# National Federation of the Blind

# 2022 National Convention

# General Session VI

## July 10, 2022

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(Gavel pounding).

MARK RICCOBONO: The afternoon session is now in order!

(Applause.)

MARK RICCOBONO: We got a busy session ahead, but let's have a door prize to kick the afternoon off.

BENNETT PROWS: We have a lot of door prizes left in this wonderful convention. David Fineman, if he writes to prize at nfb.org, he'll get a $30 gift certificate.

And Bethany Charles is our in-person winner.

How about James Brown of Tennessee? Good God, y'all!

(Laughter.)

MARK RICCOBONO: Did you find him?

BENNETT PROWS: James Brown, are you here?

Okay, he's not here. How about Glen Crosby of Texas?

(Cheering).

We got him.

MARK RICCOBONO: Okay, well, we just gave away a plaque, so let's give away some other awards. We're giving away the 15th annual Dr. Jacob Bolotin Awards. Here is the chairperson, for his first in-person presentation of the Dr. Jacob Bolotin Awards, committee chair and secretary-elect of the National Federation of the Blind, Everette Bacon!

(Intro music: I'm invincible, unbreakable, unstoppable, they knock me down, I get up again, I am the champion, you're gonna know my name, you can't hurt me now, I can't feel the pain, I was made for this, I was born to win...)

EVERETTE BACON: All right! Welcome, Federationists, to the 15th annual Dr. Jacob Bolotin Awards! Are you excited?

(Cheering and applause).

All right, I know I am!

So, you know, how many of you in this room have read The Blind Doctor?

(Applause.)

Good, I'm glad to hear it. It's a fabulous book about a man who has faced so much adversity in his life, starting from birth when he was first recognized as being blind, he faced bullying and discrimination in his early years, then when he went on to public school, he faced tons of discrimination, and not being able to get his materials. Then when he went on to college, he was kicked out of college, said he'll never make it, had to fight his way through, and get his materials, and then when he went out and he got out of college, he wants to become a medical doctor, and he has to fight with programs to get in to medical school, gets denied, gets told he's not going to be able to get there, and he makes sure to never lose that ambition, lose that tenacity. And he gets there eventually and becomes a medical doctor. And after he becomes a medical doctor, he tries to get hired. What does he get told? We can't hire you, you're blind, we can't hire a blind doctor. Finally, he gets to the point where he's a medical doctor practicing and he gets to the point where he ends up running a veterans services hospital in Chicago, Illinois.

This man was the epitome of what the National Federation of the Blind stood for, before there was ever a National Federation of the Blind! I believe this man put the militant in NFB! He was militant before any of us were militant! So this is, it's an exciting book. It's an honor to be able to present this award in his name. We are so excited about the different honorees you're going to hear about in just a second. We have five outstanding honorees for the 2022 Dr. Jacob Bolotin Awards. Will, why don't you run that tape!

(Video playing).

Federationists and guests, the National Federation of the Blind is proud to introduce the 2022 recipients of our Dr. Jacob Bolotin Awards. Made possible in part by the generous support of the Alfred and Rosalyn Pearlman trust and the Santa Barbara Foundation. These individuals and organizations have broken down barriers for blind people in various ways, changed perceptions of blindness and blind people, and pushed past existing boundaries to inspire blind people to achieve new heights. The three individual winners are: Caroline Karbosski, founder of See3D.

This was a nonprofit that I started back when I was in high school, and we organized the printing and distribution of 3D printed models for blind people. We send them to people, mainly in the United States, but all over the world. We've sent them to people in 17 countries and 27 states. So I saw an article when I was in 8th grade about 3D printing telescope and microscope images so blind people could make their own scientific observations, and not only have to rely on descriptions made by sighted people of the printed data. They were printing 3D labels of the images. And I thought, I know braille, I can add my braille skills to 3D printed models. Because in 8th grade, a lot of people were asking me, why are you learning braille? You're a sighted person, you don't need to know this. So I was always looking for extra uses to apply my braille skills. So seeing this article really inspired me to think about 3D printing. My high school had 3D printers and I wanted to be able to use them, my friends wanted to use them, but we weren't sure what to make. They were just devices that we had. So I said why don't we make 3D models for blind people and I'll add braille labels to them and we can submit them to the tech competition every year we have in Cincinnati, Ohio. So I submitted the models that we designed and I worked with some friends of my moms who are TBIs, and I met some blind people in Cincinnati, just by chance, I happened to see them in the community and told them about my project, they connected me with the NFB and some people who wrote articles about See3D that helped us gain more publicity so more people knew about our program. It all started out by us posting a website with a Google form to fill out for requests for models and people would give us feedback on the models, and we've improved since then. Now, being at OSU, which is Ohio State University, we then got funding to become a nonprofit, really develop our program, and now we ship models all over the world and have a community of people who 3D print and distribute models

TYLER MERREN, athlete, trainer, and founder of Revision Fitness.

TYLER: I learned about fitness through classes, but I realized how much of a need there was out there, so a few years ago, I started tumbling around in my head the idea of creating a fitness program specifically for people who were blind and visually impaired. I started talking to people and doing interviews of folks who had gone before me and made the same attempts and learned what worked and what didn't. Now I have a project up and running called Revision Fitness, and it's a fitness program specifically designed to help blind and visually impaired people to step into the fitness world as well.

JEANETTA PRICE, founder of blind girl magic.

Who would have guessed that this blind girl possessed magic! Abracadabra. Now that you're convinced I have magical superpowers, that would be a yes for success. As I leap over obstacles in life, dodge negativity, slam misconceptions of society, slap "I can't" in the face with "I did that", is the fact that blind girl magic goes back to Harriet Tubman.

(Cheering in the crowd).

Born into slavery, escaped to freedom, but she did not stop. She went back and back and back to lead others to freedom. Blind girl magic is built off the shoulders of phenomenal women. Blind girl magic is the independent movement that is leading our blind sisters to freedom from depression, low self-esteem, anger, sadness, abracadabra, you are set free. Blind girl magic lives in me.

(Applause.)

Our organizational winners are 64-Ounce games, and this is their founders Richard and Emily Gibbs.

RICHARD: Accessibility kits is where we started off. We do a lot of other things now, but accessibility kits is where we started off. What it is is you purchase a retail game and you purchase our accessibility kit, and it has braille stickers, 3D pieces, overlays, anything that might be needed to play -- this is board games, don't get confused with video games, I don't know enough about programming to make that happen. EMILY: So you take the board game off the shelf and pair it with our kit to make a completely accessible game.

RICHARD: We're firm believers in braille. We believe braille gaming is braille literacy. My wife is a teacher of blind students and I've learned the braille system for years. We hope that by making these games accessible, we hope by extension that people realize that braille is useful, and braille is important, and braille offers opportunities that you would not get otherwise.

EMILY: Absolutely. One of our major tenets of our company is supporting braille literacy, and we believe one of the best ways to foster that is to play games to learn braille.

Our other organizational winner is Netflix. Here is one of their dubbing specialists.

Our library has grown exponentially not only in English but other languages as well. We've started adding audio description in other languages, including Narcos, in neutral Spanish, and Marseilles, in French. The number of local audio description titles is growing with the number of local productions. I don't know if you know this, but we have created at least one audio description in over 50 languages. And our latest addition was Pashto audio description, which we created for a short documentary, 3 Sons for Benizer, and we're currently working on Punjabi audio description which will be available later this year for a Thriller about long time gangs and their rivalries in the south of Punjab. So we're grateful for all of this. And I checked this morning, we have 18,000 hours of audio scribed programming and 11,000 of those hours are in English.

Each of these winners will receive a monetary award to support their work in helping us live the life we want. Now here is our group of 2022 Dr. Jacob Bolotin Awards winners.

EVERETTE BACON: What an outstanding group. Aren't you excited!

(Applause.)

Great. We received over 50 applications for this year's award. So if you did not get an award, or the person that you nominated or organization you nominated, you can do that again next year. We're going to give these awards again next year. The Rose Perlman trust is awesome and gives us the ability to give these awards each year, and we'll be doing it again next year. So please send in those applications, we want to give them, individual or organizational awards.

Now I want to recognize the committee that helped choose these award recipient s. Mary Ellen Jernigan of Maryland. Dr. Natalie Shaheen of Illinois. Second vice president Ron Brown of Indiana. Steve Jacobson of Minnesota. And new board member-elect, Donald Porterfield of Arizona.

(Applause.)

Now before we go to the awards and how much they're getting, let me read what is on their trophy. Beth.

BETH BRAUN: Presented to applicant by the National Federation of the Blind and the Santa Barbara Foundation, July 2022.

EVERETTE BACON: So our first winner, we'll do the individual awards first. The first winner, winning the amount of $5,000, Caroline Karbowski!

(Cheering and applause).

Eric Duffy, who nominated her, said this: She does not -- sorry, she does not ask if it is possible for a blind person to accomplish a specific task. Rather, instead, she asks, how can we make this task more accessible?

(Cheering).

Caroline, congratulations.

CAROLINE: Thank you so much.

EVERETTE BACON: All right, our next award winner, again, winning the amount of $5,000, Tyler Merren, Revision Fitness.

(Cheering and applause).

Now, JJ Maddow, who sent and nominated Tyler, says this: We've known blind people for many years who have mastered fitness, workouts, and athletics. That part isn't new. What Tyler has done, however, is create a platform that is usable and applicable to people at any level of fitness, where previously, you would need to find an existing fitness coach or someone willing to explain various workouts, Tyler has brought this information into an engaging and accessible app which can be used by virtually anyone at any time. Whether it's a simple exercise like a pushup, or a more advanced routine, the app likely has you covered.

(Cheering and applause).

Tyler, here you go my friend, congratulations.

TYLER: Thank you, I really appreciate this, thank you.

EVERETTE BACON: All right, our next and final individual award winner is Jeanetta Price of Blind Girl Magic!

(Cheering and applause).

And Jeanetta, we are giving a $15,000 award to.

(Cheering).

Blind Girl Magic provides blind support groups, workshops, and retreats that taps into the magic of a world of out-of-sight possibilities. Her mission in life is to help others tap into their vision by utilizing writing as an instrument of healing.

She volunteers by sharing her gift of poetry and performance that inspires the blind community and beyond.

Jeanetta Price, congratulations, my friend.

JEANETTA: Thank you.

EVERETTE BACON: Thank you so much.

All right. Now, we'll go on to our organizational winners. The first one is something that's been near and dear to my heart because I've been using their services since 2006 -- actually, no, sorry, let me take that back. Since 2003, when a certain Blockbuster video fired me, I immediately cut up my membership and joined Netflix. And I've been a member ever since!

(Applause.)

And I've watched them bring audio description and all other kinds of accessibility to their platform. So I'm so honored and excited to give them this award. Netflix is an honorarium award, they said they didn't want to take any funding, but they're excited to receive the award, they want to put the funding back into the National Federation of the Blind.

(Applause.)

Not only does Netflix guarantee audio description for all its original content, but it listens to feedback from blind customers and is adding audio description to popular series such as Breaking Bad and Mad Men.

Netflix offers audio description in numerous languages and even offers AD in English for some of its foreign titles.

Whenever the organized blind has brought an issue to Netflix, such as making Squid Game accessible with English AD --

(Cheering).

Or offering guidance on screenplays featuring a blind character, Netflix has listened. Netflix even has an upcoming feature that will have an authentic blind person playing a blind character!

(Cheering and applause).

How is that for authenticity!

(Applause.)

Alisha, Shanta, this is such a pleasure to give to you. Thank you.

Now, our final organizational award winner, 64 Ounce Games!

(Applause.)

And we are awarding 64-ounce Games with our largest award, $20,000.

(Applause.)

Karen Anderson, who nominated them, said this: We in the National Federation of the Blind know that braille and tactile literacy open endless possibilities, and for nearly a decade, 64 Ounce Games has worked to unlock that world of possibilities and fun by putting braille and tactile graphics at the fingertips of more blind children and adults. And to do so in a fun and engaging way, they created and sell accessibility kits that, when paired with a mainstream game, sold at any retailer, make that game fully accessible!

(Cheering and applause).

So, unfortunately, Richard and Emily Gibbs, who are the owners of 64-Ounce Games, contracted COVID a couple of days ago, and had to go home. Now, accepting their award and making sure that they'll get their award is Karen Anderson, who nominated them.

(Cheering and applause).

Thank you, Karen.

Oh, there was one other part Beth wanted to read. And I believe we have Emily Gibbs on the Zoom. Emily, are you there?

EMILY: Yes, we're here.

EVERETTE BACON: Would you like to say a few words, Emily?

RICHARD: I'm here as well, this is Richard Gibbs. Thank you so much for this honor. We're happy to be able to be here with you today virtually. We want to thank our family, especially both of our parents, who have supported us over the years. They've helped us to make more games for BELL Academy, they've been invaluable to help with our five kids, and despite being skeptical, they trusted us when we left two days after our wedding to start a new adventure in a small city. Perhaps you've heard of it -- Rustin, Louisiana!

(Cheering and applause).

There, Emily completed her TBS. We made many blind friends and we saw the need for accessible board games in this community. In particular, we'd like to thank Dr. Ruby Riles, who is the reason that we both know braille. From there, we moved on to teaching and eventually we found ourselves on a new mission -- to help make the games that I love accessible.

EMILY: Our initial Kickstarter found support in the sighted board game community and the organized blind movement. So many people in this room have helped make our dream a reality. We have always had the support of our Federation family. Rachel Olivero and Karen Anderson have been there from the very beginning supporting and playing our games. We would not be here today without their confidence in us.

And the Texas affiliate, especially Norma and Glen Crosby, have been our play testers and advisors from the very start. We plan to use this award to continue bringing accessible board games to the blind community, expanding our tactile graphics, and bringing more in the future. There are big things coming.

EVERETTE BACON: Let's give a big Federation cheer!

And we're going to have Beth read the rest of the award. Go ahead, Beth.

BETH BRAUN: My apologies. There's a medallion at the top of the award, and one side of that medallion reads: Dr. Jacob Bolotin, and then there is his likeness, 1888-1924, and then the inscription below that reads "celebrating his life, the Alfred and Rosalyn Perlman Trust". The back of the medallion says the Dr. Jacob Bolotin award, then there's the NFB logo, and it says celebrating achievement, creating opportunity.

That's it.

EVERETTE BACON: All right, let's give them one last round of applause! Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

Mr. President, that is my awards. Thank you.

BENNETT PROWS: How about a door prize.

MARK RICCOBONO: Yeah, door prize.

BENNETT PROWS: $50 cash and a 25 dollars gift certificate for Sarah Mornes of Vermont... Sarah Mornes, are you there? If so, stand up and wave your arms around and yell and scream, but it doesn't seem like she's there.

How about William Jacobson of Maryland? He's here. I think we've got him.

MARK RICCOBONO: All right!

Congratulations to our award winners. And thank you for your continued work, and I know it will contribute to the organized blind movement.

I have some of the 64-Ounce Games myself! I can never get my kids to play Ticket to Ride with me -- I don't know what that's about!

(Laughter.)

This next item is Going My Way: Driving Accessibility through Innovative Autonomous Transportation.

(Cheering).

From the beginning, the beginning of the work on our Blind Driver Challenge, we've used it as a platform to talk about access to all stages of the working done in this country, well, really, around the world, on autonomous vehicle technology. The Federation has participated with autonomous vehicle companies all over the world. And more and more of the leaders that are working in the autonomous vehicle industry have come to understand and prioritize our message of equal access. Waymo is one of the key companies in this emerging industry, and our next speaker is their global head of public policy. Her career has centered on building and growing government relation programs for large, small, established, and startup companies in fields like financial services, high tech, and transportation. And we're proud to have her company as a partner in our work to transform accessible transportation options for blind people. Here's Michelle Peacock!

(Intro music: Why don't we drive in the rain... straight to the eye of the hurricane... go for a ride and a drive in the rain...)

MICHELLE PEACOCK: Hi, everyone. I'm Michelle Peacock. It's great to be here today. What an amazing time this has been. This whole convention has been spectacular. I've met so many great people. I want to give a shoutout to my new best friend, Sailor Cooper, from Houston.

(Applause.)

It's just been amazing to meet so many people like Sailor earlier today. So let's talk about Waymo. Waymo, the words stand for new way forward.

We strive to make it safer and easier for people and things to move around. Fully autonomous technology promises to offer more road safety and transportation options for millions and millions of people. Waymo is building the Waymo Driver, which is our proprietary, fully autonomous driving system, across two lines of businesses, Waymo 1, our fully autonomous ride hailing service that's now operating in the metro Phoenix area, and Waymo Via, which is focused on all forms of commercial goods delivery, including heavy duty trucking and local delivery.

Now, I was asked this question earlier today, which is, when can I buy one of these Waymo cars?

(Cheering).

Well, the answer is, you're not.

(Laughter.)

Awww. We don't manufacture cars to sell to the public. The cars that we are operating in San Francisco are beautiful Jaguar Land Rover iPaces. So what we're doing is operating a fleet of AV cars and heavy duty trucks with an autonomous driver, and we think this will help improve road safety. We are promoting the availability of options without the need to buy this car. So we're the most experienced AV company with 11 years of experience in autonomous vehicles. In 2009 we started as the Google Self- Driving Car Project, and in 2011, we began to develop our own hard ware and sensors in house. There's nothing on the market that could deliver this full autonomous capability. In 2015, we completed the world's first fully autonomous ride on public roads. This was in Austin Texas, with our friend, Steve Mann, who was blind. And in 2020, we launched to the world the first fully autonomous ride hailing service in Phoenix. And we're now completing testing of Waymo 1 in San Francisco.

Like I said, we believe the Waymo driver has the ability to dramatically improve road safety because it's always paying attention. It doesn't get tired or distracted, it doesn't have to yell at kids in the back seat.

(Laughter.)

Or spill food down the front of themselves, or, like I often am, trying to find Dua Lipa on the radio.

So let me talk about our accessibility vision because we think AVs promise so much for accessibility. And I'll focus on Waymo 1, our ride hail service.

As I said before, because we own our fleet, we're uniquely positioned to add accessibility features to our product in a way that the manually operated ride-hailing companies just can't do.

And that's significant. Because we believe that the benefits of AVs will be brought to the public, consumers and the market, through shared ride hailing before they reach customers via car ownership. Waymo 1's service means more riders will benefit sooner than they otherwise would. And our efforts are fully in line with the philosophy of the National Federation of the Blind. Our efforts at the user experience are exactly what we're trying to accomplish here this weekend. Collaborations with the community helps raise the bar for user experience for everyone. We're proud of this work, but in addition to that, I'm really excited to share that we've recently expanded our partnership, and are collaborating with NFB on accessible infrastructure legislation in Congress that will advance our joint missions.

Waymo's had a long standing relationship with the blind community. Our "let's talk autonomous driving" campaign highlights the benefits of autonomous driving technology for people who cannot drive, including organizations like Foundation for Blind Children, Light House for the Blind SF, and World Blind Union. In a minute, I'll talk you through the different ways we've designed our app for accessibility. But before I do, I want to stress two things. First, we know that we're not done. We understand that our service is a work in progress and there's more that we can do to meet our riders' needs over time. And we've heard from the community loud and clear: Nothing about us without us

(Cheering).

Yes, sure, let's have that applause! There we go.

We've heard from the community that nothing about us without us, and we've definitely put that into practice. So we want to make sure that we're engaging with all of you on this process, collecting feedback, and using it to constantly improve our service.

And then the second thing I wanted to point out is that this spirit of inclusive design actually benefits all of our customers. On several occasions, we've built inclusive design features and have found that those that ostensibly built for the disabled community have been things that improved user experience for the entire business.

(Applause.)

All right, so let's talk about these inclusive design features in Waymo 1. These include the option to minimize walking time when ordering a trip. Turn-by-turn walking navigation. The ability to honk the car's horn remotely.

(Cheering).

And the option to contact rider support.

So, to ensure our service is accessible for rider of various needs, we have taken two broad approaches to developing these features.

So, first, we've conducted user research with these riders. We've had them use our app, take rides in the car, talk to the support team. And inevitably, this identifies opportunities for improvement which are then added to the product development.

And second, we've gathered feedback from internal riders that have disabilities. These are people that our sister company, Google, who have disabilities, and we get them in the car and get really valuable direct feedback from them as well.

And there's an also important to highlight role that NFB played in helping us develop this technology. When we first started autonomous driving in Chandler, Arizona, in 2017, NFB was invited to be part of our trusted tester program, which blind people have been able to take test rights and give us detailed feedback. And that's been a treasure trove of data for us to have.

So let me talk about Waymo 1 and these features. Once a user has onboarded with us, the user can navigate to the accessibility settings, so I want to talk you through this experience. First the user orders a car using the Waymo 1 app. And the app is legible by a screen reader, which allows blind users to navigate by hearing labels and buttons read out loud. And then, what happens after that is the pickup process. And, you know, this also creates some challenges. From time to time, a rider might experience some competing factors at pickup or dropoff. And it would often involve balancing two things. A safe area to meet the car with a pickup, but that it might take a longer walk to get there.

And so Waymo makes sure the rider is alerted to this situation as it happens and gives them the tools to help locate the vehicle. For example, we provide pickup and dropoff warnings for long walks before a trip is even ordered. So if a rider decides that's too long a walk, they can decline the ride if that doesn't work. And we can provide information for more specific scenarios, like if the dropoff is in a parking lot.

But limiting the walking is big for us. To do that, under the accessibility settings, users will find a feature called minimize walking time. Here's how it works. As I mentioned before, cars sometimes give these tradeoffs to give the user a shorter overall journey but more walking time. For example, if a car needs to circle a block in order to pick up a passenger, it may decide to stop across the street for passenger pickup. But this feature would have a disproportionate impact on blind users. So the blind user could instead request that the vehicle go ahead and circle the block and come right to where I'm standing, so that person doesn't have to cross the street. This feature allows them to do that.

(Cheering).

Another feature is rider -- we call it rider-only matching. So when we talk about these full y autonomous cars, our shorthand is rider only, there's no driver in the car. So when users hail a ride, we alert them to the fact that this ride may be rider only with no driver present before it arrives, and provides additional information, like a list of 10 things you need to know about this ride. If the user isn't comfortable with rider only or actually need a person to help them, we give them a tool so they can notify us or cancel the ride.

We have also added some new tools to help the rider locate the vehicle. First is the vehicle ID. So this helps people with lower vision who could see color or a few bright letters from far away rather than the license plate. With this, we highlight a 2 digit ID number at the top of the car with LED and it can be customized by color. Right now in San Francisco you often see it flashed up as the initials of the person taking the ride. So when I do this, I look for the initials MP, because it's coming for me. So I use this all the time, not just people with disabilities, to help people find their car.

Another tool is honking the horn. I have used this tool also, where you can, from the app, press a button and it will honk the horn.

(Clapping (.

Thank you! It was again, made for blind individuals to make it easier to find the car when there wasn't a person behind the wheel to call. But again, this is a great benefit. And I use this all the time and not because it's funny, but I actually use it to find the car too.

(Laughter.)

In San Francisco there's a lot of these cars on the street, so it's really helpful to find them when you need to.

And then inside the car, once the rider is in the car, we've added other settings that help provide assistive audio. So these are tools that help visually impaired riders get context about what's happening in the car. So for example, the vehicle will tell riders when it's yielding for a pedestrian or stopping at a traffic light, just to give riders comfort to know that the car is on track and their ride is continuing as expected.

(Cheering and applause).

I like the cheers, but I will say, this is a tool we built for inclusivity, but actually everybody likes this! My husband and I were in a car recently, and we were like, this is so cool, I know exactly what's going on. It's a tremendous benefit for everyone too.

Once in a while, things don't go as planned on these rides, and that's where our rider support team can step in and help us be prepared for the unexpected. So once in the vehicle, we have live rider support team just one tap away. They're available in the car and also from the app.

For example, rarely, the Waymo vehicle may need to come to a full stop when it doesn't know how to proceed. There may be debris in the road that they can't identify or get around. In those scenarios, a member of the Waymo roadside assistance team will join the ride, take over control, and complete the trip. And we want to make sure we're effectively communicating about this for everyone who is taking the ride. In addition to the internal screen on the car where we show what's happening, we also provide audio announcements, as well as talk riders through the event. Our rider support team will also call in, provide a high-touch experience that explains to the rider what is happening and answers questions and will describe what happens next.

We're very proud of these features that are available in the car and in the app today. But there is even more ahead of us. For Waymo is a participant in the U.S. Department of Transportation Inclusive Design Challenge. This is a very exciting project that we've been involved in, too. It's sort of taking what we've done, the OG features, and boosting them up even more. So as I shared with you today, we have come a long way since 2011 in developing this technology, and this is really just the beginning. We are so excited to have been selected as a semifinalist in the U.S. DOT inclusive design challenge!

(Cheering and applause).

Thank you.

And this challenge seeks to help us develop new solutions for people with needs to make use of autonomous vehicles to access jobs and health care and other critical decisions. And so, through our user research and feedback from riders -- are you hearing a theme? -- in developing this fully autonomous technology, we've learned one of the largest challenges for low-vision riders is finding the car at pickup. This research has formed the heart of our challenge submission, and after being selected as a semifinalist in January 2021, we've moved to Stage 2, where is where we are now, so fingers crossed. In Stage 2, our team prototyped additional accessibility features beyond those that we've just talked about, and they will include adaptive app navigation, visual, audio, and haptic cues to navigate to a vehicle, purpose-built car sounds for wayfinding, locating with headlights, and hands-free car communication. And also video chat support.

So in total, we've developed features that fell into 11 different categories, all aimed at improving accessibility.

(Cheering and applause).

I love all the whoos! That is great.

So, one area of focus, as we talked about, is wayfinding. And our proposal included using creative speech, such as explaining the position of the Waymo vehicle by noting verbally things like "the car is 15 feet away from you as the crow flies", using everyday language to help people navigate to where the car is.

And we also include purpose-built sounds that help people engage more effectively with the app, and haptic vibrations, where we use like a hot and cold approach that can alert users when they're getting closer to the car. Some of you may use Apple watch and it will vibrate when you're making turns for navigation. This will use something similar to tell you you're getting warmer, you're getting colder.

(Cheering).

Earlier, as you remember, I mentioned my fondness for the horn honking because it is really fun. But one of the challenges you might imagine is that the horn honking on the Waymo cars sounds a lot like other cars' horns honking. So through this challenge we designed a custom horn sound different than the standard honk. I've listened to a couple versions of it. One has this distinctive, like a trill sound, and another one is a lovely melody that plays, just a very lovely, bright, and cheerful melody. You'll know when you hear that sound that that's the Waymo car, and not a different car with a similar sound honking. We think that might also help people who are not customers of Waymo cars, but are bystanders who don't like the sound of more horns in urban environments

If you can imagine a scenario where a blind user of Waymo is trying to find a car but they have things in their hands, like groceries, a cane, or a child, it might not be easy for them to pull out the phone and engage with the phone to press the button to have this noise made. So we're working on finding a way to have the car recognize that the user is just close, and then send the signal itself so that the person would be able to find the car.

(Cheering and applause).

We're very excited about this challenge. We should have the outcome with the winners announced any day now, and we're really hopeful to win. So all of you, send your good vibes out there to the U.S. DOT!

(Applause.)

This has been an amazing opportunity for us. We love the partnership with the organization, and I just want to say thank you to all of you and to the Federation. I am really proud of Waymo's focus on accessibility, and we're so grateful to be constantly learning from our riders and local and national disability groups. I think together we'll just continue to be dedicated to bringing more accessible autonomous driving to the world! So thank you.

(Applause.)

Thank you, Mark, so much.

MARK RICCOBONO: Appreciate it.

Well, thank you very much, Waymo. I think you've covered all of the bases on that! That's pretty great. I hope that many more of us will get to take a Waymo ride very soon, and we look to the next generation of that technology. Really transformative. Thank you very much for being at our convention!

(Applause.)

How about a door prize for that?

BENNETT PROWS: Great idea, I'm glad you thought of, it Mr. President. We have a door prize coming up of $75 of gift certificates, but before we do that, we've got a virtual participants prize for a virtual participant named Dan Miner of Missouri. You get a $25 gift card if you e-mail prize at nfb.org within 30 minutes. Dan Miner, you got it

Now we have $75 gift certificates to... Jonathan Knowles of Ohio.

Maybe not... Gina Manuel of Massachusetts? Are you here? Is everybody having a good time?

(Cheering).

All right! Who's next?

How about Todd Elsey of Ohio? He's got it. Thank you. Keep waving...

MARK RICCOBONO: Okay! We claim him in Maryland. But he is in Ohio. But, new staff member at the National Federation of the Blind!

(Applause.)

All right, I want to let you know that at 3:00, which means, like, right almost now, Give 20 is going to be closing. So get your last-minute Give 20 contributions in -- run -- walk safely back to the tables, give your last Give 20 contributions. Here's Scott LaBarre for the PAC plan.

(Pac Man theme playing).

SCOTT LABARRE: Thank you, thank you very much!

Good afternoon, Federation family. I got a lot of news for you. First item is about 30 minutes from now, as soon as I get done, 30 minutes from then, the PAC table will be closing. So this is your last chance!

In the race for the PAC rat, whew! This one's coming down to the wire. Colorado is one person ahead of Maryland!

(Cheering).

Come on, Ryan, you're coming back home!!!

The seniors are slightly ahead of the parents. Well, 7 people. But if you get busy, parents, you can take on the seniors here.

And we have a new leader, increasing their PAC pledge 118% is the great state of Maine! For Pare the PACyderm!

(Cheering and applause).

Now, back to the Colorado-Maryland race. In terms of the monthly amount, according to my calculations here, Colorado is $3 ahead a month of Maryland. Except that I happen to know after I got these figures, a Colorado member raised their PAC $25. So it could be as much as a $28 a month lead. So, Colorado, we're still number 1!

MARK RICCOBONO: Come on, Maryland.

(Laughter.)

SCOTT LABARRE: Now, annualized, we are at $493,355 on the PAC plan, $41,112 a month. Now, these are the final winners of gift cards. Please go back to the PAC table or call me, I'll give you my number in a minute. Vince Armstrong. Vanessa Meadows. David Andrews of Minnesota! Ronza Othman, Maryland. Tinea Baker Ivy, don't know where you're from, sorry, but you won. Brigitte Ordoc. NFB of Ohio won a gift ward, I don't know what you want to do with it, but come get it. Mary Ann, come on back. Robert Whitman of Michigan, I know we did that over the phone, so we'll send it to you, we'll get your address. Nancy Altman of Nebraska. The NFB Lancaster chapter of South Carolina. Karen Anderson of Maryland! Christine Palmer, you're from Philadelphia, Christine. I remember that.

(Cheering).

Willie Wells, Tennessee. We've got Eric Valezquez. Marla Yule of Maryland, and Bob Watson of Maryland.

MARK RICCOBONO: All right, Maryland.

SCOTT LABARRE: Suzanne Schaefer of Connecticut. Those were all our winners. Lastly, Mr. President, I want to thank everyone that's been helping on PAC. Lisa, Sean, Danielle. We've had Sophie back at our national office, and all the people back at our national office. Bridget Burke here, and Ross here, and Seth Lamkin at the PAC table. Finally, thank you my Federation family. We're doing great on PAC. Let's keep it up. You have 30 minutes and you could still be in the drawing for those $250 gift cards! Get back to the PAC table.

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you very much, Scott. I encourage all folks to get back to the PAC table. Let's really break some records.

Now we're moving from transportation to transformation in employment. We first really got to know our next speaker through her legal capacities, helping to advance civil rights for people with disabilities, including serving as our legal counsel in important efforts to advance competitive integrated employment. Her value -- we value her expertise and equally as important, she values ours. And that's why our partnership together is really powerful. As you heard in the presidential report, we are working together to find new innovative ways to raise expectations.

She is the founder and managing partner of EnAble Ventures, and founder and chair of SmartJob. Here is our friend and our innovative partner, Regina Kline!

(Intro music: I'm on top of the world, I'm on top of the world, hey. I've been waiting to smile, hey, been holding it in for a while, take it with me if I can, been dreaming of this since a child...)

REGINA KLINE: Thank you, Mr. President! Hello and good afternoon, members of the Federation!

(Cheering and applause).

What a privilege it is to come back here today after being gone and apart for a couple of years. This has a lot of significance to me personally, and I know it has to you. This convention is so much a homecoming. And a homecoming this year during such challenging times that we all have been through.

But it does reflect a critical moment to celebrate community. And to celebrate the energy that's created by THIS community in particular. There's potent power in this room!

(Cheering).

There are ideas and actions in this room that will lift up those that are here and those that are not, for the rest of the year and for years to come.

Well, I was introduced just now by the president in my role as founder of EnAble Ventures and SmartJob, both companies aimed to close the disability wealth gap and grow an entrepreneurial system throughout the blind community, as I will mention. But as was said in my introduction, I first entered this work as a lawyer. I was honored to work as senior counsel in the U.S. Department of Justice under the Obama administration, that I fought on matters that the NFB has always led on -- and that is to advance the interests of workers with disabilities, to achieve competitive employment.

(Applause.)

That means avoiding unnecessary, unjustified segregation. It means being able to leave sub minimum wage work when you can and want to work for competitive wages.

(Applause.)

And as you well know, NFB has always been on the cutting edge of civil rights, of workers in the organized blind movement, to work in employment in a range of jobs, to advance the highest expectations of people who are blind, for the full inclusion of the organized blind in work and the economy. I look out today. I see some of my great friends -- Eve Hill, I worked with her back at DOJ.

(Applause.)

She's one of the great lawyers in the United States advancing the ADA. Anne Raisch, still at the DOJ advancing civil rights. But this was back in the DOJ when we were pushing to apply the case law of Olmstead to apply to places where people with disabilities worked. Now we know that people with disabilities can thrive in the job market with a range of opportunities, and that there is a recognized right in the United States for people with disabilities to receive the services and supports they need to work in the community.

Later in my career, I went on and worked with Eve Hill and Dan Goldstein, who is in the audience, and other lawyers here from Brown, Goldstein & Levy --

(Cheering).

Oh, yeah, let's hear it for Brown, Goldstein & Levy!

(Applause.)

A law firm truly with singularity that has worked hand in glove with the NFB to advance the rights of people with disabilities and people in this community for decades.

We worked on matters across the United States with the NFB, advancing the rights of blind workers to avoid unlawful, un necessary segregation, to be treated equally on the job, to access ladders of opportunity, and that is work that is still carrying on today with the NFB and with these lawyers that have dedicated so much of their lives to making sure that people with disabilities have equal rights.

It was just around the start of 2020, however, that my work took me in a very interesting and very different place. I began to assess the sum of these experiences, and I was assessing what it meant that I had worked with some of the most talented people I've ever met in this community, in this room, and rooms like this around the country. And I began to realize that there were two different realities at play. First, 30 years after the ADA, it remained the case that two-thirds of working age adults with disabilities are in fact not employed.

Second, and this is really important, that there is an abundance of raw innovation, invention, ingenuity, throughout the blind community!

(Applause.)

It's everywhere! Talent is lying everywhere! And it's in this convention hall today.

(Applause.)

And it sparks the question, it should spark the question in all of us, which is how can we harness that talent to access more than just the right to be free from discrimination? What additional tools can we use to allow talented people with disabilities to achieve a freedom that works hand in glove with equality, that is economic justice? In the movement for disability rights, how do we build on the equality already achieved and the battles yet to be fought, while leveling up to the word that is "equity"? That which gives people economic opportunities, employment, and greater access to wealth. And I turned to entrepreneurship to address these questions.

Now, ask me what entrepreneurship is. To me, it's a prayer to the kind of world you want to live in in the future. It's a prayer that through consistent and dedicated folks, you will into the world. Through the power of a single idea, you will it into reality. Even despite the odds, even despite the odds that it might not succeed.

The history of successful entrepreneurs is replete with examples of people who have succeeded in spite of the odds, in spite of great barriers. They've been excluded from traditional avenues of employment. As the founder of LinkedIn, Reed Hoffman, wrote in a 2013 op-ed about the subject of immigration: Immigration is pure entrepreneurship. You see, you leave behind everything familiar to start somewhere new. To succeed, you develop alliances. You must acquire skills. You will have to improvise on occasion. That's a bold proposition, he said.

Well, like the experience of immigration, so many of the entrepreneurs with disabilities that I meet every day are fantastically situated for the experience of entrepreneurship. Each day they battle and bust through barriers in a world that was not written with them in mind. Each day, they see opportunities they don't have not because of their merit but because of the biases of the world. They seek new paths with new additional skills. Their lives are ones of inventing work-arounds, hacks, better ways. And they are uncompromising in their belief that they can and will live in a world where the experience of disability is equated with problem-solving, innovation, and a better way.

(Cheering and applause).

I founded SmartJob in 2020, and this year in 2022 partnered with Jim Sorensen, a world renowned impact investor of the Sorensen Impact Platform, to create EnAble Ventures, a market rate venture firm. Our job is to find the most talented entrepreneurs with disabilities in the world who are leveraging the disability experience as an asset!

(Cheering).

And in their businesses, they are creating inclusively designed products and services. And they're launching startups that will increase the employment of people with disabilities. We connect these entrepreneurs with funding to allow their companies and enterprises to grow, to scale, to be sustainable.

These entrepreneurs and companies are bringing new products to the market that will improve the lives of themselves and others, and the lives of people with disabilities. In our estimation, by backing and supporting these innovators and entrepreneurs, we are working, and we need you to help us. We are working on building smarter jobs. We don't need to build any smart people. We've got them here! We've got them everywhere!

(Cheering and applause).

We don't need to get more talented. We have talent here! We have talent everywhere!

What we need to do is change the way we design work. And there is a rising class of entrepreneurs with disabilities around the world that will do that, that will reimagine work for everyone.

Now you're saying -- my friend Tracy over there gives me a hard time in NFB -- let's hear it for Tracy Soforenko from NFB of Virginia.

(Laughter.)

He says, Gina, you're too much Wall Street, not enough main street. You're too Harvard, not enough rock and roll.

(Laughter.)

Okay, Tracy, here's some regular language about what we do. Is that all right? Okay. Here we go. This is what we're working on, guys. We're providing our support to entrepreneurs and early stage companies that are inventing new wayfinding solutions, next generation braille displays, digital training and hiring platforms designed to screen in, not screen out. You heard Anne from the U.S. DOJ. They're worried about technologies coming along that are AI driven that screen workers out. We're looking for technologies that intend, are designed to screen workers IN.

(Cheering and applause).

We're backing entrepreneurs with disabilities with powerful ideas, who are seeking funding, in order to grow and scale the kind of companies that will hire other people with disabilities, that will promote accessibility in their supply chains, that will be designed with the community in mind from the beginning.

(Applause.)

It means that SmartJob is finding and supporting a global community of disability tech accelerators, small business incubators, entrepreneurship programs that provide entrepreneurs with those critical skills, the critical skills, support, and information they need to be successful on their entrepreneurial journeys. You know, some of the fastest-growing jobs in our economy today are in the technology sector. And that's an industry where people with disabilities, including people who are blind, are absolutely underrepresented. It is estimated that hundreds of thousands of jobs that exist today will be gone by 2030 because of the lightning speed of innovation, automation, and because of this increasing digital divide. People who have unequal access to technology will be the hardest hit with these labor force trends. And as you know, here we are in 2022, and the internet remains so often inaccessible to blind people 32 years after the enactment of the ADA.

To solve for these problems, in addition to the good work, the profound work of the NFB in its crusade for civil rights with so many talented lawyers, to solve for this problem, SmartJob is building relationships. And we're building a lot of them. We're building relationships with coding, digital accessibility, and other technology training boot camps. We're trying to connect workers with new inroads into that tech industry. We're working to pave alternative and accessible learning and training paths right into the technology sector to drive inclusion into the heart of tech by making it easier for tech to meet our talented workforce!

The members of the National Federation of the Blind and people across the disability community who can and want to work in tech, and can bring their talents to bear on the next generation of technology.

(Applause.)

So, I've got to tell you, since 2020, I've met with hundreds of entrepreneurs with disabilities from around the world. We're talking about inventors and dreamers and founders and makers. They're leveraging the experience of disability as an asset to business, and as an asset to the world.

And they're expanding the disability market and the general market. The general consumer market, as they're doing it.

You might ask yourself today if you're not an entrepreneur why you should care about this. Why should you care about this? What does it have to do with your life?

Today, entrepreneurs throughout the world are working on solutions. They're working on solutions that you'll buy at the store. They're working -- and many of them are blind -- working on solutions to remove barriers from people with disabilities' lives. That's true. But the right solutions need funding to scale, in order to be sustainable, to reach you, they need funding in order to get off the ground, to hit a wider distribution, to have a lower price point, to make it, to make the sustainability of those sustainability of those products, they need sustained funding. And they need a magic ingredient, which we in investing call product market fed. They need feedback like the relationship we've formed under President Riccobono with the National Federation of the Blind to know, what is the user experience? What do blind people think about this product? What does the community need to be built? Who in the community wants to build it?

And so we are working on all these issues together. As we are looking to support and grow companies, we're also looking to support and grow the interests of consumers as to what they need, and you know what you need, and you know what you'd like to see have on the shelf in the future.

When entrepreneurs with disabilities and those co-designing with them have more funding, when they have more support, when they have more guidance, consumers do have a wider array of choices in their lives, and that levels the playing field.

And on this journey, as I mentioned -- and I really want to underscore this -- the NFB has been an in dispensable partner. This should be of little surprise, as the NFB has been at the forefront of not only, as we mentioned, advancing employment for much of its 80-plus year history. But NFB has been at the edge, the cutting edge, of advancing innovation for all of its history. Certainly blind innovation since the very beginning has very directly influenced the history of innovation writ large in the world. You can draw a straight line from the invention of the typewriter to text to voice to audio books. Many of the component features of your iPhone in your pocket, that started in the organized blind community. That started with blind innovators! That started here!

(Cheering and applause).

That started in the community!

Those innovations changed the world. They changed the world.

And I know that your president knows that. NFB knows that. And looking out into the future, they know that there are innovators and inventors in the audience here today. Across this country. Who will create the next generation of solutions in the next 50 years.

(Cheering and applause).

We are very excited by this partnership, and the ability to announce two special opportunities that are coming online right now in this partnership between SmartJob and the NFB.

We have supported and brought to the community synergies works -- it's a small microbusiness incubator. This is Tracy again -- what does incubator mean, Gina? It's a place where entrepreneurs can get end to end support on their ideas, mentorship, the opportunity to meet with coaches about their ideas, the opportunity to receive support in accounting and marketing and understanding how to reach consumers and test product. The opportunity to learn how to make a business plan.

We're bringing this online, and the opportunity is currently open to members of the National Federation of the Blind!

(Cheering and applause).

And the other thing we have to tell you is that we're bringing online, thanks to the folks at Include, LLC, a "how to raise venture capital" course, how to get funding from angel investors and venture capitalists for great business ideas here in the NFB community. That course is opening right now as well. We've got lots of opportunities, and we hope that we'll see many of you participating in these opportunities as we move forward.

Thank you very much!

(Applause.)

MARK RICCOBONO: All right, really excited about our work with Gina, and how about that energy!

(Cheering).

Bennett, you got a quick door prize?

BENNETT PROWS: I think so, oh, we got a lot. You know, this is the time for people to stick around. We've got some bucks coming up. Right now, we have a great item, it's the health monitoring kit, and it's got, with the COVID tests with it, probably over an $800 value, and the winner is Mark Coleman of Nebraska --

They got him!

(Applause.)

MARK RICCOBONO: Okay! Yeah, we got him.

BENNETT PROWS: He's out raising "cane" there.

(Laughter.)

MARK RICCOBONO: Our partnership with Kellogg's has been growing over the years.

(Cheering).

I think the first time they participated in this convention is when they launched our partnership on the Braille Love Notes.

(Clapping).

Yeah, that was pretty cool, wasn't it?

This year, they are our Elite sponsor, which is our top sponsorship level!

(Cheering and applause).

Now, some of you may not realize. To get to stand on this stage and speak to this audience, you don't get to pay for that privilege. So as much as we love our Elite sponsor, it does not earn you the opportunity to come speak.

So that means the fact that we have invited Kellogg to speak indicates a deeper and more substantial partnership. We do not have a pay-to-play model in the National Federation of the Blind.

(Applause.)

You have to earn it!

Our presenter is the senior director of retail operations at Kellogg corporation, based in Battle Creek, Michigan.

(Cheering).

He has been at Kellogg's for over 28 years. In addition to his professional credentials, he exhibits the spirit of determination that we share in the National Federation of the Blind. During the COVID pandemic he set the goal of running the Chicago Marathon, and in October, he did so. His third marathon.

(Applause.)

Here to present Diversity at Kellogg: A Commitment That Raises Expectations for Blind Empowerment is a gentleman who I should tell you is also, in observance of our mask policy, is wearing a mask that makes him look like Tony the Tiger.

(Laughter and applause).

So, please welcome our GRRR-EAT Elite Sponsor, Wilson Ray!

(Intro music: We're all in together, once we see that we are, we're all stars, we're all in this together, when it shows, when we stand, hand in hand, make our dreams come true!)

WILSON RAY SR: Hello, NFB, I've been so excited because this is a great group and we thank you for your interaction at the exhibitor showcase and we're excited to talk about some really fun news. Before I get to that, I want to first of all say thank you. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today. We at Kellogg's are very excited to be your Elite sponsor for this year's convention.

(Applause.)

And on behalf of everyone at Kellogg's, I would like to thank NFB president Mark Riccobono, as well as everybody in the NFB organization for your great hospitality in welcoming us to this fine town of New Orleans. Everybody enjoying New Orleans?

(Applause.)

I know I absolutely am.

And I would be remiss to also not take a moment to congratulate the Jacob Bolotin award winners. Those stories were SO inspiring! And so motivational. I just want to say thank you to those, and congratulations. Let's give those winners another round of applause. Super job.

(Applause.)

As was mentioned, my name is Wilson Ray. I'm director of retail sales operations for Kellogg's. Some of you probably know Kellogg's through our iconic breakfast cereals and brands, like Kellogg's corn flakes, Frosted Flakes, who doesn't love Tony the Tiger, and Rice Krispies. But Kellogg's also makes Pringles, Cheetos, RX Bars, and Morning Star Farms Vegetarian products. I want you to understand that in this family of products your voice matters, and I'll talk about that

I'm often asked, how does one spend 28 years, their entire professional career with one company? It's easy to answer for me. Kellogg's is a company with a true purpose, with a why behind what we do. We're not just about making and selling food, we're about taking care of our environment, our consumers, and our people. I want to share with you Kellogg's vision and purpose. Our vision at Kellogg's is a good and just world where people are not just fed but fulfilled, and our purpose is creating better days and a place at the table for everyone through our trusted food brands. A place at the table. That's what we're going to talk about today.

A very tangible example of how Kellogg's lives these values and lives this purpose is in what we call our business employee resource groups, or BERGs. Our business employee resource groups are very important to Kellogg's because they allow us to connect at a deeper level. I on top of my day job in sales have the privilege and honor of serving as one of the national co-chairs of Capable, Kellogg's business employee resource groups for employees with disabilities and their supporters.

(Applause.)

I will tell you, Kellogg's Capable is active in finding ways to make our workplace more inclusive and accessible for our employees with disabilities. Couple of ways we do that. We partner with our facilities to make sure our buildings are accessible and easy to get around in.

(Cheering and applause).

Thank you. We partner with IT on technology for accessibility for all of our employees. We want our employees to be able to bring their full selves to work, and we try to leverage that.

We made an internal impact through Capable at advocating for enhanced benefits for our employees.

(Cheering).

Most recently, in the last two years we've improved and enhanced our coverage of hearing aids, and in this last year I'm proud to say we've almost doubled our mental health coverage for all employees at Kellogg's.

(Applause.)

Within that, we launched a program Called Lean On Me, a training program where we're certifying Kellogg's employees to be mental health first aid providers. I will say by the end of this year, at Kellogg's, we'll have over 200 mental health first aiders in our organization.

(Applause.)

I'll tell you, that's internal, it's really good, it's great for employees, and I gotta tell you it's a great place to work. Kellogg's, and Capable, is also committed to taking that same concept to the market in our products. Our goal is to make our products more accessible for everyone. Including people with disabilities.

Our partnership was mentioned a few years ago with our Rice Krispie Treats Love Notes, what a great program, do you remember that? That included braille stickers as well as rerecordable audio boxes. That was us taking that concept of inclusion to our consumers, and that's a great example of Kellogg's living our purpose.

That brings me to why I'm here today. I've been asked a couple times, why is Kellogg's here? It's because we have something exciting to talk about! I'm here to give you a sneak peek into a very exciting project that Kellogg's and Capable has been working on for a couple years. It takes time for these to come to market.

We recently launched technology in Europe a few years ago that's been really successful. I think a lot of you have even already had the opportunity to engage with the Nabulans technology here at the conference. I know we had examples of packaging at our booth, I see the codes on our state signs throughout the conference. I have one on my name badge as well. Tim Fallberg has been a great partner, he made me my own Nabulens code, which is like a business card. If you see me tonight at the dinner, scan my code and get my contact information! That's fantastic, love to have you do that.

Tim is a partner and educator at the Wisconsin School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. He's helped prepare us and understand the power of Nabulans for this group of people. These codes and apps allow you to easily find our products on selves. It will allow you to hear the product name, ingredients, even allergen information. We're proud at this year's conference to announce that we'll be launching a pilot incorporating Nabulans code on packaging of four of our iconic and beloved cereal brands later this year.

(Applause.)

You'll see the technology on Kellogg's Corn Flakes, Special K Original, Rice Krispies, and Crispix. I'm very proud to say today that we'll be the first company to incorporate this technology on food packaging in the United States.

(Cheering and applause).

What an exciting time. And we thought this was the perfect avenue to announce that to the public. And we're excited for all of you, thank you for your engagement, your partnership, thank you for all you do.

A little bit about Nabulens just so you know. It's a code, it's an optical smart code. If you've used a QR code, it's similar, but it use high-contrast colored squares against a colored background. So it's a lot more powerful than a QR code. When you use the Navigo app, you can scan the code. You don't really have to know where the code is, if you point the smartphone's camera in the general direction, it will pick it up from up to 4 feet away. Once detected, the app will read important product information from the packaging, reading the name, ingredients, and allergen information that's very important and needed. What's really cool is this app will also translate into different languages, based on the settings on your phone. It will even use sound and vibrations to direct you to where the box is on the store shelf! How exciting is that

(Cheering and applause).

Now, we're going to put the code on the front and the side of the box, and that's on purpose, because we want it to be accessible whether you're walking down the aisle of your favorite grocery store looking for a box of Corn Flakes, or you're in your kitchen and want to prepare a tasty bowl of Special K for breakfast, you'll be able to easily find the box you're looking for.

The Nabulens app is developed for blind users. Those who use screen readers on their phones. It will automatically read out the information as that code is detected. The Nabulens Go App is optimized for sighted and low vision users. It will display information on the screen and give you the option to tap to have it read out. So there's a lot of options for all of our consumers.

To that end, if you're going to attend the banquet tonight, we'll be putting table tents on all the tables. On that table tent there will be a link to the Nabulens Go app, as well as a Nabulens code that you can test out for real, get used to it, and know that it's coming to grocery shelves in your neighborhood at the end of this year.

(Applause.)

As I close out, I want to share more about why we're here today. We're committed to driving growth with purpose. Kellogg's Better Days platform is made to address the intersection of well-being, hunger, sustainability, and equity, diversity, and inclusion. It's a core tenet of our Better Days commitment. It encompasses our employees, partners, and consumers. We believe that everyone deserves a place at our table and should have equitable access to food. Kellogg's also has a very special tie to blindness. You may not know this, but our founder, WK Kellogg, went blind later in his life. And after he went blind, he continued to work at Kellogg's, so he was an innovator in accessibility and continuing to do his work and do great things. In 1930, he established the WK Kellogg Foundation. This is a foundation that supports numerous blind causes and continues to make grants to organizations today. It has become one of the top philanthropic foundations in the U.S. And in 1931, the NG Kellogg School was built. This school was built with the purpose of creating an environment where both children with and without disabilities could be educated under one roof. Mr. Kelloggs was an innovator and was an innovator in this space, and we continue that legacy.

(Applause.)

Incorporating Nabulens into our packaging continues his legacy and I'm proud of that, to continue the legacy of our founder. It builds on his values and is what we need to do to continue growing and be the right kind of partner to our consumers. Our hope today is that this technology will empower even more of our consumers to enjoy our foods. We hope you feel the inclusivity of Kellogg's and we hope you know that you have a place at our table. Thank you.

(Cheering and applause).

MARK RICCOBONO: All right.

BENNETT PROWS: A door prize?

MARK RICCOBONO: We want a door prize, definitely.

BENNETT PROWS: Hello, let's give $75 cash and a $25 gift certificate, how about Guy Kelly of Maryland? Are you there, Guy?

How about Linda Disney of Utah?

MARK RICCOBONO: Should have given away some Rice Krispie Treats or something!

(Laughter.)

BENNETT PROWS: How about Scott Duncan of Texas? Are you there?

How about Ellen Thomas of Alabama?

MARK RICCOBONO: Who's left in here?

(Loud cheering from crowd).

BENNETT PROWS: How about Lucas Simonaire, I guess it is, of Texas? Come on, Texas! They're still not here. I know it's a big state, but, you know, let's go.

How about Dr. Carolyn Peters of Ohio?

Well, all right, how about Sean Whalen of Wisconsin? You've got to be here.

I guess we're not going to be able to give all this money away we've got up here. But let's see... how about Jim Sole of Arizona? I bet he's here... yeah, he's here! All right, oh, my goodness.

MARK RICCOBONO: If I could have your attention, please, for some announcements. We have the chairman of convention arrangements, John Berggren!

(Applause.)

JOHN: Good afternoon, everyone. We're just hours away from the banquet. I hope everyone has an exchanged banquet ticket. There are some important things to keep in mind. While it has been three years since we've done this, there are some things I'm confident you remember. Perhaps most importantly is the fact that we have to make way for the hotel's ballroom banquet team. They have to strike 2200 chairs and set up 135 tables and place 1350 salads. So in order to do that, we have to clear this ballroom very quickly. When that gavel falls, we have three simple instructions, and I think most of you remember what they are.

(Crowd chanting along with them) stand up, turn around, and head out --

(Laughter.)

JOHN: Head out those doors. Now, we have some directions based on where you're heading tonight. For those of you in the Quarter Towers, we would recommend that you walk the long way out of the ballroom and head into the Acadia Foyer. We will have two paths for you to follow. There will be an opportunity to take the elevators on the left, the Quarter Tower elevators. We strongly encourage that folks allow wheelchairs to take advantage of the elevator lobby so they can get up to their rooms.

(Applause.)

We will also be directing folks down the escalators, where they can also pick up the Quarter Tower elevators. If you are in the River Tower, we encourage you to head out the back doors of the ballroom. There is a long hallway that extends the length of our ballroom.

When you get to Salon E, and if you registered in those first couple of days in convention, you will have been in Salon E already, when you walk through Salon E, it deposits you just next to the escalators and kitty-corner to the River Tower elevators. It is a wide room. There should be plenty of space for everyone to make their way quickly to the elevators.

Now, elevators. In the past, those of you who are banquet veterans -- banquet elevator veterans in particular -- will know that we have operated some or all of the elevators in a way that they go only to certain floors. This means you will not have to press elevator buttons to get you to your floor. We will be loading elevators in each of the lobbies that will take you to high floors or low floors in each of the towers. And we will be stopping at the floors that everyone needs, so that we have no wasted effort getting to floors that someone accidentally called for. We'll make sure that we hit the right floors.

Once it gets to be... well, once we've got everybody up to their rooms, we're going to then reverse that process. Certain elevators will stop only at certain floors so we can get everybody down here in a quick fashion.

Now, a little bit more about departure.

When the gavel falls, and you stand up, turn around, and head for the door, that is not the point at which you look to see if you can find your cell phone. It's not the point at which you start bundling together all your knitting.

(Laughter.)

It's not the point at which you have a conversation with your friend to see if you still have time to get a drink at the bar. You need to be ready to head for the door when the gavel falls. So I ask you to be a little proactive and begin to collect your belongings before that gavel falls.

Now, when we come back down, again, I would encourage our wheelchair users, those who have other mobility means, to arrive early. 6:15 is not too early. That will get you a spot close to the door. We'll make sure that you get priority seating. We will get you to your table. We will swap out your chair if you would like to remain in your wheelchair or we'll find a place along the wall for your wheelchair after you've gotten into your banquet seat.

At 6:45, or as soon as the hotel is ready for us, we'll open the doors to allow the rest of the crowd to come in. And just a heads up, 6:15 is not the time when we will seat wheelchairs. It's when we'd like you here to make sure that you're at the front of the line. As soon as those doors are ready, we'll be seating first wheelchairs, then everyone. I would encourage folks who have banquet seats between 1 and 40 to use the Acadia Foyer ballroom doors. Those are the doors down by Alabama and Arkansas.

If you are further up in the numerical tables, you're going to travel farther and farther down the hallway that runs behind the ballroom. This is the hall that once between Salons A, D, E, and H, and the ballroom here. And you can come in those doors and we'll help you get to your seats.

Now, we're going to need to make a couple of last-minute adjustments. We have plenty of seats in the ballroom for everyone to sit. We may surprise you with a last-minute table adjustment. But by and large, your tickets are going to be where you are sitting.

So I look forward to a fantastic banquet, and a smooth operation of us getting out of the ballroom, and a smooth operation of us returning at 7:00 -- 6:15 or 6:30, actually.

Now, I will remind you, we're going to fill those... get everyone seated as quickly as possible so we can start the program.

That means probably shortly after 7:00, when we have the vast majority of the crowd seated, we're going to shift to open seating. So if you've waited too long for your elevator and arrive late, there's a chance that there will be someone sitting in your seat. Doesn't mean you won't have a place to sit, but it may not be the seat you were hoping to use. So I encourage to you get down here with plenty of time, and I look forward to enjoying a banquet with all of you here!

(Applause.)

I think that's my report, President Riccobono.

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you very much, John, and I encourage everybody to harness their most inner patience. I know it's been three years, but we've done this many times, right? And the hotel is always amazed when we execute it. So just remember, we're all gonna get there. Let's work together.

We have three more presentations, though, so I want to get right to it. The next one is Engineering A New Response, and we've discussed extensively at this convention our disappointment with the initial government announcement about the at-home COVID testing program. But from January 3 forward, from the beginning, we have been very clear with the administration of all the tools that we have to compel the government to get it right. We want to be a partner. We want to help get this right for all at home testing in the future. And when we did get the attention of the government, our experience has been, especially with the leadership at the National Institutes of Health, they've said, you know what? We did this quickly. We didn't get it right on accessibility. But we are gonna nail this going forward.

(Applause.)

And here's what I want to say about that. Here's what I want to say about that. You may not realize that at-home COVID testing is changing the nature of at-home testing forever. In the month of February alone, more Americans took at-home COVID tests in that month than took at-home pregnancy tests in all of 2021!

That means there's a big opportunity to innovate. And I think we should be focused on the fact that the government, and especially the leadership at NIH, has rallied to our call for equal access. And not only that, they have called on us, the National Federation of the Blind, to be a trusted expert in helping them get it right.

(Cheering and applause).

So I'm really excited to have with us at this convention the deputy director of the National Institutes of Health National Institute of Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering, I've talked about it extensively in our presidential report. Please welcome Dr. Jill Heemskerk!

(Intro music: Hit me with your best shot, why don't you hit me with your best shot! Hit me with your best shot... fire away!)

(Guitar solo, as song fades out).

JILL HEEMSKERK: (Chuckling) I'm really wondering what to make of that intro music!

(Laughter.)

You guys are a hoot.

Yes, so, thank you for that nice introduction, and good afternoon, everybody.

(Applause.)

I am Jill Heemskerk, deputy director of, we'll say, NIBIB, you heard the full name and it's a mouthful, but really what we are is the engineering institute at the National Institutes of Health.

The NIH is one of the largest, is actually THE largest funder of biomedical research in the world, and funds most of the research done at universities, small businesses, and research institutions in this country. It's actually made up of 27 different institutes and centers, and you know at least one, because Dr. Tony Fauci runs the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease.

(Cheering and applause).

That's one of the biggest NIH institutes. Engineering is a small one, but we're mighty. And when the pandemic started, Congress gave the NIH a lot of money to develop new vaccines, new treatments, and new tests for COVID.

The engineering institute, our institute, NIBIB, was charged with developing COVID tests, which is a perfect role for the engineering community. And you'll remember at the beginning of the pandemic how very hard it was to get a COVID test, and then once you got your test, how long it took to get the results back.

Yeah, that's right, you couldn't even get them.

So, I'm going to tell you today about a program we started called RADX, and that stands for Rapid Acceleration of Diagnostics. And we've been successful at delivering about half the diagnostics available in the country now, not only in laboratories, but also at point of care in doctors' clinics, as well as the at-home tests that we're so grateful to have. But really the big story today is our partnership with NFB to make home tests more accessible for people with blindness and low vision.

(Applause.)

So, as we just heard, when the government started distributing free tests to people in the country early this year, NFB and other advocacy groups quickly did some very important and very effective outreach to the government, and they pointed out that while it's great to have tests in the country, the tests that we have are not accessible to people with blindness and low vision and other disabilities.

And we completely agree and recognize that everybody needs tests that can be taken easily, independently, and confidentially.

And so I'm going to tell you about our RADX efforts to make accessible tests a reality.

I'm going to first, though, describe the RADX program, because it's unique and it's quite a powerful process for accelerating research and development. NIBIB had received funding for development, because we already had a program in place since 2007 developing point of care and at home tests for lots of different diseases and conditions. We quickly expanded that network in April of 2020 to focus on COVID test development.

We had four academic centers at the time and a coordinating center at Mass General Hospital. And we established new core resources to validate tests, conduct clinical studies that the FDA needs for authorization, and we set up one resource that is truly unique at NIH called the deployment of core at SIMET, which has all of the expertise in house to get tests from the ideas stage all the way out to the market.

And what we did is provide much more than funding to these manufacturers. We provided this wrap-around support to the company's developing tests that managed issues around supply chain, manufacturing, FDA authorization. We helped them solve every problem in getting an entirely new kind of test to the marketplace.

And the experts in the deployment corps spent the last two years working with over 900 experts from multiple sectors to create an entirely new ecosystem of at-home and point of care tests in the U.S.

We started with a broad call for technology solutions, as soon as we got the money in April, and this really galvanized the engineering community. We were amazed that we attracted 824 separate proposals for tests from companies and academic institutions. And to deal with this onslaught of proposals, we set up a pipeline to evaluate the tests and figure out which ones were the most important to support. We developed a unique process for NIH that almost resembles a venture capital approach. We started off with a viability assessment, and then proposals that looked promising entered what we were calling the "shark tank" phase, where a team of experts worked closely with the companies over 1 or 2 weeks to look at all their data and their capabilities, and we examined all the aspects of the technology. The technical, the clinical, the regulatory, and the plans for manufacturing.

And so we had a very good sense of which of these test proposals were the most promising. And we moved those into phase 1, which was sort of a de-risking -- try to make the test, try to validate the test, we helped with that. And those that were successful moved to phase 2, where there was a very large scale investment to get the clinical studies done for the FDA and to scale up the tests for the marketplace. And this novel, hands-on process has proved to be tremendously successful, and we actually reduced what is typically a 6-month test development timeline down to as little as 6 months

So what have we accomplished so far?

We have delivered 2.6 billion tests to the United States -- that's billion with a b --

(Applause.)

For comparison, last year in the U.S., there were 9,000 pregnancy tests taken. So that's just a completely different scale.

These tests include not only laboratory, but point of care and home tests, and represent about half of the tests that are available in the U.S. now.

We have supported tests all the way to FDA authorization. We have 44 FDA authorizations under our belt, including 10 for at home tests, and we've got more on the way.

(Applause.)

In this process, we've worked with more than 100 manufacturers, and we're relying on our relationships with these companies to help in our now effort to develop more accessible tests for people with blindness and disabilities.

We are still actively working and developing new tests and continuing with this successful pipeline. Central to this, of course, is developing tests that can be used independently by people with blindness and low vision. But we plan now that accessibility will be built into all of our development efforts, including efforts --

(Cheering and applause).

-- including efforts to develop at-home tests that are as reliable as lab tests. We also would like to broaden our efforts to other diseases. For example, respiratory infections like flu and RSV. And we'd like to spur innovation in the cost drivers to get tests to the market that are not only accessible, but cost as little as $5 per test.

(Applause.)

So -- thank you.

And it's funny to look back at the start of this project, I thought, if we could just have a COVID test that was like a pregnancy test, that would be great. We'd be done. And then we get to that point, and we realize, oh, they're not accessible, they're not affordable. They're not very sensitive. So there's still a lot to be done. And that is where the partnership with NFB comes in.

Once the NFB, and other groups, reached out to the government about the importance of accessible tests, the first thing we did in RADX was to organize a listening session. Actually, that was the second thing we did. The first thing was regret that we had not had accessibility built in at the outset.

We set up a listening session so that we could talk to the users and understand the challenges in the accessibility of at-home tests. We invited advocates from the disability community, the aging community, and the blind and low-vision communities.

Beyond just listening, the important goal here was to set up relationships that we could integrate these users into what we knew was going to be an ongoing process to develop tests. We didn't want to have a single engagement and then go from there. We wanted to have active partners. And I have to say that NFB has been incredibly generous with their time and education and resources.

(Applause.)

We also invited the 6 federal agencies that have accessibility as part of their mission, including multiple institutes from NIH, the CDC, FDA, the Administration for Community Living, the National Council on Disability, and the U.S. Access Board. And we had at this meeting three breakout sessions. One blind and low-vision, one fine motor impairment, and one for older adults. And it was incredibly revealing for us to hear about things that we had not even considered, incredibly valuable. And one thing that we did notice was that these groups, in their separate breakout groups, often came up with the same challenges, regardless of what the challenge was. And they were actually challenges that we all have with these tests. The instructions was a big one. Small print, complicated, few language options, no braille at all. And often no simple, step by step instructions.

The boxes were difficult because there's no scannable identifier, so you have a box and you don't know what's in it, you don't know what instructions to look for.

The test procedure itself is challenging to, truly, almost everybody. There are too many steps in these processes. The need to count drops of fluid and aim into a tiny hole on the device. Multiple small little parts in the box. And instructions that say things like "put the drops in the top hole". Well, if you don't know which end of the device is up, you don't know what's the top hole and what's the bottom hole.

And I think especially vexing for people with blindness, the repeated instruction not to touch this and not to touch that --

(Applause.)

-- is just not helpful at all.

(Applause.)

And then also key for people with blindness is that the result appears often as a little faint line on a strip. There's no simple interpretation that says "your test is positive" or "your test is negative". And although some of the tests work with smartphones, they're not accessible to many people. We learned that as many as 40% of these communities don't have access to cell phones.

So, we are taking a two pronged approach here. One prong is the fastest approach, which is to modify existing tests. And the other prong is the best approach, which is a longer-term plan to design accessible tests with accessibility built in to the design from the very beginning, which clearly is the preferred approach.

(Cheering and applause).

We'll be announcing a solicitation for proposals in just a matter of just a few weeks. But I'm going to tell you a little bit about our process for test modification, which we're very engaged and excited about.

Illum is a good example of a reasonably accessible test, and that was noted by the NFB in their own accessibility evaluation. And the government, I want to make sure I tell you, the government on covidtest.gov, is making Illum COVID tests available free to people with blindness and low vision.

(Applause.)

But even Illum, if you've taken it, has room for improvement. And those improvements is what we want to bring to bear. So our process is a multistep pipeline, where we start with the accessibility evaluation, and then based on the challenges observed for the particular test, design a prototype. And on the advice of NFB, some of our designers are people with blindness and people with low vision.

(Applause.)

Getting advice from experts is always the best idea.

Then once we have the prototype designed, we'll move into the user feedback phase. We want to put these, again, in the hands of people with blindness and low vision for them to tell us, did we get it right? And what we plan to do -- this is a very high-touch process with lots of user involvement -- we're going to go through that process twice. Tests that have gone through to the user feedback stage already, we've heard, no, that's not quite what we want. So what we're thinking is that we're going to start with a sort of early prototype, go back to the design stage with the feedback, and then produce a more mature prototype and get feedback again. And we'll do that as many times as we need to get something that is acceptable to the community.

(Cheering and applause).

And then once we have an agreed-upon product, we'll support the companies to start producing those.

We identified 24 different tests for this initial evaluation, and 12 look very amenable to modification, and they've moved on into this prototype design phase.

And our goal is to have more accessible tests being produced as early as this fall.

(Applause.)

We've had a lot of good news in this process already. The first piece of good news we got was that as we reach out to the companies making these tests and tell them what we're doing, they've been saying "that's great. Do this as quickly as possible. We're developing tests for other things. We want to know how to make them accessible."

(Applause.)

So they're very eager for the feedback. And very, very eager for... to start producing more accessible tests. They see a huge benefit in this.

We even had a company start making modifications before we got all the user feedback in, and we had to tell them to slow down! They were so eager.

The other very gratifying news is that we have always collaborated closely with the FDA on our RADX program, and they are also very excited about this and prepared to advise and accelerate the process. Any changes we make to the tests are going to have to go through FDA review, and they're going to need data that tells them that the changes made don't do anything to make the test unsuccessful. So even something as simple as changing the instructions is going to take probably 3 months before there's a new product on the shelves.

There are two other elements of the accessibility initiative that I wanted to mention. One is really focused on the instructions, because two-thirds of our recommendations from the accessibility review have been about the instructions. So we've set up a separate fast-track process that can benefit all of the marketed tests. We'd like to develop a general format that all companies can use that is simplified, has larger type, has a new layout. And we will make this available so that any company, whether they're working with us or not, as they're developing their instructions, can use this template.

(Applause.)

And for web-accessible instructions, we are addressing packaging for rapid access to the relevant instructions, such as QR codes. And I was really interested to hear what Kellogg has. That sounds like -- that you can do that from 4 feet away is brilliant. The FDA is poised to help, as I said. And they will review the new instructions after all the users have agreed that the instructions are now actually helpful. The other effort that we're doing is a best practices effort, because what we'd like is for the work that we're doing to benefit all test manufacturing, as now home tests are commonplace because of COVID, there are going to be other tests for other disorders. Glucose tests, flu test, pregnancy tests. And we want accessibility guidelines to be available to manufacturers so they can design with accessibility in mind from the outset.

(Applause.)

So in conclusion, everybody at RADX is really excited about this initiative. We recognize that accessibility improvements will benefit everybody. And we're very grateful to the NFB for their role in not only stimulating this work, but for their ongoing support and advice as we work together to create accessible COVID tests. Thank you very much.

(Cheering and applause).

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you very much, and we will continue to be partners with you in this journey. So thank you so much for the work of the NIH in this area. Let's have a door prize for that.

BENNETT PROWS: We're going to have Robin Mayer from New York, and Joseph Thomson from Idaho virtually, and if they e-mail prize at nfb.org within 30 minutes, they'll get gift certificates to the Independence Market.

The next prize is 250 bucks in cash!

(Crowd reacting).

Hindley Williams of Maryland.

(Cheering).

Are you here?

(Crowd yelling).

If he's upstairs, he's not here, right?

How about Patricia Mauer of Maryland?

MARK RICCOBONO: She's not in the room.

BENNETT PROWS: Oh! Okay. Well... how about Michael Powell of Michigan?

(Loud cheering).

Got him, we got him. You want another one?

MARK RICCOBONO: No, no, no, no, no. We've got two more presentations. We will get more door prizes in, though. But we've got a tight timeline here!

Okay, so, we've talked during this convention about the difficulties in getting the support through the courts of this nation for the viewpoints that we hold about disability and equal access. One reason that we struggle with the courts is that when you look at the judiciary system, especially at the federal level, you don't see any people who exhibit the qualities that we have, especially as it relates to disability!

In fact, you might think by the folks that are serving on the bench that America doesn't have any people with disabilities!

Well, our speaker here is a blind person, and he's serving in a significant position in the court. He's doing so in the state of Michigan.

(Cheering).

He's bringing his lived experience to the effort, of course. You'll recall that in our leadup to the to 2020 elections, one of the states we worked in was Michigan, on accessible voting. And, you know, blind people face trouble with voting all the time. But when one of the blind people who has trouble voting is a justice to the state supreme court, it gets a lot of people's attention!

(Laughter and applause).

So don't think that just because he serves in a significant position, he's immune from the problems that blind people have. He's still a blind person, and he brings that authenticity, that lived experience, to the work he does every day, and it drives his passion. And he uses his legal talents to advance our nation, but also through his lived experience, our cause as blind people.

He has come to our convention. We're glad to have him. And he is someone who I think is at this convention for the first time. Here's the Honorable Richard Bernstein!

(Intro music: "I fought the law and the law won. I fought the law, and the law won. I needed money cause I had none, I fought the law, and the law won. I fought the law, and the law won...")

(Music fading out).

RICHARD BERNSTEIN: I got a call a short time ago, and it was a call that probably many of you have had. And a conversation that many of you had. It was a wonderful young prosecutor, and he told me "I love practicing law, I love being a prosecutor, and the thing that I want to do more than anything is to serve as a judge." "But I went before the committee, they told him, you have all the qualifications. Would be an outstanding judge! But we simply can't take you because you're blind.

(Crowd jeering and booing).

In what other situation, what other group would that be okay? To say to somebody, the only reason you can't have this job, the only reason you can't be promoted, the only reason you can't have advancement is solely and exclusively because of the way that God made you and the way that you were ultimately created?

I am certain that every single person in this room, throughout their educational process, or at their workplace, has had to contend with that self-appointed expert that feels that they know everything about blindness!!!

When they have NO knowledge! NO training! NO expertise! But yet so often in our workplaces, we have to be subservient to this mindset. And to these types of people.

I would venture to say that even in our social lives, blindness will always play a role. It's always so funny that as you're growing up, people will say "I found the perfect girl for you!" And I'll say "oh, that's great, tell me all about her", and they'll say "oh, she's blind".

(Laughter.)

And I'll say "what else?"

"Well, she's blind".

(Laughter.)

And that's it! She's blind. She's perfect for you because she is blind!

(Laughter.)

You know, it's interesting. We as blind people have to contend with so much. It is always the same people who feel that we aren't capable of handling certain jobs or doing certain things, and yet these are the same people that will always say things to you like, oh, have you read about this blind guy that climbed Mount Everest? And as wonderful and amazing as that is, we don't all climb Mount Everest! And the irony that so many of us who are blind have to contend with each and every day is this paradox.

(Crowd agreeing).

That when we try to go for employment, try to go for jobs, people have this natural instinct to exclude us because they can't believe the fact that we can actually perform the duties that are before us. But then, at the same time, there are these ridiculous expectations that they feel that we have to meet because they always know about that one blind guy!

There's this ONE blind guy that I know! And he does all these things!

And so we get compared to people in an unrealistic fashion.

And I think the reason that I am so excited to be a part of the NFB is thank God for this organization! Thank God for its work!

(Cheering and applause).

Thank God for its efforts! But most importantly, thank God for its advocacy. Because it's people like the NFB who are making life better for each and every one of us. They're not exploiting us. They're advocating for us. They're dedicated to doing the types of things that make our life better.

You know, listen. For all of us who are here today, whether you were born blind or whether you're in a more challenging situation where you have lost your vision suddenly and are now having to learn how to be blind, there are real challenges that come with blindness.

There are real difficulties that come with blindness. It is something that we have to contend with and live with, and experience each and every day.

And, yes! There are so many people that are out doing extraordinary things, and that is fantastic. But what we have to focus on are the basics. We have to focus on the fact that, according to the Census, over 80% of our population is currently unemployed. Now, that is not because we are not capable. That is not because we are not talented. That is not because we are not hardworking. It is solely and exclusively socioeconomic, which is exacerbated by our disabilities. You know, I want to be very direct. Because I think it's important. The worst thing that someone can stand up here and say, which I find to be infuriating, is when someone stands up and says "well, if I can do it, you can do it." That is so outrageous!

(Laughter.)

(Applause.)

And so offensive, and so arrogant! Because ultimately, what we know here at the NFB is that every one of us has our own story.

(Cheering).

Every one of us has our own unique experience. And I just like to be honest, direct. That's just my nature as a judge. You just say it honestly and directly to people. Let's just put it out there. If I had not been born and blessed to come from the family that I come from, where I had the absolute best of everything -- I had the best of schools, I had the best of teachers, I had literally the best of everything because my family was able to provide that -- but if I hadn't been given those advantages, those unbelievable socioeconomic advantages, there is no question that I would be part of the 80% who is currently unemployed and having to struggle.

(Applause.)

So I think the idea of this conference and the idea as to why we gather and as to why we are together is because the NFB represents the reality of the world. And the NFB represents the reality of what blind people have to face and contend with each and every day. But I don't have a lot of time to be with you today, because you've got some extraordinary speakers, but I'm hoping that we will have much more time in the future. But there's a certain thing that I really do want to highlight, and I really do believe needs to be focused.

When people say, like they said to this young prosecutor, that being a judge is simply unattainable for you because how can you do this if you can't see... they are missing the most important element of this. What makes a good judge is not your academics. It's not your intellectualism. It's not your ability to research and to write and to publish, and it is certainly not your ability to see. What makes a good judge, what makes a good leader, is what every single person in this audience has. It is life experience. Everyone here today understands what it means to truly have to struggle. Everyone in this room understands what it feels like to be left out. Everyone in this room understands the general feeling you have when people discriminate against you for something that is beyond your control.

(Applause.)

The reason that the NFB has to be loud, the reason that the NFB has to be active, the reason that the NFB has to be engaged is because often it's the case, when you ask what makes a good judge, when you ask what makes a good lawyer, when you ask what makes a good doctor, when you ask what makes a good professional, when you ask what makes a good person, it is solely and exclusively the notion of living with struggle. Understanding struggle. Understanding adversity.

But here's what I want to say to everybody who is here at this conference. This is the notion. If you learn to live with struggle, and you learn to face adversity like everybody has here today, you can live your life with passion. You can live your life with purpose. You can live your life with meaning. And you can live your life with mission that will allow you to transform the world with which we know. You're here because you have that mission. You're here because you have that passion. You're here because you understand why you were ultimately created. We're a powerful organization, for we are a powerful people. And when we go forth into society and into the world at large, and people give us opportunities, they are not doing it out of charity. They are doing it because we add to their organization. They're doing it because we teach people the lesson of resilience. We teach people the lesson of strength. We teach people the lesson of struggle. We teach people the lesson of mission and purpose. I conclude with my favorite biblical story that goes to the essence and heart of why we are here and why we're so dedicated to doing what we do. It's the story of the angel coming upon Jacob deep into the night. As the bible teaches us, there existed an intense battle that ranged until dawn. And when the sun rose, the angel blessed Jacob and gave him a new name, the name of Israel, which translates to mean "one who struggles with God". But as scripture teaches us, Jacob was not left uninjured. For after the struggle, he was given a shattered hip. He would walk with a limp, and he would know great pain for the remainder of his days.

I believe that scripture teaches us this valuable lesson, because it was only through Jacob's struggle, it was only through his setback, it was only through his frustration that he was able to connect, appreciate, and understand the challenges and the hardships of his fellow man. And it was only through that ability that he was able to become a leader and the father of a nation.

Let us go forth and take our struggle, find our passion, and continue to do what we do as blind people: Make the world better for everybody.

(Cheering and applause).

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you, Justice Bernstein!

(Applause.)

From time to time, we are invited to support candidates for various, or individuals for various positions. And recently, we have signed letters of support for individuals with disabilities to serve on the federal bench, and one of them is Justice Bernstein, and we hope that the administration will appoint him to the federal bench so we finally have a blind person serving there!

(Cheering and applause).

Who can represent us and our stories.

BENNETT PROWS: Yeah. We have a door prize.

MARK RICCOBONO: Go for it.

BENNETT PROWS: 250 bucks for the judge!

(Laughter.)

And it is to Rebecca Mintron of Florida. Rebecca, you better be here.

MARK RICCOBONO: That door prize is very popular in the people's court, I think.

(Laughter.)

BENNETT PROWS: Tim Fallberg of Wisconsin --

MARK RICCOBONO: From Kellogg!

BENNETT PROWS: Okay, McKenzie Gray -- I love people pushing me to move --

(Laughter.)

All right, here we go. Tom Page of Kansas. You gotta be here.

MARK RICCOBONO: Oh, I think he stepped away...

BENNETT PROWS: I guess we turn the "page" then.

(Crowd groaning at pun).

(Laughter.)

Mc Kayla Baka of Louisiana.

Okay... how about Jack Bock of Wisconsin? How about Jeremy Coopererstock of Canada?

All right, we gotta have this person. Sabrina Washington of Maryland, are you here? Sabrina Washington of Maryland...

From my state to yours, I guess she's not here. Okay...

All right, how about Matthew Hines of Washington?

Are you here?

Not here. Calvin Thompson of North Carolina.

Oh, my goodness!

Travis Moses, Montana.

Lynn Heights of Pennsylvania.

(Loud cheering).

I bet you she's here... got her.

MARK RICCOBONO: Okay! Excellent. Our next and final presenter for this afternoon is in line -- we got you -- it's coming, calm down!

(Laughter.)

-- with the theme that we've been sharing through much of this convention about sharing our stories. She's a long time Federation member, and some of you have worked alongside of her in the movement for decades, while others of you may simply only know her for the work that she's done as The Blind History Lady.

(Cheering and applause).

In 2018, we awarded her efforts with our Jacob Bolotin award. For her work to preserve the stories, the individual stories that have contributed to our shared movement.

Earlier in this convention, I have called each and every one of us to action around the Museum of the Blind People's Movement. And she has been helping us with the feasibility work to get ready for a museum and to talk about how we collect stories. This movement is grateful to her for what she has done to champion the preservation of the individual stories of blind people and how those blind people have come together to create a movement of blind people.

Here to share the importance of our stories is The Blind History Lady, Peggy Chong!

(Intro song: Everybody's got a tale of how to chase the great white whale. Some succeeded, some just failed. Trying is what you got to do. Because in the trying, you feel you're flying, the whole world beneath you lying, it's true, there's no denying, there's a hero in you).

PEGGY CHONG: Thank you, President Riccobono, and hello to all of my Federation friends and family.

(Applause.)

To own our own story. To tell our own story. That is so powerful, and it is so rare. If you go on the internet, if you go to a library, if you go to state archives, and you ask for the information on blindness, you get governmental reports, university studies, home teacher reports, and they tell just a small portion of the lives of blind people. And mostly not in the most favorable light.

The tenBroek Library has a lot of information in that library. But it's a lot of puzzle pieces. When you go to the state archives and pull the reports on the home for the blind, or the asylum for the blind, you have a puzzle with corners, edges, and finite puzzles. Our history is a puzzle, and it has lot of missing pieces, and it's up to us to find those pieces. We are up to the task. We have old records in our files, in our basements, in our closets. We have the children of our blind ancestors who have gone on that probably have mom and dad's, or grandma or grandpa's old braille books that they can't read, their notebooks, their diaries, their scrap books. We should gather them up and collect them. And we may not really understand what is in those puzzle pieces that we're bringing to the tenBroek Library that's going to be the basis for telling our stories through this history of the movement museum. But what we will have are other pieces to go with it. Let me tell you some about my gathering of puzzle pieces. About 40 years ago -- and it seems to strange to say that! -- about 40 years ago, I got the opportunity to clean out the files at the home for the blind in Minnesota. It was a treasure trove of paper, old paper, news clippings, letters, correspondence, minutes, books. And we were moving into much smaller spaces. Most of it had to go. I tell you, I regret throwing every piece of paper out today.

When I was going through those letters and artifacts that didn't have anything to do with the minute books, every once in a while I'd stop and read something. I read a letter that really made me stop and say, whoa, what have we got here? Because it talked about meeting with our blind Congressman over the Robbins Bill. Well, I didn't know what the Robbins Bill was at the time, and I kept looking for the name of that blind Congressman. And it wasn't there. So I had a puzzle piece that needed a whole bunch of more pieces to go around it. I took that puzzle piece and set it aside. I found another puzzle piece from the 1920s, again regarding the Robbins Bill, and they were reaching out to a blind man in Nebraska named F. Edgecombe and asking that he help, use his influence to help with the Robbins Bill. Well, how did this blind guy, F. Edgecombe, have influence? Who was he? I set that puzzle piece aside. I did find out that Congressman was Thomas David Shaw, who went on to the U.S. Senate, and had tried several times to introduce legislation regarding blindness. Frank Edgecombe was the blind man from Geneva, Nebraska, who set up a newspaper empire, and by the way, his great-grandchildren are still running it today. So he left a long legacy.

The reason I asked Frank Edgecombe to help was because he was involved in the National Republican Party, not just at the state level, but at a national level, and had an opportunity to talk to Republicans across the country.

I'm digging around in 1930s information and I come across correspondence regarding the Pennsylvania affiliate -- it wasn't yet an affiliate, but it would be soon. They had sent a blind man to Congress by the name of Matthew Dunn, and the blind people sent him to Congress because there was a lot of changes going on, the Social Security program was being developed, it was going to impact blind people. A blind person should have some say in how it was developed. The same with the federalization of rehabilitation.

So I learned about Matthew Dunn. I set those puzzle pieces aside.

I took all my puzzle pieced and moved -- I've done a lot of that -- I took my puzzle pieces and I moved to Iowa. And in Iowa, I found a whole bunch of puzzle pieces, and those puzzle pieces were fairly well filled in from about 1860 to about 1930. They highlighted how graduates of the Iowa College for the Blind could go to North Dakota -- that was way out west by that time, that was when the West was expanding, North Dakota. And they could get teaching positions. Because nobody wanted to go to North Dakota and teach.

(Laughter.)

But as people came to North Dakota, and it wasn't just open prairieland, there were actually towns and houses and churches and schools, more sighted folks came who had qualifications to be a teacher, and soon, the blind teachers' contracts were not renewed, and they went on to other occupations such as tuning pianos, and one went on to become one of the first female attorneys in the country, and she was blind.

(Applause.)

I picked up all my puzzle pieces there, and I moved to New Mexico.

(Cheering).

And I found a whole bunch of puzzle pieces surrounding Pauline Gomez and Albert Gonzalez. Pauline Gomez graduated from college in the 1940s. She wanted to be a teacher. She was well qualified. But no one would hire her. Pauline decided if no one would hire her, she'd hire her. So out of the back of her home, she opened up the very first kindergarten in the state of New Mexico.

(Applause.)

Through her family connections she had the opportunity to educate a lot of the young children from some of the most prominent families in Santa Fe. When New Mexico wanted to have a kindergarten program for all of the 5-year-olds in the state of New Mexico, they went to Pauline. Pauline pretty much wrote the curriculum for the first kindergarten classes that were ever taught in New Mexico. She had an impact on who would be hired, what the qualifications were for teachers, how the classrooms should be set up and so on. It was Pauline who built the framework for the kindergarteners of New Mexico.

Albert Gonzalez was blind from his youth. He served in the state legislature in the 1940s. He didn't really know any other blind guys, but he knew times were not good for blind guys in New Mexico. He tried to have legislation passed for a commission for the blind, brought out Helen Keller and all that good stuff. It went nowhere.

He was a lawyer and he enjoyed being a lawyer. However, his children tell me that he didn't usually get paid in greenbacks. He got paid in chickens and chiles, fruits, vegetables, occasionally a piece of land, but lots of potatoes.

When he did get paid, he invested his money into land, buildings, and businesses that allowed his law practice to continue up until his death. Both Pauline and Albert left correspondence, news articles. They left the state newsletter behind to tell us a lot more about themselves, the things that they were doing. But they also shared with us, in those papers, what some of the other blind folks were doing. Again, more puzzle pieces to find that didn't have matching pieces.

I picked up my puzzle pieces and I moved to Colorado.

(Cheering).

Yeah! And in the basement of the CCB were all sorts of puzzle pieces. Unfortunately, a lot of them were handwritten, dating back to about 1915. So not really accessible! However, we are almost finished with our preservation of historical documents that we have digitized and had them transcribed into accessible files that pretty soon, any library or any person who wants to go on some internet libraries, of which I'll have details later on, will be able to access the Colorado's history of blindness, the history of the movement of blind people in Colorado.

And that is so exciting.

(Applause.)

In those files, there was a big push all across the state, by specifically five individuals, who had put together the relief act for the blind that would provide for consistent funding for blind people who are on welfare, and it also set the foundation for the commission for the blind.

Now, the records told us more about two of those people. One is still being researched, but two of those folks I looked at, and found that one of them was a seating state representative. James Downing was in the legislature because he had been a very successful attorney working for the mining companies up in Aspen. Made a lot of money. He went blind around 1910, and all his money could not buy any services, any training, any education on how to be a blind person. Sew decided he would go to the state legislature and he would create those laws. He didn't really know what he was going to do, exactly, but then he met up with the members of the United Workers for the Blind, which became an affiliate of NFB in 1941. And met another person, Elias M. Amons. I thought, gosh, that sounds awful familiar, because there's Amons Way, Amons Drives, all over Colorado. That man must have a reason he's famous. He was governor of Colorado from 1913 to 1915. So was he a sighted guy? There didn't seem to be a blind governor. So more puzzle pieces

In other files, I found that Elias M. Amons served in the state house and state senate. He didn't identify as a blind person, because back then, if you weren't blind, you didn't see anything. But he did have to have a reader in order to conduct his business, that was important to him, and actually when he was a senator, that was part of his office. The senate actually appointed him a reader.

He had a secretary, and sometimes used a guide. He wasn't a very good traveler, but he also found a lot of people who told him a lot more information about some of the legislation when they were helping him find where he needed to go.

So he sort of thought that striking out on his own and facing the possibility of getting lost would also be a very profitable opportunity for him to learn more about the legislation he was supporting or not supporting.

So Elias Amons -- sorry, New York, I believe Colorado had the first blind governor in the United States.

(Applause.)

His family tells me, his descendants tell me, that by the time he was governor, he did not recognize people who walked into the office until they spoke to him. So he definitely did not have any reading vision for at least 20 years before he became governor at all.

He also had this huge funeral that was just absolutely wonderful.

But there are still more pieces of the puzzles missing, and needing to have all these pieces put together. Our puzzle doesn't have corner pieces, and it doesn't have edges. It's a multidimensional puzzle that keeps growing and growing and growing. We have heard this week about winning the -- breaking the record for the fastest person driving blindfolded. Dan has contributed a lot of audio, video, and written documents and artifacts for the tenBroek Library. But I want to know, aside from the judge, who does not remember Eric Weinmare? Okay, let me tell you, he's a generation back. Eric Weinmare was a blind man from Colorado, by the way, and he was a blind man that NFB supported to climb Mount Everest, and we have photos and documentation from the climb. But if we don't have those stories, we don't have the grandma at Thanksgiving who told us how she had to walk uphill both ways in a snowstorm for six months out of the year

(Laughter.)

We have our museum to tell our story, our way, to fill in the pieces. We talked about Dr. Jacob Bolotin. There are really interesting other pieces around Dr. Jacob Bolotin that make it a really interesting time to study in Chicago, because there were three blind doctors at the time, the other two being Dr. Robert Babcock and George Bobbins. That's really interesting, because why were there three, and why are there no more any blind doctors? It's important that we remember our history, because when we forget, society reverts to stereotypes and fears. So let's gather all of our puzzle pieces and contribute them to the tenBroek Library so we can contribute them to the History of the Blind Movement Museum, and tell our story our way. Even if you're not sure who that person is, we'll find another puzzle piece to go with it. So this is the time, and we have the place.

(Applause.)

Thank you, Mr. President.

(Applause.)

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you very much to The Blind History Lady!

(Applause.)

Now, don't forget, who tells our stories?

(Crowd: WE DO! ) That's right. So join The Blind History Lady in putting the puzzle together. Bennett, I don't know why you don't give a door prize.

BENNETT PROWS: Yeah, who wins our door prizes!

(Laughter.)

How about Arthur Graham of Michigan.

MARK RICCOBONO: How many door prizes are you going to give away?

BENNETT PROWS: I've got at least 6.

MARK RICCOBONO: Hurry up. The faster the better.

BENNETT PROWS: Tanya Tedesh of Mississippi.

How about Gloria Woodside of Louisiana?

Meredith Gonzalez of Texas.

How about Wayne Fletcher of Ohio.

MARK RICCOBONO: Gotta be fast on the draw! Jump up!

BENNETT PROWS: Kay Darno of Louisiana. How about if I double, put two of them together, we'll make it 500 bucks!

(Cheering and applause).

MARK RICCOBONO: That's a good story to tell!

BENNETT PROWS: How about Michael Harris of Utah?

We got 500 bucks... next... Robin House of Missouri. You've been called once before, I don't think were here. Is he here?

MARK RICCOBONO: She. Is she here?

(Crowd saying no).

BENNETT PROWS: Oh, how about Roland Allen of Louisiana?

(Cheering and applause).

No, it's not rigged, Pam!

(Laughter.)

MARK RICCOBONO: He's here.

BENNETT PROWS: So he's here!

MARK RICCOBONO: I'm kind of amazed he's here, he's been doing a lot of work around this convention to make things work, so...

(Cheering and applause).

BENNETT PROWS: Got another 250 for Jeffrey Wilson of Massachusetts.

Nope.

MARK RICCOBONO: Clock is ticking...

BENNETT PROWS: How about Cheryl Rowe of Indiana?

How about Joanne Collins Johnson of Georgia?

(Cheering).

You here?

Yup, we got her.

MARK RICCOBONO: Nice, nice.

BENNETT PROWS: All right. Another 250... for Kenneth Lanto of Louisiana. Louisiana, deserves it.

How about Tyrone Bradshire of Maryland?

We're going to make it 5 hundred dollars. Bethany Sverda of Arizona? 500 bucks on the line... Kate Paxon of Iowa.

Nope?

How about Catherine McKenzie of Louisiana?

Okay, how about Earl Everett of Virginia?

(Laughter.)

Okay, I bet this is it. Desmond Jackson of Maryland. Desmond, are you here?

Nope.

Barbie Elliot of Utah.

(Cheering).

Barbie Elliot, Utah. She's here. We got her.

MARK RICCOBONO: We got Barbie. Congratulations.

I think we've got time for one more.

BENNETT PROWS: We've got another one for $450. We're combining these things. Danielle Turner of Ohio.

MARK RICCOBONO: Our last door prize before the banquet. Remember, patience, for the elevators.

BENNETT PROWS: How about Deb Altman of Nebraska? Not here? Wait a minute...

MARK RICCOBONO: Deb, are you out there?

BENNETT PROWS: Okay, yeah, we got her. So that's good. Okay, thank you very much. I want to thank the whole crowd of people that have worked with me, and my daughter, Elizabeth, who's been my primary reader this year.

MARK RICCOBONO: Let's give it up for the door prize crew.

(Cheering and applause).

Okay, we will stand adjourned until the banquet at 7:00.

(Gavel banging).

(End of session).