updating the basic protocols. The good news is that you, community, can define the rules in cryptocurrency. For example, why is alt text on these platforms limited to the number of characters? It's different number of characters on different social media platforms. So why is it limited? And why not there is an alt voice for describing arts and images on the web in the voice of the creators?

So before we dig deep, if you care about privacy and if you care about ownership of your data, say aye.

(Crowd saying aye).

Friends, that's blockchain. If you care about the data making money for you and economic opportunities for you, say aye.

(Crowd saying aye).

That's cryptocurrency.

If you care about making that data useful to your community, say aye.

(Crowd saying aye).

And that's NFTs.

It's that simple.

So how does blockchain help with the privacy? Think of it as every piece of the data that we add to the internet, like a social media post, a podcast, an article, has an associated ownership and ledger to keep track of. That's the new internet. How does cryptocurrency make money for you? Think about it as every piece of the data that you add to the internet carries an associated monetary value. Normally referred to as tokens.

When a group of people believe in currency, it can be used to create goods, art, digital assets. Traditionally, the currencies are backed by the government. In the case of cryptocurrency, it's backed by people. It's the community, and it's a movement from people around the globe. Now, you may ask, what are NFTs, Suman? Think about NFTs as goods that you exchange with cryptocurrency that is built on blockchain.

So what is all this having to do with the blind community? Well, remember, it took many, many years of work and advocacy from the blind community for web 1 accessibility and web 2 usability. And the next phase is web 3 ownability, and it is happening right now. And I believe it is important for this community to have a seat at the table in the places that matter to be at the forefront of this change so it doesn't become another moment, but it's fundamentally designed with each and every one of you in mind.

(Applause.)

Web 3 enables the future of consumer internet experiences such as Metaverse, owning your creative content, and participating in economy upfront. Web 3 is about privacy. It's about security. It's about independence, and it's about ease of use. We all have to be ahead in the game of this technology.

Me, personally, I'm building Personal.ai, where every person gets to create their own digital mind. The digital mind we create is nothing but an AI algorithm that is trained on all your data that you create. So far we've been giving away that data to big tech to benefit them, and I want to put control of the data and monetary value of the data back to the people. So if you're already a writer, author, podcaster, content creator, you should join this community and switch the monetary value back to you.

A few NFB members are creating a Discord called Blind in Crypto. If you want to be part of the movement specific in the context of this group. E-mail Personal.ai/blind. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MARK RICCOBONO: How about a door prize? Give away some Bitcoin or something.

(Laughter.)

BENNETT PROWS: We've got chocolate covered espresso beans --

MARK RICCOBONO: Much more valuable, that's good.

BENNETT PROWS: And a gift card. Sabrina Frazer of New York! I think she's here! That's good! That's what we gotta have from everybody.

(Laughter.)

(Sabrina cheering).

(Laughter.)

BENNETT PROWS: We got her!

(Laughter.)

MARK RICCOBONO:

BENNETT PROWS: I hope we recorded that, it's going to be an example later on.

(Laughter.)

MARK RICCOBONO: That's right.

Okay. Unfortunately, we had a presentation next which was going to be a report from our Jernigan Institute given by Anil Lewis. Anil is not up to being at the podium this morning. He is battling COVID.

(Crowd reacting with sympathy).

I know. So we'll have to miss him this morning. But I know that we'll find a way for him to give some interesting insights and updates to the Federation community later this summer, maybe.

So we are going to move to the next presentation, which is going to be partly in the room and partly virtual. And I think it will be one that you'll enjoy. So, strengthening the dimensions of nonvisual learning is our next presentation. And there are a number of people participating in this presentation who have been part of our efforts to stimulate the education and innovation for blind people in science, technology, engineering, and math. This is always a powerful moment in our convention, especially when we can hear from the next generation who have been impacted by the work that we've done. And it's a good time for us to think about how we can transform our own learning in ways that impact

For a number of years, you've heard about our SABER program, which we have been undertaking to teach and explore spatial reasoning and understanding. And really stretch the dimensions of what nonvisual access means and how we can contribute to the broader understanding of engineering.

Here to lead us in this presentation is someone that has become very well-known in many parts of this convention, in this context, she is serving as our director for our NFB SABER program. She also now has the distinction of being a Jacob Bolotin award winner. Here's Dr. Natalie Shaheen!

(Cheering and applause).

(Intro music playing).

NATALIE SHAHEEN: All right, can you hear me okay?

MARK RICCOBONO: We can hear you.

NATALIE SHAHEEN: Brilliant. Good morning, friends. Before we get started, I want to let you know a transcript of this presentation is available online. You will find a link on the Crowd Compass app and in the tweet I posted this morning. I also posted a link in the Zoom for those participating virtually.

As you may have deduced from the announcement and the materials that hopefully were passed around your delegation earlier, this session is going to employ a pedagogical approach that's a little different than what you're accustomed to, unless you know me well, nothing about this presentation will come as a surprise, including my use of the word "pedagogy".

The NFB EQ students and I have a multimodal learning opportunity planned for the next 30 minutes. We hope you are ready to think spatially and be active learners. If you do not already have 4 pieces of origami paper and 6 index cards, see your affiliate president or the NFB EQ students and menders who are scattered around the room. NFB EQ friends, can you make some noise so folks know where you are.

(Cheering).

NFB Engineering Quotient, or EQ for short, is a program of the Spatial Ability and Blind Engineering Research project, which you may call Dr. Wade Goodridge and I told you about in the 2019 convention. The project's aim is to broaden the participation of blind youth in STEM fields through accessible STEM programs designed to increase blind youth's spatial ability. Through this National Science Foundation funded project, we held face to face programs in Baltimore in 2018 and 2019 and remote programs in 2020 and 2021.

As you will soon hear from the students, the face to face program centered around a structural engineering and architecture project in which students designed and engineered a place of their own and then constructed a scale model of their place. The remote programs focused on the art and math of paper folding as well as its engineering applications. Students learned to fold fractals and they learned the mathematical laws that govern origami. That's right, there are four mathematical laws that govern origami.

MARK RICCOBONO: Natalie, I want to let you know that you're a little choppy on the internet. I don't know if there's anything you can do about it -- are you on your phone?

NATALIE SHAHEEN: No, I'm on the computer.

Well, I can try turning off the headset and we can use the mic from my computer. Maybe it's an audio issue?

MARK RICCOBONO: Yeah, you're cutting in and out a little bit.

NATALIE SHAHEEN: Okay, hold on a second.

How's that?

MARK RICCOBONO: That's good.

NATALIE SHAHEEN: That's good? All right, hang tight, just a second.

All right, cool!

So, the four mathematical laws that govern origami -- let's get back to that. Two-colorability, mountain valley counting, angles around a vertex, and layer ordering. If you want to learn more about the mathematics of origami, I recommend the work of Drs. Robert Lang and Thomas Hull. Madeline Mau, a 2021 NFB EQ online participant who hails from New Jersey, is here to share her NFB EQ experience. Here's Maddy.

(Applause.)

(Crowd cheering: "Yay Maddy! ")

MADELINE MAU: Hi, everyone, thank you so much.

(Applause.)

So, there are many things middle school science classes might be known for: Long lectures, zany teachers in periodic table T-shirts, or group labs devolving into good-natured horseplay among classmates. My science education had some of those things -- mostly the former -- but there was an even bigger component many people overlooked: The inaccessibility of STEM education. Since early childhood, I had been given a science education far less adapted for my learning needs than that of my sighted peers. This manifested in a myriad of ways. Teachers using inaccessible materials, sloppy or nonexistent tactile graphics, reduced opportunities for my participation in labs, and my needs being given less importance by the teacher, to name a few.

These patterns caused me to become apprehensive about pursuing STEM as a career, or subjecting myself to more rigorous STEM education, as I feared all of it would be similar to what I had previous experience with.

My freshman year of high school was filled with similar hurdles and challenges as my middle school career. Teachers continually underestimated me or tried to put me in lower-level classes than what I should have been allowed to take, because they didn't want to deal with adapting complex material for me or thought I was incapable of understanding the concepts, even though the only difference between me and my peers was my blindness.

However, I started gaining a new perspective when I enrolled in the National Federation of the Blind's EQ program for high school students last summer.

(Cheering and applause).

It has been almost a year since the program ended, but I still treasure the lessons and techniques it has taught me, as well as the connections I made with other blind students and members of the Federation. The curriculum is rigorous, with many activities devoted to developing spatial reasoning skills through technical drawing, paper folding, and puzzle-solving.

My peers and I were given many challenging assignments that encouraged us to reframe how we thought about STEM as a whole through conversations with blind STEM professionals and resources about blind people in STEM fields.

We were also provided with many manipulatives to participate in hands-on activities like folding origami boxes, making fractals out of index cards, and drawing multi-view sketches of various objects in our daily lives.

There were also ample opportunities for combining spatial reasoning with recreation, like when we were encouraged to build Legos with nonvisual instructions, or given origami popup books to deconstruct and analyze. Those this curriculum compared vastly different activities compared to my standard science education, it has proven to be far more valuable. It introduced me to advanced spatial reasoning concepts, gave me transferrable skills I could use in my mainstream classes, and showed me how fulfilling accessible STEM could be, complete with advice from successful blind people in the workforce.

(Applause.)

The EQ program not only had engaging activities and lessons, but it also had a student showcase where my peers and I could present projects inspired by what we learned, which was one of the biggest highlights for me. It showcased everyone's unique perspective on what we learned in addition to their skill sets and other interests. Some students who knew about web development created websites sharing EQ resources like origami patterns and Lego instructions in adapted formats as well as new patterns they'd created. Others used the skills they'd learned at EQ to make detailed paper creations that highlighted their spatial thinking and inventive mindsets. And others, like me, wrote about their positive experiences and take a and takeaways to tell the world both the benefits of adapted STEM education and why it is essential for all blind students, STEM inclined or not.

(Applause.)

After reflecting on my experiences in the NFB EQ program, I still don't know if STEM is truly for me. I worry a lot about what my future science education will look like, or if higher level STEM classes will be accessible so I can succeed. As I am speaking to you all today, I am a rising junior in high school and have just finished a school year filled with the same unadapted STEM materials and un cooperative teachers on top of a more demanding course load and the daunting prospect of choosing a career. However, I now understand how STEM can become more than inaccessible experiments or in flexible teachers. I've been fortunate to experience how an accessible and engaging science education can boost confidence and open up new possibilities for myself and my blind peers and I hope others will have easy access to such opportunities in the future. Thank you.

(Applause.)

NATALIE SHAHEEN: Thanks so much, Maddy. Now, are all ready to be active learners? You will need origami paper for the first activity. Before we get started, a couple notes about mindset. First, we all come today's activity with different knowledge and experience. In the Federation we have some skilled origami artists. I'm not one of them.

(Laughter.)

Today's activities are for you whether you are a skilled origami artist or someone who has never fold paper. The each of us will have different takeaways from today's activities. Your takeaways might be about how to fold paper to make interesting shapes, or they might be about how to support others in developing that knowledge.

Second, each of us uses a different combination of supports to learn. Your learning supports might be personal capacities like your sense of touch, digital tools, analog tools, or other humans. Whatever combination of supports works best for you is perfect. From my perspective, learning supports do not exist in a hierarchy. I encourage you to use whatever combination of supports suits you today. A couple of sports specific to these activities are available. For those of you who prefer to read, you will find written instructions for the activities in the, which is linked in the Crowd Compass app and in the tweet I posted this morning.

Our NFB EQ students, mentors, and staff are on the floor to provide human support. Can y'all make some noise again to folks know where you are?

(Cheering).

You will also find human supports all around you. It is the Federation way to help each other out. I am sure the folks around you would be pleased to support your learning.

Now, let's fold some paper. This activity has two rounds. If the first round you will fold and in the second you will teach.

Round one, grab one piece of origami paper. Fold the paper at least 3 times. You have 1 minute to fold your paper at least 3 times. When the music ends, your time is up.

(Instrumental pop music playing).

MARK RICCOBONO: At least 3 times!

NATALIE SHAHEEN: At least. Could be more.

(Music continues).

All right, round 2. Now, it's time to teach someone near you how to fold what you folded. You can use any teaching method with which you and your partner are comfortable. If you want a challenge, try teaching or learning using words only, no tactile or visual exploration. You'll have 4 minutes to teach. There will be 2 songs in this round. Each song will be 2 minutes. I suggest each partner teach for the duration of one song. But if you feel a different use of the time would better support your learning, go with your gut.

(Upbeat instrumental pop music playing).

Awesome. I loved all the active learning noise.

We're still working...

(Song changes to second song).

NATALIE SHAHEEN: All right, there's the end of the music! All right, loved all the active learning noise. If you're having fun folding paper, I invite you to continue folding as we hear from some more students. I ask you that fold quietly and don't fold your index cards yet!

Next we have a fire round of recorded presentations from five of our NFB EQ students.

ABBY DUFFY: Hi, my name is Abby Duffy and I'm from New Hampshire. I participated in NFB EQ in both 2019 and 2020. In both of these programs I was able to learn a lot about science but I was also able to have a lot of fun. In 2019, some of my favorite memories are making new friends and experiencing a lot of things. Also we built these really cool wooden models that I still have to this day. In 2020, I also participated in NFB EQ. And this one was a virtual EQ, because 2020. But I had a lot of fun on this one as well. I felt like we got to learn a lot of new things and listen to a lot of cool experience -- speakers, and I'm just really glad I got to participate in both of those programs

ROBERT EGGLESTON: Hello, I'm Robert Eggleston from Virginia. I was one of the participants in the NFB EQ virtual 2021 summer session. I believe that the most valuable skill I took away from that program was how to think and design in three dimensions, which I learned through the lessons involving origami and multiview drawings. Now this skill both helped me when navigating through buildings and when designing STEM related projects.

My name is Andrea Cataquiz from Illinois. In 2021, via Zoom, I attended the NFB STEM EQ program, where we did a variety of fun activities such as origami and we ended the program by creating a project where we could share our experiences and the things we learned.

GABRIEL MENDEZ-FRANCIS: Hello, my name is Gabriel Mendez-Francis and I'm from Alabama. I participated in the NFB EQ, and that's Engineering Quotient program, from 2019 and the favorite part about the program for me personally is that most other STEM programs that I've been to have been kind of concept based or theoretical. Like they show you what you have to do, but they never actually show you how to do it. But we actually went hands on with the project so we had to study architectural engineering, and after that, we applied some of those concepts by looking at different ways that it could work bit by bit. And ultimately we made a final project, a structure of our own. And it was all completely creative, no guardrails. So I built an observatory and I still have it to this day. Maura: Hi, my name is Maura. I'm a college student right now, and I'm from Nebraska

(Cheering).

I participated in NFB EQ in 2019. It was a really great experience. We got to build little models of rooms that we would like to have someday. Mine was a Netflix room, don't ask me why. But it was a really fun time and we got to make drawings and measure the balsa wood, as much as we could do within the angles we had, mine was an hexagon. And at the end of the week, we got to do an exhibition in front of a lot of NFB leaders. So I got to answer some really cool questions. And it was really fun to see people that were truly invested in my future and didn't see my blindness as an obstacle.

(Applause.)

NATALIE SHAHEEN: Many thanks to Abby, Robert, Andrea, Gabriel, and Maura. Remember Maddy mentioned making a fractal out of index cards at the beginning of this presentation? Well, that is what we're going to do now. Don't worry, you don't have to have a deep understanding of fractals to fold one. In fact, folding a fractal is a great way to learn about them or refresh your memory. Today we're going to make a Menger sponge, a fractal Emily Gibbs of Texas originally introduced me too.

We're going to fold this fractal in four rounds. The first three rounds we'll do together and the fourth round you can do with some friends later.

For round 1 you will need 2 index cards. We're going to orient the two cards so they are perpendicular to one another. Perpendicular lines intersect at a 90-degree angle. Examples of perpendicular lines in everyday life are: A traditional 4 way stop, a lowercase print t, and a cross.

Take one card and orient it horizontally left or right. Take your second card and lay it on top to in ab up and down orientation. You should have a shape that resembles a cross or street intersection.

Examine each of the legs of your cross and make sure all four are about the same I size. Take the top leg of your cross and fold it back and around the horizontal card to create a flap

Do the same thing with the bottom leg. Fold it back and around the horizontal card to create a second flap.

At this point, you should have a one horizontal index card with a second virtual card folded around it creating two flaps in the back.

Now, take the left leg and fold it up around the vertical card to create a third flap, this time in the front.

Take the right leg and fold it up around the vertical card creating the fourth and final flap in the front.

The technical term for this shape is "square flappy thing". If you're with me, you should have two index cards folded into a square with two flaps in the front and two flaps in the back.

I'm going to give you a minute to finish your square flappy thing. I encourage you to solicit support from the folks around you or offer support if you are finished.

(Upbeat pop music).

NATALIE SHAHEEN: All right, for round 2, you will need your 4 remaining index cards. With those 4 cards, you need to make 2 more square flappy things. I'll give you 1 minute to do that. Solicit support as needed.

(Pop music playing).

NATALIE SHAHEEN: In round 3, we are going to make a cube. Each index card will serve as one face of the cube. To make your cube, the first thing you need to do is pull your 3 square flappy things apart. When you do that, you should have 6 separate index cards, and each card should have 2 flaps.

I'm going to let you solve the spatial puzzle of how to turn your 6 flappy index cards into a cube. Hint: The flaps always go on the outside.

Take the next 4 minutes to solve the puzzle. Solicit support as needed.

(Instrumental music playing).

NATALIE SHAHEEN: Later today, for round 4, gather 19 of your friends and use your 20 cubes to make a Level 1 Menger sponge. That's a cube comprised of 20 smaller cubes. And, if you're ambitious, use 20 Level 1 Menger sponge to make a Level 2 Menger sponge, an even bigger cube. Emily Gibbs, some students, and I once made a Level 3 Menger sponge. That was a really big cube!

There are enough index cards in the ballroom to make that happen. The question is, are you up to the collaborative challenge?

(Crowd reacting with excitement).

Share your progress on social media using the hashtag #NFB22. Keep thinking spatially and stretching the dimensions of nonvisual learning! And remember, STEM isn't visual. It's spatial. Thank you!

(Cheering and applause).

MARK RICCOBONO: I was still making my cube over here!

(Laughter.)

I think I should have called for more EQ assistance.

How about these students and Dr. Shaheen!

(Cheering and applause).

All right. That deserves a square door prize.

BENNETT PROWS: I think we need a cube door prize or something like that.

MARK RICCOBONO: I'm still going to be working on my cube the rest of the day.

BENNETT PROWS: We're going to have a virtual participant door prize of a $50 gift card, and that goes to Michelle Berneski of Pennsylvania. You have 30 minutes to call prize at nfb.org. I don't mean call, I mean send an e-mail!

(Laughter.)

I'll get it by the end of convention. Send an e-mail to prize at nfb.org within 30 minutes and you'll win the gift card.

We also have $50 and a knitted scarf from Missouri. And it's going to Mississippi, to Maxine Gritchicof. Maxine, are you in the room? Or are you in Mississippi?

Nobody like that here. Okay, David Brant of Nebraska.

No David?

How about Taylor Arnt of Texas? "Arnt" you here?

(Laughter.)

Sorry.

MARK RICCOBONO: Nobody is here!

(Crowd cheering in response).

BENNETT PROWS: I bet you Tamika Williams from Alabama is here. Are you here? Yes, we see you.

MARK RICCOBONO: Okay.

All right! Well, continue folding quietly.

(Laughter.)

We're going to think outside the box now, though.

(Laughter.)

(Some groans at the pun).

Accessibility awareness on a global scale. This is really an exciting presentation, and one that I am proud to bring to this stage. Our next gentleman, I actually met at my very first Federation convention in 1996. He is from Canada originally, but he has worked now extensively in mobilizing people around the world to think about, talk about, take action on accessibility. He's the co-founder of a movement that is known as Global Accessibility Awareness Day, or GAAD.

(Cheering and applause).

And he has used his talents to mobilize the conversation around accessibility in spaces where they might not traditionally be, and try to find new allies to our cause. So it's really my pleasure to invite, to speak to the Federation today, his perspective about accessibility and awareness, here's Jennison Asuncion!

(Intro music playing: "It's all around the world, just la la la la la...")

(Crowd clapping rhythmically).

JENNISON ASUNCION: Good morning, everyone!

(Crowd replying: Good morning).

JENNISON ASUNCION: Mark, you took away my thunder a little bit because I was going to tell a very quick story about how back in 1996, when I was living back in Canada, I was sent with a small delegation of Canadians who were planning to start a Federation chapter. This was in Anaheim. And I would end up meeting this, uh, really smart student and hanging out with him, and who would have thought that 26 years later, here's Mark, President Riccobono!

(Laughter and applause).

You guys are really lucky to have him! You know that! (Jennison clapping as well).

Let's see. By a show of sound by hands, how many people have NOT heard of Global Accessibility Awareness Day before?

(Applause.)

Be honest!

Good, because then that means that less people will be bored of what I'm going to talk about!

(Laughter.)

Let me -- oh, and one other thing, just as I always like to do when I'm addressing an audience, a crowd like this, I stand up here at the podium with a single sheet of braille notes -- long live braille!

(Crowd cheering).

Now, just to tell you the sign of the change of the times, I did forget my braille watch so I'm using an earpiece to keep me on time here.

(Laughter.)

Okay. A little bit about, let's see, how are we going to start this? Okay. So, I, when I graduated from university, I spent my first 6 years of my professional life working in the e-learning space, just traditional e-learning stuff. Designing, training, being a project manager. But in 2006, I woke up and said, I'm done with this. I want to do something more impactful and something I thought would make a difference. And some really good friends of mine mentioned to me that I did have a passion for accessibility, which I did, but to pursue it in a full-time fashion. So I switched in my career, at that point, to working in digital accessibility. And the one thing that I have always been passionate about, or found my passion in, was trying to find different ways to make accessibility and the concepts of accessibility, more, if you will, accessible to your everyday tech professional. Because I was meeting with web developers and designers throughout my time, and a lot of them had just frankly never heard of accessibility. Now, I know in a room like this, we would expect that the seeing world would be kind of hip to us and to what our needs are. But the reality is, the majority of people, particularly in the tech world, have never interacted with someone with a disability or have any knowledge, or anything like that.

So, I was thinking of different ways to make it interesting, make it fun, and in 2009, I attended an event called Accessibility Camp DC, which was in Washington, DC, so I was living in Toronto at the time. But it was this really crazy concept to me. They were just going to grab a room at the MLK Library in Washington, DC.

And they were just going to bring people together on this random Saturday, and feed them Potbelly subs, and have people just gather in this library room and set up these sessions on accessibility. I thought that -- see, I'm more of a Type A person, so I was like, this is too much chaos. This is not going to work. But suddenly, all these people came together, and there were designers, developers, folks with different disabilities or impairments, and it actually happened! There were all these sessions. They had breakout rooms and all of this stuff. And I was just so taken aback, but then also just pleasantly surprised that something like this could work. And people were learning, and people were asking questions, and, you know, the kinds of questions about, like, well, how does a screen reader work, and all of those kinds of things. It was mind boggling to me.

So I left that experience, and I said, I've got to do something like that.

But fast forward, I helped out with a similar event called the Accessibility Unconference at the time, in Boston, in 2010, and Accessibility Camp in Seattle in 2011, and then I think I did one in Los Angeles -- this was all before I considered doing something in Toronto. Apparently I just wanted to practice run a couple times before I decided to do something there.

But I ran one in Toronto in 2011 and that was great, and it worked really successfully. So that's just some context for you all to understand where my passion lay, and what I was trying to achieve as part of my kind of, outside of my 9 to 5 job.

Now, it was a November, a Saturday night in November in Toronto in 2011, so I had already run the accessibility camp in Toronto and I had done the stuff in Boston, LA -- sorry, I hadn't done the one in LA, but I had done Seattle, Boston, and DC, and all of that. I'm at home on a Saturday night, and that was not typical of me at the time, and what does a tech person do when they're home on a Saturday? Well, I was just trolling Twitter, and just looking around. And suddenly, I came upon a tweet that said something to the effect of "accessibility needs to go mainstream now". So I was like, oh, this is interesting. So I activated the tweet, or the link in the tweet, and I came upon this blog post by someone I didn't know at the time, named Joe Devon, who at the minute was a web developer in Los Angeles. And he, like any tech professional who has a beef or something to talk about, he decided to write a blog post. And he was recounting a story about his father, who was a brilliant man who spoke many languages and all this kind of stuff, but like many people getting older, his dad was losing his hearing and his vision. And things as simple that we take for granted as, like, going to the bank, was going to become difficult. Now, Joe, being a technology guy, was like, well, it should be easy enough for his dad to use the website for this large bank. But he soon discovered that that was not going to be possible because there was a lack of accessibility at the time. So Joe took to his blog and wrote this quick blog post talking about how web developers knew nothing about accessibility, but they did, they needed to learn about accessibility. They needed to understand about screen readers, and we needed to come up -- and he called for a day, some sort of day dedicated to learning about accessibility.

So, if you remember my story and what I was trying to achieve back in Toronto, here I am reading this blog post going, wow. This is EXACTLY what we need!

So, I tweeted him, and I responded to his blog post and said, hey, if you're serious about this, let's talk about it.

So, you know, moving further ahead, we hopped on the horn and we started chatting, and we said, let's do it.

So Joe Devon, my co-founding partner in Global Accessibility Awareness Day, who I didn't know until that moment, and I just said, let's choose a date. At the time, we chose May 9th. And we said, okay, now what?

(Laughter.)

So, we each e-mailed and called, and all of our friends -- mine in the accessibility community, and him in the tech community -- and just asked people, hey, on May 9th, can you run an event, whatever kind of event you wanted to run, with a focus on digital accessibility? And target the mainstream tech community in some way?

And we were like, meh, we'll see what happens.

Well, fast-forward to May 9th, and we had, you know, about 15 events around the world. I was just, like, wow, that's a lot, even then! And we had, like, a government conference in India. We had stuff going on in Australia. We had some events in the U.S. and in Canada. And that was great! And we ran the first event, and that was that. Well... here we are, fast-forward to 2021, last year, and we celebrated GAAD's 10th anniversary. (Cheering and applause)

Thank you.

And neither Joe or I had any idea that GAAD would pick up in such a big way. And so we are so proud of it. And we've moved the date since. (Laughing). Because we found out that we were bumping up against holidays in Europe. But it is now the third Thursday of May, is when GAAD is.

Now, real quick, because this always comes up, people are asking, what are the highlights of running these events all these years? I personally got to meet Sir Tim Bernard Lee, who is the father of the worldwide web. He participated in a Global Accessibility Awareness Day event in Copenhagen that I attended. But I think for me, one of the most exciting things to see is video game accessibility has become such a big thing.

(Cheering).

Are there gamers in the crowd?

(Cheering).

Well, it's amazing to me -- so I'm aging myself here, but for those of you who may remember Atari...

(Laughter.)

There were a couple of games that I as a completely blind person could play by staying in place. There was a game called Centipede, where all you had to do was fire away, and Jungle Hunt, and a couple other ones. But those games now are amazing, and I know many are using Global Accessibility Awareness Day to launch gaming initiatives and stuff like that. So that's another big one.

The other thing for me is to see how many events are happening in things other than English. Because G in GAAD is for global, and there's a lot of other languages across the globe besides English. So we're doing things in other languages.

Now, one of the things that Joe and I did in celebration of our 10th anniversary is we launched something called the GAAD Foundation. And the foundation has a mission to disrupt the culture of technology and digital product development to make accessibility a core requirement.

(Applause.)

Thank you. So we're doing it in a number of ways. There's five programs, and if you want to learn more about it, you can go to gaad.foundation. But one of the things we're running, and I'm leading into the next presenter, is there's something called the GAAD pledge. And what it is is an opportunity for -- I don't want to get too technical here, but there are open-source libraries, JavaScript libraries, that a lot of developers like to use to build websites and mobile apps and all those things. In fact, many of the websites and mobile apps out there are powered by these open-source libraries.

So what we ask, we ask for a library to take the GAAD pledge and spend a year making sure all of their widgets are accessible, making sure their documentation is accessible, and making sure that they're promoting accessible development amongst anyone who picks up their library to use it.

And so the next speaker you'll hear from, Mike Gifford, and the open source project that he's involved with, Drupal, this year, took the GAAD pledge. So let's give him a round of applause, and Drupal, for that!

(Cheering and applause).

Now, my ask of all of you -- there is an ask. So I would LOVE to see GAAD events in all 50 states next year.

(Applause.)

All right? Can we do this at the chapter level? All you need to do -- it doesn't have to be anything fancy. You can just open up like a meeting or host something at a library, or you can be there with your assistive technology and invite web developers to come in and for them to at least see what it's like to experience their website or their mobile app, which they probably didn't develop accessibly, but let them see what that experience is like. Whether it's with a screen reader, screen magnification, refreshable braille display, any of that stuff. Or have a guest speaker come and talk about, you know, whatever. Something to do with accessibility. But you all have this power, and my ask of all of you, in all of those 50 states and wherever else -- I know, Mark, you mentioned to me that there's some work in Puerto Rico as well, so I'm not sure if there's anyone from Puerto Rico here...

(Cheering (.

But we would love to have something in Espanol in Puerto Rico talking about digital accessibility at all.

So if you all can just think about that, the third Thursday of May next year, and if you want to learn more about Global Accessibility Awareness Day, you can go to this nifty website called accessibility.day!

And I'm so pleased that we have that. And that's in no short part, and in real part, to President Riccobono, who was approached with that domain name, but was so generous enough to give me a call and say, hey, Global Accessibility Awareness Day deserves this accessibility.day domain name.

(Cheering and applause).

So this is my opportunity to publicly thank President Riccobono. And I want to thank all of you for your attention. This is only my third convention I've attended, but I've thoroughly enjoyed it, and I really appreciate your time and attention. Thank you so much!

(Cheering and applause).

MARK RICCOBONO: So how about a GAAD event in every chapter!

(Cheering).

Maybe we can build some cubes together! I'm still working on mine up here.

(Laughter.)

How about a door prize?

BENNETT PROWS: How about that, yeah!

MARK RICCOBONO: And then we're going to get a PAC update.

BENNETT PROWS: I'm giving a door prize of chocolate covered cherries from Washington, and two $25 gift cards from Georgia. And by the way, I just learned that next May -- I was looking at my Action Fund calendar, it says is on the 18th of May.

The winner is Laurea Elliot of Utah. Are you around here somewhere? Sounds awful quiet...

Okay, Opal Pelstriano of -- Feliciano, maybe -- of Missouri.

Okay, we got her.

MARK RICCOBONO: Okay, great.

Let's have a Give 20 update!

TRACY SOFORENKO: Hello, this is Tracy Soforenko with a Give 20 update, and the fact that I just stopped Scott LaBarre from speaking is a remarkable thing!

(Cheering and applause).

SCOTT LABARRE: Not for long.

TRACY SOFORENKO: So back in the '80s there was this band called Europe, and they had this song called The Final Count down! (Singing) we'll do it together!

We're on the final count down for our Give 20 campaign. As part of that process together we've achieved an opportunity, with 435 participants we've achieved 33 thousand dollars in donations. That is great! But we don't want to leave this super generous matching gift from Humanware on the table, up to $50,000. We want to get that money in our pocket for work for the NFB, for our White Cane fund to support all of the programs we Rupp. -- run. For the building fund, the tenBroek Fund. For the SUN rainy day fund, and the Jernigan fund for first timers to the convention. If a thousand individuals gave 20 bucks, we'd be over that limit! Or, not limit. There's no limit to what we could give

(Laughter.)

But there is an ability to maximize that match. We'd love to have you participate in this. Here's how you can do it. One, you can go to nfb.org/give20, and use our totally accessible, easy form. You can call 410-659-9314, extension 2430, and talk with our team that's available to take your credit card payment. You could come to the back of the room to the Dream Makers Circle and make your contribution there, we'll gather your information. Finally, for individuals who want to share their first-time convention story, they can share their first time convention story by e-mailing rookie at nfb.org or going back to the Jernigan Fund table and sharing those stories. Those stories would then be used in subsequent promotional campaigns.

Please help us make Give 20 truly successful. We're already there, but let's get all the way there to maximize this match.

(Singing) "the final countdown!"

Thank you, President Riccobono.

(Applause.)

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you, Tracy, and the PAC plan!

(Pac-Man theme song playing).

SCOTT LABARRE: Gooooood morning! Federation family!

(Applause.)

I am here with your Sunday morning PAC report, and all kinds of things are going on in the PAC plan, but the PAC Man is not quite happy. So we've gotta work on this. First of all I want to shout out to Ryan Strunk, I hope you're feeling better, Ryan, and we want you back here soon!

(Applause.)

Now, we came in to this convention at $447,744, annualized on the PAC plan. Currently we're sitting at just over $479,000.

I think if we dig deep we can get all the way to $500,000 annualized on the PAC plan. But we need your help. You can go to the PAC table in the back of the room or go to nfb.org/pac to fill out the form. You can you call me at 410-659-9314, extension 2424, and leave a message. One of our operators will call you back.

And so, now, let me talk to you about some of these contests. This is really kind of fun. With respect to the PAC Rat -- this is the affiliate doing the most PAC business here at this convention -- right now, it's Colorado!!!

(Cheering).

We've had one person more than Maryland do PAC business.

Now, the president just told me he is going to raise his PAC -- yay, Mark Riccobono. That would put Maryland and Colorado in a tie. But come on, Colorado! Get back to the PAC table. We gotta take the rat home!

MARK RICCOBONO: You're closer, go for it, Maryland.

(Laughter.)

SCOTT LABARRE: Speaking of the PAC rat, right here, ladies and gentlemen, those of you who have a little vision or whatever, this is Ryan the PAC rat right here. (Waving a stuffed rat).

See, this is Ryan.

I also have with me this morning, this is Ryan Jr.! He's a little baby rat. And maybe the runner-up affiliate might get the little baby rat, I don't know. But here is Ryan and Ryan Jr. for you.

MARK RICCOBONO: We all know Baltimore is the true home of the rat. Come on, Maryland!

(Cheering).

SCOTT LABARRE: This here, ladies and gentlemen, is Pare the PACyderm, okay? Now, this is actually, if you really look at this, it's a woolly mammoth, a pre historic pachyderm. That's what you look like, John Pare, a prehistoric pachyderm. In the lead is Montana, right behind them is Vermont, and listen up here, Maine, you're right in this race too. So if you get to it, you can take Pare the PACyderm home.

Last but certainly not least in the PAC critters, this is Scott the PAC mule. This goes to the division with the most activity. And right now, that is the Senior division!

(Cheering and applause).

But seniors, seniors... don't get all cocky there. The parents have woken up! And they've been really busy yesterday. And the parents are going to try and catch ya. So I don't know who's going to end up with Scott here, but it looks like it's going to be either the seniors or the parents.

Now, the other thing I want to talk about is rankings. Maryland, you are now at $4,639 a month on the PAC plan. And Colorado... we are at $4,732 a month on the PAC plan!

(Cheering).

And so, I want to remind you of our contest. If you sign up right now, your name will be entered into a drawing for a $25 gift card for signing up during this session, and then your name is also entered two more times. If you're increasing your PAC, you're put into a drawing for $250 at the banquet tonight, and if you're starting a new pledge, your name is being put into the drawing for a $250 gift card. Now, I was going to announce the names of the 12 winners of the gift card drawing, but they have disappeared off my braille Sense! So I'll have to do that later.

But here's what is going to happen, folks. Later I'll beg, cajole, do anything I can to get on the agenda later to announce these 12 winners and also to announce the closing of the PAC table and the PAC contest. We'll have to close well before the session ends because what the hotel starts doing is putting the tables away and pre-preparing for the banquet. So we'll be shutting down the PAC table early this afternoon, and we'll give you one more opportunity to do PAC business. Again, go to nfb.org/pac, visit the PAC table at the back of the room, or call 410-659-9314 extension 2424. Thank you very much, I'm outta here!

(Applause.)

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you very much, Scott, and Maryland, get back to the PAC table, as well as our affiliates.

BENNETT PROWS: How about a door prize for all the planning we've got going on, the PAC plan.

MARK RICCOBONO: Sure, sure.

BENNETT PROWS: We have $50 and a plaque that has magnetic braille. It's going to Maureen Dodson of Alabama.

We keep calling Alabama people, but anyway...

How about Francis Fritz of Washington, DC? The other Washington, we say, from Washington State.

MARK RICCOBONO: This afternoon we'll hear from Gina Klein, who is the founder of Smart Jobs, and Smart Job is having a reception to talk about its entrepreneurship programs. If you're interested in entrepreneurship programs for blind individuals, you can go to the reception at 12:30 today in studio 8. 12:30 today, studio 8, says Gina.

BENNETT PROWS: Okay, Tanya Tete from Mississippi, are you here?

I hear nothing.

How about Maurice Tennessee, from Virginia! Get this, Maurice Tennessee from Virginia! The combining of states!

(Laughter.)

Is he here? Not here...

How about Bridget Mordock of Georgia?

Here's another one. I bet this person here. Joyce Brooks from Maryland.

(Long, sustained cheer from the audience).

(Laughter.)

BENNETT PROWS: I think she's here! Well, cheers, Maryland!

MARK RICCOBONO: She was probably headed back to the PAC table to increase her PAC!

(Laughter.)

This is a -- we've been talking a lot at this convention about our stories, and this is a special story to tell: Creating Content with Accessibility as the Default: Celebrating Drupal's Olivero Theme and calling For More Blind Contributors.

(Applause.)

Now, many in this room knew very personally Rachel Olivero.

(Cheering).

Rachel was one of my best friends, and we had the opportunity also to work together. She served as our director of organizational technology until her very sudden and untimely passing in 2019. And for our first-timers, I would call to you the article that I wrote in the April 2019 Braille Monitor if you want to know at least a little glimpse at Rachel's story.

In addition to helping to guide the Federation's development of internal technologies to support our movement, she worked tirelessly just by the way she lived her life to have broader impacts on accessibility.

By the way, I should mention also that here with us at this convention is Rachel's life partner, Karen Anderson.

(Cheering and applause).

One of the many ways that Rachel's legacy continues to live on with us.

Rachel and I worked on thinking about what the NFB web presence would be like, and, well, I say "we determined", but really, she did -- that Drupal would be an appropriate platform for us to really scale up our Federation web presence. And we are now 50% through the way of getting all Federation divisions and affiliates using a common Drupal platform. Many of you have lived through this already. So we're in the process of carrying out that vision that she had for how to leverage our web presence and make more people come to know it.

Like with all that we do, though, we want to have a broader impact, and we want to have accessibility at the forefront of what we do. And so we have contributed to accessibility within the Drupal community as we've gone on this journey. And it's unfortunate that Rachel's not here to celebrate this moment with us. Because in the pandemic, we learned truly that her story, although it means a lot in this room, had extended so much further. And we learned that the Drupal community was talking about taking new steps in accessibility, and they were planning to use Rachel's inspiration to do that.

And so, here to discuss with us the impacts of Rachel Olivero and other blind contributors in the Drupal community, and the future of accessibility within Drupal and in other places is just one of the collaborators who's helped have a significant impact on accessibility. I know he will say that there are many others who have contributed, but from my talking to folks, he's been a staunch advocate and resource for carrying what Rachel brought to the accessibility community forward. It's my pleasure to introduce to you the senior strategist at CivicActions and a Drupal Core Developer, Mike Gifford!

(Intro music playing: Code monkey like Mountain Dew, code monkey a simple fan with a warm fuzzy secret heart, code monkey like you...)

MIKE GIFFORD: Well, first of all, thank you. I came yesterday and was amazed by the stories and the presentations and I've learned a lot about the work that your community is doing, and does, and it's really very impressive. And I was not expecting to have two introductions, so thank you, Mark, and Jennison. It's been lovely to be part of a community and to be here today.

So, first of all, I wanted to go and to try and just have another call again for Global Accessibility Awareness Day.

(Applause.)

How many people here have participated in GAAD events in the past.

(Very scattered applause).

Whoo! Well, if we're going to get to the 50 states, we'll need a few more hands, so hopefully we will next year when we talk about this.

My name is Mike Gifford and I'm one of four accessibility maintainers as part of Drupal Core. Drupal is a software that maintains sites across the internet, probably sites you use on a daily basis. There are more than a million sites using Drupal across the world, representing 2% of the web.

This includes the NFB websites and several chapter websites. But more than software, Drupal is a community. And there are ways that it is a family as well, just like the NFB. So, Drupal is participating in the GAAD pledge, and we're the third open-source software to be involved in this. And it's really our commitment to try and take the accessibility leadership that our community has had other the last decade and to push more to learn more, to see that we are more accessible than we were yesterday and see that this is an ongoing journey that we need to be part of.

So, Drupal is just one of millions of open-source projects, and the open-source movement is founded on the idea of standing on the shoulders of giants. This idea has been echoed several times already this convention, and I think that's a really important piece, that we can all play a small role, but there are so many that have come before us to do so much.

So I work for CivicActions, but for 21 years prior to this I had my own web business, and it was in Canada, in Ottawa, and open concept implemented a number of sites when I was leading that company. We implemented the Alliance for Blind Canadians, the Broadcast Accessibility Fund, and also the Canadian National Institute of the Blind website. And the last accessibility site that we launched was the government of Canada's Accessible Standards of Canada. This is part of Canada's Accessible Canada Act, which is something that we've been looking forward to a long time, looking ahead to what we can bring from the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Web Accessibility Directive and other sort of European and global efforts to try and improve accessibility across the board. But it was nice to be part of that initiative and learn more about how to help them build more accessible sites.

So for the people here who know Drupal, can I hear some noise!

(Some cheering).

Yay! I gotta say, my wife was quite surprised. We ran into a few people outside the convention before, on Friday night, and there were so many people, I guess 3 people we met, and all of them knew Drupal. So it was really quite neat to see a community that was already so familiar with what Drupal was.

So, I've been spearheading Drupal's accessibility since 2009, and I'm regularly remind how much more I need to learn. Back when I started, I expected that we could go and fix up the accessibility in Drupal in maybe a year or two. It would be a lot of work, but, you know, a year or two tops.

Well... it's a bigger problem than that.

So, what brings me here is Drupal's new default theme. The default theme is the default look and feel. And I was asked to introduce this theme to the NFB and have -- but I am here really representing all those who have worked hard to build this very accessible new default theme.

Now, names are important. The old default theme was Bartuk, named after Jean Bartuk, a pioneer in computer science. We often forget that women played a critical role in the emergence of the computer science sector.

(Applause.)

Absolutely.

Drupal wanted to choose the name Bartuk as a reminder of the importance of acknowledging women's contributions and doing more to increase the level.

It is unusual for a name of a theme to generate much attention. But in this case, it's more than just a name. The people behind this theme wanted to honor somebody who inspired them. Somebody who might help remind us of the constant need to build a more inclusive world. A small group of front-end developers talked about how to modernize Drupal's look and feel. They needed a new name for the project. These front-end developers wanted it to be beautiful, dynamic, modern, and to do so without compromising accessibility. It was critical that it have an excellent support for both mobile and desktop views, and also it was important for the theme to work without JavaScript. When they heard of Rachel Olivero's untimely death, they wanted to honor her contributions to the Drupal community, not only contributing to the issue queue, but also being part of the diversity, equity, and inclusion group that was at the core of the community. After settling on this name for the theme, it became especially important that we live up to Rachel's example, to ensure that it has been as inclusive as possible. The name Olivero is a reminder of this.

Can I get some noise here for everyone who knew Rachel?

(Lots of cheering and applause).

I only met her twice, but she was quite, quite an impressive person, and really had a great opportunity to learn from her when she attended Drupal Con, so thank you for that.

So Rachel was well known at the NFB as both a leader, staff member at the main NFB office. Many here knew her. Perhaps even before she started working at the NFB. I think Karen is here, but I haven't had a chance to go off and meet Karen in person, so, hoping to do that before the end of the day today.

Rachel likely had an impact on many of us in our career. We know that one of the last things she did was to launch the NFB's new website built with Drupal 8.

The new theme was led largely by a Drupal development agency called Lolobot. They're a digital agency that has done a lot of work on Drupal and has a number of really great accessibility people on their team. Mike Hirschel was the main person leading the Olivero theme. But I wanted to name some other -- mention some other names as well who were a key part of this. Matthew Tift. Kat Shaw. James Sansbury, Jan Wilcoxy, Jared Pinoch, and many others.

The theme of Drupal Core has been pretty accessible since Drupal 7. But that just wasn't good enough for Olivero. This ultimately meant committing to doing considerably more testing and evaluation for accessibility. We had to take what we had done in previous versions of Drupal and up our game so that it was a better representation for more people.

So hundreds, if not thousands of hours went into making this theme as accessible as we could.

So, the Drupal community believes in addressing accessibility as early in the project life cycle as possible. The Olivero team brought in the expertise of Drupal's accessibility maintainers. We pushed to test with a wide range of devices and settings to support as many users as possible. We know the best way to design is to build for everyone so that it supports the fringe.

I wanted to highlight the contributions of two Drupal accessibility maintainers, Andrew McPherson, and Rainn Braugh, now at Google, actually, provided support both for cognitive disabilities and switch devices.

At most sites, the menu structure is critical for navigation, but it's also a source for accessibility errors. The Olivero menu system has undergone extensive work on its menu accessibility. Screen reader only text was built in for better submenu support, overflow support was added for longer menus, logical focus orders were reviewed in both mobile and desktop, testing was done in Windows High Contrast mode, including with custom style sheets, and interactions were considered so that a wide range of scenarios with assistive technology were evaluated.

The Olivero team engaged with NFB to test as early as possible in the process. Karl Belanger did much of the testing for the NFB. It's great to have an external perspective on the work that we're doing. There's only so much that an internal team can actually determine about the accessibility of a site.

We're happy that the NFB was able to review the draft theme and to help us improve the accessibility. Drupal's accessibility issue queue is always open and we welcome feedback when new issues arise, and they will arise.

Just last month, Drupal 9.2 was released, and Olivero became the official default theme.

(Applause.)

Thank you!

There are now at least a dozen presentations on this theme available for free on YouTube. Our community is excited about our work and eager to share it with the world.

But this isn't the end of our story. How many people here have contributed a bug or an issue or reported an issue with a piece of software?

(Cheering).

Thank you! That's really great!

And how about on a website? Have you ever reported bugs on websites?

(Loud cheering).

Have you noticed any bugs on websites?

(Laughter.)

There's always bugs in software, and the web is no different. But, yes, there's a lot of work to be done.

So, web developers need to hear from you. People are always way more compelled, are way more compelling than guidelines. We need your involvement, not just in the Olivero theme, but in all of Drupal. It probably won't surprise people here, but Drupal's accessibility has already benefitted from the blind community. Aside from Rachel, we've had input from Everett Zufeld, our first core accessibility maintainer, who pushed us to consider the authoring environment along with the front facing pages of Drupal 7. I hired him in 2009, fresh out of university, and he worked exclusively on Drupal Core at that time. He played a critical role in helping our community understand accessibility. He is now the vice president of product and partnerships at a large digital design agency in Toronto. So that was pretty impressive.

(Applause.)

Vincenzo Robano was finishing high school in Italy when he started contributing to Drupal 8. He found places where accessibility had been broken, and re factoring Drupal 7 to Drupal 8. He contributed to a number of issues, caught several barriers that we had missed. I helped fundraise to bring him to Drupal Con in Portland in 2013. At that time, at the time of the conference, he had multiple job offers from people to help them with their accessibility. He declined all of those and decided to go to university. He is now finishing his PhD in computer science.

(Applause.)

I also like to note that Vincenzo Robano as a high school student did more to contribute to Drupal Core's accessibility than all of the governments in the world combined.

(Applause.)

I was watching the accessibility issues and the commitments, and, yes, this one individual contributed more to Drupal Core's accessibility, in high school, than all the governments of the world combined. So we have a bit of a problem there.

So, the early accessibility is addressed, the more robust it is. It often costs less to develop. If we can improve accessibility in the framework used by millions of sites, then it is fair to assume that the Drupal platform will benefit many of the billion people who have disabilities. These changes often take years to actually get implemented by the sites that you and I regularly use. However, getting involved can really pay off over time. The Olivero theme is the new Drupal default theme. This is what people will see out of the box when they come. In Drupal 10, we'll see the introduction of a new starter kit theme. This theme will likely be the basis of many, if not most, new Drupal sites. The starter kit theme is basic, an unstyled theme, and it will be set up to allow front-end developers to very quickly make the site look and function the way that they or their client want it to. It contains all the structured HTML but with very minimal CSS and JavaScript. Unlike Olivero, it isn't designed to look good. Getting involved with the starter kit theme is a great way to influence new sites not only to meet WCAG requirements but also to provide a good aural experience. Part of this is simply documenting the best practices of the developers so they don't need to hunt for them. The other is developing new ways for best practices to be incorporate. We're trying to do all of those things as part of the GAAD pledge, but we need help doing that. This is a volunteer led initiative. We need your help. The web keeps changing, and assistive technology is struggling to keep up. Our use of technology changes. We need people with disabilities engaged to ensure that open source tools meet all of our needs. There are will always be accessibility barriers identified in any tool. The earlier we catch these, the better it will be for everyone. We want your help to make the starter kit theme and the rest of Drupal as accessible as possible.

So, how many people here are more interested in contributing to an open source project like Drupal?

(Applause.)

Excellent!

So, nothing about us without us is the rallying cry for this movement. And there are lots of ways to become involved. Thank you for your time. If you'd like, I'll be available for a lunch discussion on contributing to Drupal. I will be in Salon B at lunch, and hope to see you there to talk about making Drupal better for everyone. I'm also easily findable on Twitter and LinkedIn and other places. So, searching "Mike Gifford" or "M Gifford" is a great way to find me on most social media. Thank you for your time.

(Applause.)

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you very much, Mike. I encourage everybody to be part of the Olivero moment. Bennett, that deserves a door prize.

BENNETT PROWS: In honor of the Rachel movement, we have a health kit with cartridges for 10 COVID --

MARK RICCOBONO: Technology! This is amazing.

BENNETT PROWS: The winner is Sharon Park of Arizona. Sharon Park of Arizona, are you here? Yes, we have her!

MARK RICCOBONO: Okay, reminder, we will be doing the Give 20 drawing at the banquet this evening, so make sure you get your Give 20 contributions in, if you want to get your plans earlier than anyone else to be at the 2023 NFB convention!

Earlier this week, we talked about using all of the tools at our disposal to secure equal access protections for blind people from all branches of the federal government. We continue to recognize that we do have many allies in our work, especially to secure 21st century access rights for blind people, and one of those is our next presenter, who is the principal deputy chief for the Disability Rights Section, Civil Rights Division in the United States Department of Justice.

She has been with the Disability Rights Section since 2010, serving as a trial attorney before coming to be in her currently appointed position. She has a long resume of contributions to civil rights work. We're very honored to have her here at this convention, especially as we continue to be very concerned and feel quite an urgency about making sure that we set the standard for all websites, from employers, public accommodations, and other public entities, that they be fully accessible to blind people!

(Applause.)

So we welcome her to discuss the right to participate fully in 21st century America. Here from the Department of Justice is Anne Raish.

(Intro music: Stand up with your face to the sky, together, we can take it higher! Together, we can take it higher!)

ANNE RAISH: Good morning, everyone.

I am really delighted to be here, to have the opportunity to speak with you all about the Justice Department's work to advance the right to full participation in 21st century America.

And I'm especially excited to be gathering in person for the first time in a really long time!

(Cheering and applause).

At the Justice Department, we recognize that perhaps nothing is more fundamental to participation in the 21st century than technology.

Now more than ever, technology is the cornerstone of how we communicate, learn, and do business. And this was made even more abundantly clear during the height of the pandemic. During that time, to stay home and physically distance, we relied on technology even more. To do our grocery shopping, to work, and to consult with our health care providers.

We are at a critical point for people with disabilities and technology. The pace of technological change is staggering. And while advancing technology can open doors for many people with disabilities, and provide the means to move closer to the goal of full, equal, and truly integrated access, cutting-edge technological advances can leave people with disabilities behind, especially if the entities that develop, manufacture, and offer them do not make their products and services accessible on the front end.

When Congress enacted the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504, the internet and information technologies as we know them today did not even exist. And for that reason, although the ADA provides and guarantees rights in a variety of acts and activities, it does not mention the internet. Accessibility must be built into the digital environment just like accessibility must be built into the physical environment.

(Applause.)

Enforcement of these laws by the Department of Justice has resulted in public entities, businesses, and some technology developers taking new approaches to accessible technology. My goal today is to share with you all the department's role and tools as it relates to enforcing the ADA in accessible technology. I'm going to talk about some recent work in this area. And then I'm going to talk about how we can work together to enforce full participation

The Disability Rights Section where I work is in the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department. Our work is to advance the rights of people with disabilities using the ADA. We have many tools to achieve this. One of them is regulations. Congress tasked us to provide regulations for the ADA. And we can clarify the obligations imposed by the ADA and how those obligations can be met. Currently the Justice Department is working on a rule to provide technical standards to help state and local governments comply with their existing obligations to make their websites accessible to individuals with disabilities.

(Applause.)

But I want to make clear, because we hear this from some entities, that even without final regulations, the ADA applies to the accessibility of web information and services.

(Applause.)

That's been the long-standing position of the Justice Department, and courts around the country have recognized that web information and services must be accessible to people with disabilities, even without formal technical standards.

As another tool to advance disability rights, the department also provides information and technical assistance to entities who have responsibilities to comply with the ADA. To that end, the department has several technical assistance documents regarding web accessibility and services. Most recently, the spring, the department published new guidance that explains that state and local governments who offer their programs, services, and activities on the web, they must take steps to ensure that their communications with people with disabilities are as effective as their communications with others.

This includes services like paying a parking ticket, registering for school, applying for an absentee ballot, and any other government program provided on the web.

The guidance also explains that businesses open to the public must ensure that individuals with disabilities have full and equal access to their goods and services, including the services they offer on their websites. This includes retail stores, banks, hotels, medical offices, entertainment venues, and restaurants. The guidance provides examples of common barriers, such as poor color contrast, using color itself to provide information, failing to provide text alternatives to images, and inaccessible online forms, where the forms use labels that can't be detected by screen readers. The guidance then provides a variety of features that businesses and state and local governments can use to make their websites accessible. It also discusses the deficiencies in automated accessibility checkers and states that a manual check of a website can provide a better sense of accessibility.

This may sound like basic stuff. But our hope is that by putting a document out like this from the Department of Justice, it will prompt businesses and state and local governments to put a stronger focus on making their web service accessible.

(Applause.)

You can find this document on our website, ada.gov, and if there are topics or areas where you feel that it would be helpful for the Department to issue guidance, please reach out and let us know. We value your insights and your expertise, and we would like to know about recommendations that you have.

Now, we have another tool that we can use when these other tools fail to bring about sufficient compliance. We also have our enforcement tool. And we can sue government entities under the ADA.

(Applause.)

-- the department has jurisdiction over all state and local government employers, the activities of all of those state and local governments, and businesses open to the public, like hotels, restaurants, movie theaters, grocery stores, and others. We have jurisdiction to enforce the ADA at all of these entities and have brought enforcement actions against many of them. As you know, many technologies that have access barriers include not only commercial and public websites, but mobile applications, educational software, audio visual multimedia, self-service kiosks, ebooks, and much more.

I'm going to talk about employment first. Employment is key to how so many of us spend our days, make a living, and even define ourselves. And under the ADA, employers must provide reasonable accommodations to employees with disabilities, unless it would impose an undue hardship. Assistive technology and accessible technologies are just some examples of reasonable accommodations. Employers must also test in a way that tests skill and ability on the job, not just measuring disability. Advances in technology have had enormous impact, but new ways of doing business if not implemented with access in mind can limit accessibility or lead to discrimination.

For example, many employers now use algorithm-driven hiring tools to interview job applicants. Job applicants must answer interview questions on video, and those video recordings are then analyzed to see how applicants' facial and voice expression compare to the facial and voice expression of, quote, successful employees.

The risk that the tool might disqualify individuals with speech impairments or facial tics is obvious, but less obvious is how such tools may disqualify individuals with other disabilities. Perhaps more troubling is that job seekers may not know that the tool was used, or that it led to their failure in the hiring process. Rejected applicants may have no way of knowing that they have been discriminated against or that they could have asked for a reasonable accommodation.

The department also has many settlement agreements with public employers including a requirement that online job applications comply with web content accessibility guidelines, including Decalb, Illinois, Isle of Palms, South Carolina, and village of Ruidoso, New Mexico.

Moving on to titles II and III of the ADA, state and local governments and public accommodations must ensure that their communication with people with disabilities is as effective as communications with others. To that end, they must provide auxiliary aids and services to ensure effective communication. An example of those aids and services are accessible electronic and information technology. They must provide those aids and services in a timely manner and in a manner that protects the privacy and independence of the individual.

An example of a recent case we did, the Justice Department reached a settlement agreement with the Champaign-Urbana mass transit system in Illinois. An individual who was blind noted that when the mass transit redid their website, they did so in a way that reduced usability for blind users. Specifically, it limited their ability to plan their trips online and travel independently. The Justice Department conducted a survey of the districts website and identified 16 different accessibility barriers, including insufficient color contrast, inaccessible hyperlinks, and limited keyboard access. We asserted that because of the redesign of the district's mass transit website, they excluded people who were blind and with other disabilities' ability to participate in the mass transit program in violation of the ADA. Under the agreement, the district must make the mass transit website accessible for blind users and users with manual impairments. The agreement requires the district to comply with WCAG2.1AA

Also in Illinois, the department is in ongoing litigation against the city of Chicago to ensure that people who are blind or deafblind have equal access to pedestrian crosswalks. It was filed in district court and last year the Justice Department intervened as a plaintiff, alleging that there are no accessible pedestrian signals at over 99% of Chicago intersections that have a crossing signal. Chicago is the third largest city in America, and to put the number in perspective, only 15 of the city's roughly 2700 crossing signals have accessible signals.

The lawsuit alleges that this widespread failure by the city subjects people who are blind or deafblind to added risks and burdens that are not faced by sighted pedestrians, such as fear of injury or death. We are continuing to litigate that case and it remains ongoing.

I want to also highlight some matters we've had with public businesses. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Justice Department learned of widespread problems experienced by individuals with disabilities trying to access vaccine websites for the COVID-19 vaccine.

(Applause.)

These websites obviously provide critical information about COVID vaccinations and enable people to schedule appointments online. A number of major retailers operated vaccine registration portals that were not accessible to people who use screen readers or have a hard time using a mouse.

(Applause.)

In response to this feedback, the Justice Department reviewed the websites of several large businesses, including Rite Aid, high V, Kroger, and CVS, and determined that these corporations' COVID-19 vaccine portals were not accessible to people with some disabilities. For instance, the calendar on Rite Aid's website used for scheduling vaccine appointments did not show screen readers any available appointment times. And people who used the tab key instead of a mouse could not make a choice on a consent form that they needed to fill out before making their appointment. And people who use screen readers could not hear the questions on Hi-V's online medical screening forms. And people who used the tab key instead of a mouse could not select appointment times. These are obviously critical functions needed to make a vaccine appointment!

The corporations agreed to make content about the COVID-19 vaccine, including the forms for making appointments, conform to WCAG2.1 level AA.

(Cheering and applause).

We have also done work in the area of self-service kiosks. Last fall, the Department filed a brief clarifying that the ADA requires public accommodations to provide auxiliary aids and services so that individuals with disabilities can fully and equally enjoy all of their services. Quest Diagnostics provides health care and diagnostic testing services, and requires patients to use an electronic self-service kiosk to check in, input personal information, choose where to wait, and perform other tasks. No staff are allegedly present in the check-in area, so patients who are blind must ask strangers for assistance or bring companions.

Our brief explained that the ADA prohibits public accommodations from treating individuals with disabilities differently because of the absence of auxiliary aids and services, including failing to provide effective communication with respect to services offered through visual and electronic means, like self-service kiosks.

I want to mention one more case involving accessible technology, because on this one, we are specifically seeking your feedback if you have experience with it. Several years ago, the Department of Justice issued a letter of findings to the University of California at Berkeley, concluding that Berkeley's free online content is in accessible to individuals with disabilities in violation of the ADA. Berkeley creates and publishes free online content, including courses on its Berkeley X platform, and it provides thousands of hours of audio and visual content featuring conferences, lectures, and other university events and programming.

Its online content is made available to the public for free, but much of it is inaccessible to blind individuals and individuals with other disabilities. If you have tried to access UC Berkeley's online content, but you were unable to do so because it was inaccessible, we'd be interested in hearing about your experience. I have an e-mail address that I hope is easy to remember! If you would like to reach out on this. And that e-mail address is uc.berkley at usdoj.gov. I'll also leave the information up here so you can reach out if you'd like to

I'd like to end by talking about how we can work together to dismantle barriers to access in 21st century American life. There are many ways that we can collaborate. As you may have done in the past, you can report an ADA violation through the civil rights division's website, which is civilrights.justice.gov. You can contact us to inform us of lawsuits filed under the ADA in which we might participate by filing a brief or intervening as a plaintiff.

You can recommend technical assistance, and you, of course, can comment on our pending regulations when they are published.

Together, we can have a significant impact, eliminating barriers to access. The Justice Department will continue to use every one of its tools to advance full participation in 21st century life. Thank you again for having me here today to share some of our work in this important area, and we look forward to our continued collaboration.

(Cheering and applause).

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you very much, Anne. We appreciate the work that the Department of Justice is taking on, and we certainly appreciate the notion that regulations are not needed, that the law is very clear about the requirement for the internet to be accessible. We agree with that!

(Cheering and applause).

On the other hand, the Department of Justice has a lot of weight and tools that it can apply in this area, and we just want to share by show of voice our support for strong regulations from the Department of Justice protecting our rights on the internet. How about it, folks?

(Loud cheering and applause).

So, if you could just share that message back at the Department of Justice, we would appreciate it! But thank you for being with us today.

(Applause.)

BENNETT PROWS: And I have a door prize, Mr. President. A virtual participant will receive a $30 Independence Market gift certificate, and the name is, I'm going to probably ruin this one, Stanhoe Luchart from Oklahoma. We also have $50 and the name is Barbara Alexander from Louisiana!

I had it in my mind and forgot -- okay, Louisiana, are you here?

Not here.

MARK RICCOBONO: I just want to say, I have my cube built over here!

(Applause.)

I have my cube. I had to see a model. That's what helped me. That was my learning support. But I'm holding up my cube right here!

(Applause.)

BENNETT PROWS: Have another name. Jocelyn Bucaro of New York.

Jocelyn Bucaro of New York, are you here?

Well, then, how about Theresa Williams of Tennessee? Are you here?

All right, we're going to continue to Andrew Adams of South Carolina. Are you here? Not even anybody cheering for him! Well, okay.

(Laughter.)

Theresa Favre from Illinois.

(Cheering).

Sounds like she might be here. We got her!

MARK RICCOBONO: Okay.

Our final attendance statistics at this convention, give you the top 10. First, Virginia came in at number 10, 75 individuals registered. Number 9, New York, 76 people registered. Number 8, Georgia

(Applause.)

82 people registered.

Tied, actually, with number 7, Colorado, 82 people registered.

Great work, Georgia.

Number 6, Florida, 95 people registered.

Number 5, Arizona, 98 people registered.

Number 4, California, 129 people registered.

Number 3, Texas, 161. I have a feeling they'll get more there next year!

Number 2, Maryland. 215 people registered.

And number 1, Louisiana, 227 people registered.

(Cheering and applause).

We have 47 -- excuse me, 57 people registered from foreign nations.

(Applause.)

Giving us total in person registration for 2022: 2,478 individuals.

(Applause.)

And we almost made it to 1500 virtually: 1, 497 people registered for virtual convention. Registration is now closed, but you can still tune in if you're not here by using all the various methods to do that.

We have just one more presentation this morning, and it is one that we always look forward to, and the individual presenting to us is at his first convention!

(Cheering and applause).

The National Federation of the Blind has a long-standing relationship with the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled. After all, we're the customers!

(Applause.)

And we're really pleased to note that the new director of this important government program has made it a priority, has made the relationship with the National Federation of the Blind a priority. And so --

(Applause.)

-- to continue that relationship.

Prior to joining the Library of Congress in 2019, he became the first African American to serve as Vermont's state librarian.

(Applause.)

For over a decade, he held numerous library roles in both South Carolina and Georgia.

(Some cheers).

Where he used his prior training as an educator to focus on such issues as workforce development and public outreach.

I've had the opportunity to meet with him a number of times since he took the role. I think even during maybe his first week or so. And it was my first time getting to meet him in person. He's been here for a number of days. I think right before the presidential report, he came up. So he's not just dipping in and dipping out. He's actually here to participate.

Here to speak to us from the Library of Congress is Jason Broughton!

(Intro music: Take a look, it's in a book, a reading rainbow! I can go anywhere, friends to know, and ways to grow, a reading rainbow!)

(I can be anything, take a look, it's in a book).

JASON singing along: It's in a book...

(Music fades out).

How nice to be welcomed with that!

(Applause.)

How nice!

Oh, a microphone is a deadly thing for me to have, because I like to talk! So just know that I hope to keep my things concise and informative and engaging. Well, good afternoon, my name is Jason Broughton and I'm the new director for the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled, and some would say I am the new Karen Nellinger, who was the prior director, who I also know as well

(Laughter.)

If I had to use descriptive text to describe myself, for those who want to know, Black male, bald headed, 6'4'', 225, and the body of a Greek god!

(Laughter, cheering, and applause).

That's just what you need to remember.

(Laughter.)

Well, I did lie a bit. I'm only 6'1''. The rest is true!

(Laughter.)

As I said, I bring you greetings from the Library of Congress, and with that, I'd like to thank you for having me here today. I and our deputy director, Jason Gasnner, are both in attendance, so there are two Jasons at the NLS.

(Applause.)

Thank you to President Riccobono and NFB leadership for the invitation and the opportunity to talk about the importance of literacy, collaborative partnerships, and the National Library Service.

Literacy begins with an understanding of one's world, which includes people, the environment, and daily activities. Providing people with meaningful, diverse, and robust library resources and collections helps to develop basic concepts and contributes to independence as well as enhancing one's quality of life.

As we know, literacy is more than just reading and writing. I grew up in a rural area in South Carolina, out in the boonies, known as Craws.

In stating that, I loved learning, which meant I enjoy reading a lot.

(Cheering and applause (.

But that ran at odds, sometimes, with my parents and in the community, because when you read a lot, sometimes you think you know a lot.

(Laughter.)

And I used to get some feedback -- so you might have heard the following phrases as well if you enjoy reading... "how can you learn so much yet know so little?"

(Laughter.)

"Book sense is not common sense".

And of course, my favorite that I heard on a show known as the Prairie Home Companion: "To those people who think they know all of it is especially annoying to those of us who do".

(Laughter.)

Communication and literacy are interconnected, and what it does is when you have a literary and literacy rich environments, it supports people in being their best selves. It helps a person to grow. Right now, in the library world, the new sexy thing is guess what? Accessibility!

(Cheering).

It's the talk of the town in libraries!

With that, however, at NLS, we believe that accessibility should always be done at the beginning of a project or process.

(Applause.)

Not shoehorned in at the end.

Accessibility lead s to discoverability, which aids in literacy. Democracy depends on literate people navigating through the bureaucracy, dealing with the hypocrisy, being pushy about equality, ensuring there is diversity, while keeping their curiosity.

(Applause.)

It's important!

You have a lot of different choices. Still not as many as I think a lot of you would like to have. But there are more. And amongst them is the National Library Service. So why choose us? Well, we celebrate our 91st year this year --

(Applause.)

For being the library for the blind and print disabled. Thank you!

I'm going to list off a few things as an update to kind of let you know what we're doing to help with literacy and ensure we are hearing from you.

With that, in collaboration, in conversation with NFB, we work together to discuss with the U.S. Postal Service what Free Matter For the Blind should be with respect to distribution of mail, packages, and parcels.

You should except an announcement from them this month about what they plan to do to improve Free Matter For the Blind.

(Applause.)

Our deputy said something interesting, however, during the conversation that I think all of you should know, and I want him to take credit for this if it makes it in the report. One of the things that became very unique is that in some cases, people did not realize that free matter for the blind is a first-class mail service. With that, the comment really, in a sense, was made, maybe we should change it from calling it free matter for the blind, and calling it First Class Matter for the Blind.

(Applause.)

Because we all know you are already first-class!

(Cheering).

Other actions that we're doing: We are piloting braille on demand, where you can be provided one braille book a month. We are ensuring that our workforce at NLS, within the Library of Congress, is representative of the service population. And so we are still growing and also working on that. When it comes to our collection, we've started to modernize that through the Marrakesh Treaty. We now have over 2800 new works on our braille audio reading download, which you know as BARD.

(Applause.)

Thanks to you and others, we've had over 41,000 patron downloads this year. And we've added 131,000 NLS titles to the World Intellectual Property Organization, known as WIPO. We also have 13 new foreign languages we have introduced. And on something that has surprised us in a wonderful way, because some of you have personally e-mailed me and called me to know how to get into this pilot, the refreshable braille displays! (Cheering and applause)

We now have them in 37 states, and growing. Over 4,000 are now distributed and by the end of the year we hope to have an additional 6,000 deployed. And the expectation has gone beyond what we could have ever imagined. It is absolutely stunning, and with that, we are reporting that also to the Library of Congress, and to Congress itself, who is also aware.

We have eased access for the reading disabled. We now serve over 10,000 reading disabled individuals, a 50% increase to our service. And we also have duplication on demand where you can have one cartridge with multiple titles. That's going to be a cost-efficient item, and also a space-saving item for our network libraries.

For the future, here's what we're thinking. We have, in a sense, some updates that we're going to do to BARD when it comes to microservices. We're also doing things with large print and embossed braille and tactile and graphic in a sense displays will be things of the future.

(Applause.)

For those who have been waiting for us to research and hopefully develop something that's really going to be probably a game changer, but it takes some time, we are working to research a smart speaker, an Alexa for you to simply audibly say "Alexa, I'd like to have..." and it becomes available.

(Cheering and applause).

For the future!

It is taking us some time, but we are still in a positive mode to look to see when that will become available.

We're also expanding our collections. We're also having wonderful outreaches and partnerships, such as, I said, with the United States Postal Service, and one of our biggest and most proud items is doing what we're doing with the Veterans Administration in the form of a VA rapid signup, which we hope to help more people who, in a sense, have unfortunately had vision or impairment come to them to ensure that they understand that we are here to help assist in their quality of life.

I would like to thank NFB for their continued support on an effort that has been going on, as I understand it, for over 20 years. For those who might not know, and again, this is just what my staff tells me, we once were on the Capitol Complex in DC and we were temporarily moved for a unique little reason, and unfortunately, 50 years later, we are still on that temporary move. And within that, we are looking, through conversation, and through Congress itself, has the decision to decide if NLS will relocate back to the Capitol Complex.

(Cheering and applause).

Conversations continue. Things are very optimistic. With that, I'd like to thank NFB for their support and words and kindness.

As I begin to close, I'd also like to thank and give you an update on an award we give known as Library of the Year, and with that, our regional winner was going to be, and is, the Washington Talking Book and Braille Library in Seattle, Washington!

(Applause.)

And the subregional was the Panelis Talking Book Library in Clearwater, Florida. I'm quite sure that makes a lot of people happy, which is wonderful and a thing that we love to have every year.

As I begin to close, I want you to know that we have a focus group that we're conducting from 12:30 to 1:30 in Gallery 4. We seek your input, your insight, your comments, and also if you'd like to sign up for any beta tests that we're looking at with our NLS technology. Because we want to hear from you. As I tell my staff, one of the things that's really important that they need to understand as I take the helm is we don't need to get it or worry about being right. We need to GET it right. And that's very important.

(Cheering and applause).

In this business.

I'm making my comments concise because we are closing closer to 12:00, and since we are in an international food city, one thing I've learned is you do not come between people and their food!

(Laughter.)

So, as they say here in New Orleans, let the good times roll!

(Cheering and applause).

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you, Jason, for being here. And we're going to continue to work with you on all these initiatives, but most certainly, the National Library Service will again have a prominent place on Capitol Hill! Because blind people deserve it!

(Cheering and applause).

BENNETT PROWS: Yeah, and how about a door prize.

MARK RICCOBONO: We should do a door prize.

BENNETT PROWS: And because I'm from Washington State, we're very congratulatory of the Washington State Talking Book Library. WTABL we call it!

We have a prize of cherries from Washington State -- chocolate covered, that is -- and a couple of $25 gift certificates and we have a plaque. And the winner is Isaiah Nelson of South Carolina. Is anybody here from South Carolina?

MARK RICCOBONO: They said he's gone.

BENNETT PROWS: He's gone, well, too bad.

MARK RICCOBONO: I think he heard about the food or something!

BENNETT PROWS: How about Marina Raich of Texas? She's probably out --

MARK RICCOBONO: Now, Bennett, is this going to be your last door prize of the session?

BENNETT PROWS: I have one more.

MARK RICCOBONO: Okay, good, checking in.

BENNETT PROWS: Katherine Clegg of Maryland. Oh, I think we've got her. Okay, one more

MARK RICCOBONO: Okay, let me just say, because I haven't had a chance to say it today, you know, again, thank you to everybody for the continued masking effort. I was just asking Beth here sitting to my left. She said "a lot more masks than yesterday". So thank you for that.

(Applause.)

Don't forget at this evening's banquet, of course we are going to be actively eating and drinking, but I would strongly encourage you to keep your mask on as much as possible.

We do have an afternoon session and a number of lunch matters. So, Bennett, if you can give out a door prize we'll actually get out early!

(Cheering).

BENNETT PROWS: It's great, and we have another health kit, monitor kit with 10 cartridges for COVID tests. And that goes to Shirley Doris of Massachusetts.

(Cheering).

Shirley Doris, are you here?

(Shirley crying yes, yes, yes!!!)

(Laughter.)

MARK RICCOBONO: Right up front here!

All right, we will stand adjourned until 2:00 p.m.!

(Gavel banging).

(End of session)