# National Convention 2023 General Session II

RICCOBONO: The afternoon session is now in order.

We adjourned from the roll call of states and I neglected to appoint the chair of the nominating committee. Pam Allen of Louisiana will serve as chair of the nominating committee. Those who were appointed to the nominating committee this morning, you should have received an email with instructions on where the nominating committee meeting will be no later than 15 minutes after this session. So please make sure you check your email and be sure to be at the nominating committee promptly. Pam Allen will be the chair. I think that's the announcement I had. Bennett, over to you.

 BENNETT PROWS: How about a couple of door prizes? And one here, we've got a chance for three names I'm going to read here for virtual prizes for 30 bucks each, if you send that email to prize@NFB.org  and use the code word, which is this afternoon Texas.

Donna of Michigan, Cindy of Arizona, and the third one has jumped off my fingers ‑‑ oh, Cindy was the third one. The second one is Catherine... oh, yeah, okay, Catherine Armas Lopez. Everyone send an email to prize@NFB.org  with the code word of Texas. Now, for the... yeah, thank you. Now we're going to give a prize away. I just wanted to say thank you very much to the Arizona affiliate for all those prizes that we have given away this morning virtual. The Arizona affiliate is great. Thank you very much!

Now, for the $50 door prize at the beginning of the session for the people here, the winner is... Billy Moretz from California. Are you here? Jump up, yell, throw... no, don't throw anything. (laughing)

How about Sarah Pattenrod from Alabama. We found it. Good idea to stand on the chair. Thank you. We've at got...

## 2023 Presidential Report

 SPEAKER: Ladies and gentlemen, here for the 2023 presidential report is the president of the National Federation of the Blind, my dad, Mark Riccobono.

[Applause]

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Good job.

Thank you, Orianna.

During the past year, the warmth and strength of our blind people's movement has been felt in increasing intensity throughout our nation. While our mission to achieve equality, opportunity and security is rooted deeply in our souls, it is the commitment we make to work together to have each other's backs, that drives the collective heartbeat of our movement.

As we gather to review our progress over the past year, we share our lived experiences and the motivation to pursue a better future as a family of blind people joined arm‑in‑arm in a march for independence. Deep in the heart of our movement, we are proud of our achievements and celebrate the thousands of blind people who are responsible for our victories. Together, we are the National Federation of the Blind.

[Cheers and applause]

each year at this convention, our delegates elect those blind members who will represent our movement on our national Board of Directors. While this Convention remains the supreme authority of the organization, our board has the responsibility for managing the work of the movement during the other 51 weeks of the year. Coming out of the unprecedented period of isolation caused by the pandemic, our board was determined to move aggressively to build our organization. Over the past year, we have undertaken a comprehensive strategic planning process that has included deep data collection from members and partners of the Federation.

That work has been led by a steering committee that included a wide cross‑section of members and staff from all levels of our organization. This diverse group of individuals was tasked with ensuring that our strategic development work represented the whole community of the Federation, including those who have not yet been fully welcomed into the movement. This week we have made the final strategic plan publicly available. In this coming weeks we will begin the work of implementing the key values and commitments of the plan. From our position of leadership, we deal with all matters affecting the blind in society, yet our time and resources are not infinite. The strategic plan ensures that our commitments are clearly tied to the ‑‑ to building capacity for the organization, developing a strong, coordinated blind people's movement.

The single greatest factor in our success will continue to be the commitment that blind individuals bring to the work that we do. It is not enough for our leaders to be invested in the strategic direction of the organization. It has to be all of us together. It is not just that we believe in blind people. We are those people. This movement is the expression of our hopes and dreams for the future.

[Applause]

Dr. LaShawna Fant serves as president of the Jackson Chapter of the National Federation of the Blind of Mississippi.

[ Cheering ]

So further her dream of expanding awareness of the Federation, she proposed bringing the monthly presidential release live event to her community for Blind Equality Achievement Month. In the weeks leading up to our event in Jackson, national news reports began giving focus to a local water crisis that Jackson residents had been enduring for many years.

We know that when problems impact our communities, blind people are disproportionally impacted. While water distribution sites were being established, there were no accommodations to support those in the community, such as blind people, who could not drive to pick up water. In response, we mobilized help from the Federation family. Our National Association of Blind merchants secured the delivery of 700 cases of water to Jackson.

[Cheers and applause]

And LaShawna made a plan for us to personally deliver water to the homes of blind people in the community.

[Applause]

As the water...

[Applause]

As the water was graciously accepted at each visit, I was deeply moved by the personal stories of how important the National Federation of the Blind has been in creating community and hope for our members in Jackson. This is one example that demonstrates the power of our coordinated network. More importantly, it shows the love and support that lie deep in the heart of the federation.

[Applause]

Membership capacity building happens through development of strong Federation state affiliates. This includes providing infrastructure support for managing corporate documents, fiscal responsibility, and maintaining important policies and practices like our commitment to the protection of youth in our programs. One recent example of our affiliate capacity building was our work to strengthen the National Federation of the Blind of Puerto Rico, which has been...

[ Cheering ]

... our fastest growing affiliate this year.

[ Cheering ]

This work is consistent with our efforts to reimagine and improve outreach and effective communication with the Spanish‑speaking blind of our nation. Our Board of Directors has initiated the production of a Spanish version of the Braille Monitor, our monthly flagship publication.

[Cheers and applause]

And we have begun working with our partners in the American Action Fund for Blind Children and Adults to begin plans for distribution of the Future Reflections magazine in Spanish.

At the same time, we are building our capacity by combining the interpretation efforts of our blind members with the delivery of interpretation and translation through our national office. We are also improving the quality of our online tools, including Spanish‑language content on NFB‑NEWSLINE.

[Applause]

Shortly before this convention we established a corps of members to help with this effort that we call the committee for the advancement of Spanish speaking advocates, CASA.

Committee for the Advancement of Spanish‑Speaking Advocates, CASA.

This committee will make recommendations toward our continuous improvement and of coordination outreach and engagement in this part of our community. We seek to ensure these blind people know this home is also their home.

[Applause]

[ speaking Spanish ]

Estás profundamente en el corazón de la

Federación con nosotras.

We continue to improve the process for onboarding and engaging members. Example from this year include faster delivery of our new‑member welcoming materials and initiating biannual listening sessions with new members to inform our strategies for engaging under‑represented voices within our community.

Additionally, we continue to add features to our Member Management Module to assist chapters, divisions and affiliates with local membership records.

In the coming year, we will launch an online member profile feature, allowing individual members to change their primary contact information, review their membership record, and access exclusive benefits for NFB members made available through our partners.

Thousands of informal and formal activities contribute to building our national blind leadership network. Fifty years ago, Kenneth Jernigan held the first presidential leadership seminar, a tradition we continue twice each year. Dr. Jernigan understood how critical it was to build leadership and plan for the transition between leaders in our blind peoples movement. The leaders from our seminars have expanded the reach and depth of leadership within the movement. However, we do not have enough leaders to achieve all that we desire deep in the heart of the Federation. As a result, today I am announcing the establishment of the Kenneth Jernigan Leadership in Service Program of the National Federation of the Blind.

[Cheers and applause]

This yearlong, intensive leadership experience is intended to expand the corps of blind people working in service of our mission to integrate the blind into society on terms of equality. This program will not only build new leaders, it will also raise the expectations of existing leaders. Our service in mentorship is required in this program.

Our Kenneth Jernigan Leadership in Service Program will deeply root participants in the history of the organized blind movement, the philosophy born of our lived experience, and the network of community connections necessary to led into the future.

Participants in the program will have to dedicate time to in‑person and virtual sessions, and make a commitment to their own leadership journey.

More importantly, we want our future leaders to be central to the development of the leadership exercises. Therefore, our first class, expected to start later this fall, will serve as a test group to guide the structure and progression of the program in the future. This is not a replacement for existing leadership efforts. This is an additional program intended to accelerate our leadership development in service to our mission, to improve the lives of blind people by fostering personal empowerment, coordinating nationwide advocacy, and building a network of collective achievements. More details will be available during the coming weeks about this new program supported by our Kenneth Jernigan Fund.

[Applause]

The members of the National Federation of the Blind are known for action and effectiveness. From helping newly blind people in our local communities to persuading members of the United States Congress to support our priorities, we continue to make a difference by breaking down barriers and creating opportunities for the blind of our nation. This year we returned in person to our nation's capital to advance legislation related to equal access, to websites, mobile applications and medical devices. We also seek to empower blind people to control their own economic security by eliminating harmful disincentives in the Social Security disability insurance program, creating new incentive for blind people to secure access technology and taking the final steps to eliminate the discriminatory practice of permitting employers to pay blind people unequal wages.

We bring the voice of the nation's blind to policy issues as they come up in all branches of the government. In the past year this included commenting on the potential benefits of autonomous vehicles, advocating for an increased appropriation for the independent living services for older individuals who are blind program, and urging the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to take action against discriminatory driver's license requirements in employment screenings.

[Applause]

A full report of our advocacy and policy work will be featured later in this convention. With certainty, our commitment to speak and act for ourselves is found deep in the heart of the Federation.

A persistent problem we face is the denial by rideshare drivers who refuse to transport us because of our guide dogs and sometimes even just because we are blind.

[ booing in crowd ]

For years I have reported to you about our attempts to get sustained change at these companies. As well as our growing frustration. Following last year's convention, where we passed resolutions calling on both Lyft and Uber to ‑‑ we redoubled auditory efforts to make progress. Over the course of several meetings with each company, we have slowly realized some progress in ensuring that guide dog users are treated fairly with dignity and respect, but there is still more work to do.

Denials are experienced by blind people daily. And unfortunately, the media gives them little attention. And the companies give little information about the resolution of our complaints. One recent high‑profile incident involved Judge David Tatel, a senior judge at the United States court of appeals in Washington, D.C. being denied a ride with Lyft because of his guide dog. Judge Tatel's experience was documented in The Washington Post on April 20, 2023.

Another interesting incident happened in March 2023. Interesting, because I was there. Gary Wunder, editor of the Braille Monitor and I were with our colleague, Danielle McCann, who uses a guide dog. We called an Uber to take us back to the national office after participating in an extremely positive meeting with Federation partners. The joy from the meeting ended when the Uber arrived. Within seconds of his arrival, the driver made it clear he would not take us because of the guide dog. He left his doors locked and spoke to us through the passenger window. Faced with this discrimination, we would not let him refuse this chance for education. I began recording a video on my phone while talking politely with the driver about his understanding of the Uber policy. He made it clear: He was not afraid of what Uber would do.

Meanwhile, and I am not recommending this to you, Gary stood in front of the car.

[ Cheering ]

The driver attempted on a number of occasions to get Gary to stand down by using his car to push him out of the way.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Break the windshield!

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Gary stood strong in his determination and was not hurt.

Once I completed my conversation, we stood aside and let the driver leave. We sent the video and our account of the incident to Uber. And they took appropriate action.

[Applause]

They have even, for the first time, send a prominent executive to address our concerns at this convention.

[Applause]

To Uber and Lyft, we say that it should not take this extreme level of evidence or the profile of a federal judge to get your attention on these issues.

[Applause]

This is happening to blind people every day, and it must stop immediately. We demand that both of these companies uphold their responsibility under the Americans with Disabilities Act and deliver equal treatment to our community. We will not ‑‑ we will not stand down! We will use all of the tools at our disposal to make this happen. We will continue to document the discrimination. We will report incidents to local law enforcements. We will demand that the United States Department of Justice use the full power of its authority to protect our people. We will even bring our guide dogs to your offices to disrupt your business if we must.

[Cheers and applause]

Similar problems are on the rise in airports across this nation. Where we have been experiencing low expectations from officials of the Transportation Security Administration and the airlines. There is an increased trend of guide dog users being denied and in some cases... (chuckling)... being accosted and in some cases denied boarding of their flights by airline personnel who refuse to transport their guide dogs.

Blind people have been using guide dogs in this country just about as long as commercial air lion flights have been widely offered. There is no justification for the harassment and we will not permit it to continue.

[Applause]

In April, members of the National Federation of the Blind held a meeting with the officials of the United States department to have transportation to discuss our ongoing concerns and seek federal intervention. We expect to make meaningful progress during the coming year. Deep in the heart of the Federation is a determination to stand our ground for equal treatment – a determination that cannot be driven from us.

The federal government can be an important factor in ensuring our rights, but the government itself systematically discriminates against us. The most glaring discrimination happens in the lack of implementation and enforcement of Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. This law requires federal agencies to make their electronic and information technology, including their public and internal systems, accessible to people with disabilities. Typically, when blind federal employees face barriers and file complaints, they go unanswered for years, and sometimes decades. Joe Orozco, a leader from our Virginia affiliate, has been working...

[ Cheering ]

... as an intelligence analyst for the Federal Bureau of Investigation since 2012. Over his career, he has observed his employer procure several technologies that are inaccessible to the blind. Joe needs to be able to effectively use these technologies to maximize his contributions to the mission of the agency. He wants to take on the same challenging assignments and range of tasks available to others on his team. For years, he faithfully navigated the reasonable accommodations process and advocated tirelessly within his agency, hoping that the government would meet both the spirit and the requirements of Section 508. After years of patience and unanswered administrative complaints, Joe courageously brought suit in federal court to order the agency to comply with the law.

[Applause]

The trial judge dismissed Joe's case.

[ groans ]

Echoing a series of flawed decisions from other trial courts, ruling that federal employees have no right to stew their federal employers under Section 508. With the support of the National Federation of the Blind, Joe stood his ground and appealed the decision. A panel of judges of the court of appeals of the District of Columbia Circuit agreed with our arguments, and in a landmark decision, reversed the trial judge.

[Cheers and applause]

This sets a strong precedent reversing the tide of flawed opinions. We have reclaimed the right of blind and otherwise disabled federal employees and members of the public to directly sue federal agencies for their continued discrimination through use of an accessible electronic information technology. We are now mobilizing federal employees through our National Association of Blind Government Employees division and educating all people with disabilities about their rights under Section 508. For this year's Global Accessibility Awareness Day, we held a training on the requirements of Section 508 in partnership with the United States Access Board. We hope that other disability rights organizations will leverage this important breakthrough and join with us in holding the government accountable. Deep in the heart of the Federation is the strength, not simply to pass laws but to get them fully enforced.

[Applause]

While the National Federation of the Blind has been essential in making progress with the federal government, our coordination of our state affiliates gives us many more tools for change in society. Much of our effectiveness comes from our affiliates, moving model legislation at the local level and creating innovative approaches that we can use across the country.

While we have yet to eliminated the allowance of unequal pay for the blind at the federal level, in 15 states we have secured legislation or promulgated regulations to phase out subminimum wages for people with disabilities.

[Applause]

In two additional states we have secured limited restrictions on subminimum wages. This is only the beginning. Deep in the heart of the Federation, we all feel the painful experience of discrimination against blind parents and caregivers based on outdated misconceptions. These attempts to break the bonds of love between family members will only strengthen our resolve, and the bond of faith we share together in this movement. Due to the structure of social service laws, protecting blind caregivers is a critical issue best addressed at the state level. We now have secured meaningful protections for the blind in 20 states, and we are prepared to make this a reality in our other 32 affiliates.

In the meantime, we continue to help counteract the discrimination faced by blind individuals. One example from the past year is Tiffany Green, a blind person in Maryland who sought to be a foster parent.

[Applause]

The Department of Social Services in Baltimore City denied her initial application. Tiffany's application demonstrated a significant amount of experience with children, and there was no credible reason why her application was denied other than the fact that she was blind.

[ boos from crowd ]

The infection and disability rights Maryland stood by Ms. Green and convinced the department to change its decision.

[Applause]

This is a victory for Tiffany, but also for any children that will benefit from her skilled care and love in the future. We will continue to stand with blind caregivers and fight the harmful discrimination they face.

[Applause]

Another critical area of action for us is protecting the fundamental right to vote privately and independently. We have been hopeful that federal voting legislation would present an opportunity to strengthen protections for the blind to have an equal private and accessible voting experience. But no substantive movement by Congress has occurred.

In the meantime, we have had an aggressive strategy of both litigation and advocacy work at the state level. During the 2021 election, nearly half of America's votes cast were by mail, and considerably more than half of the states in our union were not prepared to provide the blind with equal access in their absentee voting programs.

In coordination with other voting advocates, we have secured legislation to permit electronic delivery of ballots for people with disabilities in 28 states.

[Applause]

In an additional six states, their law achieves our ultimate goal of electronic delivery and return of ballots. We must continue to monitor the progress. One example of our success this year comes from North Dakota, where the Secretary of State had refused to implement the state's new law allowing for accessible electronic absentee voting. Our persistent advocacy has persuaded the current Secretary of State to agree to implement the accessibility required by law.

We will continue to provide oversight to ensure that our equal access is no longer denied.

[Applause]

Another victory came in Bexar County, Texas, where we won a preliminary injunction requiring Bexar County to allow our three blind plaintiffs to electronically vote absentee in the 2022 general election. It is worth noting that the filing of this suit was a significant motivator to the advocacy community, and a wake‑up call for the state legislature, which passed a bill to allow people with disabilities to use accessible electronic absentee ballots starting this September.

[Applause]

Bexar County moved to use the new law as a basis to dismiss our case. In the meantime, the governor of Texas, a person with a disability himself, vetoed the bill.

[ boos from crowd ]

But shortly before this convention, the judge declared his intent to find that the county violated the Americans with Disabilities Act and scheduled a hearing for permanent injunction.

[Applause]

In the last week, not even a week ago, we won the case on summary judgment.

[Cheers and applause]

Due to our advocacy, blind people in Bexar County will be able to vote absentee using accessible electronic ballots privately and independently in all future elections. Deep in the heart of the Federation, we have the strength to do the work needed to transform our dreams of equal treatment into reality.

Our quest for equal treatment touches all aspects of society. Consider the challenges faced by blind people within the prison industrial complex.

The unacceptable low expectations for blind people are further exacerbated in the prison environment where no meaningful access the provided. No disability centered rehabilitation training is offered, and no accountability exists with respect to the treatment of blind people.

We are a movement that believes in rehabilitation and opportunity. But blind people must be given real access to those opportunities.

The importance of our role with regards to the prison industrial complex is further emphasized by the statistics that demonstrate that marginalized communities are overrepresented in the print population.

Those blind people who have the least access to programs such as the public vocation of rehabilitation system are more likely to be inside prisons where they are denied even the most basic access and dignity. Leveraging our earlier success within the Maryland correctional system, we achieved a settlement on behalf of the National Federation of the Blind of Colorado and blind prisoners in that state.

Blind prisoners were denied any ability to read mail, write grievances, complete other forms, or take advantage of employment or educational opportunities. As a result of our settlement, blind prisoners in that state will now have the essential accessible technology they deserve to have a fair opportunity to take advantage of the employment and educational programs offered to all other prisoners.

[Applause]

In an additional case, we have filed suited on behalf of seven blind prisoners and our Virginia affiliate, challenging the Virginia Department of Corrections failure to provide accommodations and access technology to blind prisoners. We stand with blind people behind bars and otherwise, who are denied a fair opportunity to rehabilitate themselves because of the unequal treatment of the discriminatory structures around them.

[Applause]

Equal access to educational opportunities is critical in our mission. Since 2017, I have reported on our efforts to stop the Los Angeles Community College District, LACCD, from denying blind students those opportunities. Following a preliminary ruling from the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, our case returned to the district court for trial. Days before the trial, LACCD offered us a seven‑figure settlement to walk away without any relief for blind students. They do not know what is deep in the heart of the Federation.

[Applause]

We refused to sell out.

I am happy to report that on May 26th, a jury found that LACCD had violated the ADA and did so in 14 different ways. The jury found that LACCD intentionally discriminated through actions such as failing to give blind students accommodation letters in accessible formats and through their failure to maintain accessible websites, library systems, and educational software. The jury also awarded damages to the individual blind students.

[Applause]

The finding that LACCD broadly violated the ADA now sets a strong foundation for asking the court to order LACCD to comply with the law. We will continue to press for equal access to education by the blind at LACCD and we will use this victory to make equal access a first principle in all higher education institutions across our nation.

[Applause]

Our pursuit of equal access to employment opportunities also continues. We focus our resources on opportunities to bring relief through systemic change. One example is our continued advocacy with several blind employees who were denied pay while waiting for Amazon to provide reasonable accommodations. Our success includes monetary settlements for many of these individuals, as well as guiding Amazon in eliminating the systemic problems that have led to the discrimination. We are also working to organize Amazon's current blind employees so they can provide support to each other. Our advocacy will both reduce discrimination and open new avenues for employment opportunities for the blind in Amazon's extensive network of distribution centers across the nation.

[Applause]

Other examples of our employment advocacy range from investigating inaccessible applicant screening tools and the use of artificial intelligence to eliminate blind people from employment consideration, to supporting a blind teacher whose school district continues to make excuses regarding its failure to provide Braille instructional materials and its insistence that a companion is required for the teacher to travel in the school.

[ boos from audience ]

In the meanwhile, the greatest network of resources and employment opportunities for blind people continues to be the National Federation of the Blind.

[Applause]

We produce important content through our Where the Blind Work webinar series. In addition, our specialized divisions continue to support blind individuals in a variety of career areas. With the leadership of the Federation's Employment Committee, chaired by Jennifer Wenzel of Wisconsin, we are again offering a robust set of employment boosting opportunities during this convention.

Over the past year, including our 2022 convention, we hosted 77 employers and put 349 potential blind employees in front of them.

[Applause]

It is worth emphasizing that one of these employers is the National Federation of the Blind, where we also are seeking talented people to join our staff team that works tirelessly to advocate for the blind people's movement.

Let me take this opportunity to thank the incredible paid staff of our movement.

[Applause]

Through our partnership can SmartJob, LLC, we supported a dozen blind entrepreneurs through the ideas to incubation program managed by Synergies Work out of Atlanta, Georgia. Providing intense instruction and one‑on‑one mentoring in business development. In addition, 96 of you responded to our call to blind people to join us in the five‑week Course "From Idea to Business." This intensive course curriculum was delivered online and covered key topics related to business and venture readiness. Deep in the heart of the Federation, we seek innovative partnerships with those who share our belief in blind people in order to achieve all of our employment aspirations.

[Applause]

We raise expectations and build meaningful community connections through educational programs innovated by us for the next generation of blind people. Our mantra has been "if they will not teach them, we will teach them ourselves."

[Applause]

The teaching continues in our Braille Enrichment for Literacy and Learning Academy. Last summer we offered in‑person programs in nine state affiliates and a three‑week in‑home virtual edition with the theme of music, movement, and mathematics. 219 blind students benefited from this program, with 94 of them being first‑timers to our program.

[Applause]

More than 100 individuals supported this work through instruction, coordination, mentoring, materials prep, and logistics support like Zoom hosting. Our 2023 program is now underway, and we expect the results to be even more impactful to blind students across the nation.

[Applause]

We now add a new mantra to our work.

If they are to teach them, we must teach them ourselves.

[Applause]

For far too long, programs to prepare teachers of blind students have been rooted in an outdated vision‑centered model rather than an authentic approach centering the lived experience of blind people. We are dismantling the outdated systems by teaching the future teachers ourselves, and grounding them in the blind people's movement.

We find that these teachers are hungry for the authenticity and support offered in our community. Consider this from one of the participants in our current program. "It has truly been a pleasure being part of the Teachers of Tomorrow program. It has been phenomenal, and I want more. I also want to give back in other ways. As a blind individual, I received negative connotations about the NFB, but they were false. This program and these approaches are priceless..."

[Applause]

As our current cohort of teachers finishes the program at this convention, they begin their career as part of our blind‑centered movement. We are their professional network, and together, deep in the heart of the Federation, we work tirelessly to ensure that no blind child is left behind.

[Cheers and applause]

We are also planning for change in the future. Last year I announced our intention to establish the Museum of the Blind People's Movement before the end of this decade. This bold initiative to establish a museum centered on blind people and providing a radical level of inclusion for all is not as much about the past as it is about our future. We seek to preserve the authentic stories of blind people and our work together.

During the past year, we have conducted 22 new oral histories, and our collection will grow in the coming year. We added important personal papers and artifacts to our archives, including Dan Parker's motorcycle driven on the salt flats in Utah, personal papers and artifacts from Jim Omvig...

[Applause]

... fully digitized archival records from our Colorado affiliate, and papers from the Cambridge Chapter and Massachusetts affiliate preserved by David Ticchi.

We are now building the solid foundation required for a credible museum effort. We have begun the concept design phase where the initial identification of themes and user experiences are being developed with a cross‑section of blind people from our movement.

Each of us is the key to success in this effort. We need your ideas, your dreams, and your help.

You can send your ideas for our future museum and how you think you can help to an email address, which is Museum@NFB.org . In the meantime, we have been talking to blind people throughout the country and from around the world. This Museum will be unlike anything we have ever dreamed of before. And it will be the most powerful tool we have ever built to positively improve the public image of blindness. It will require all of our imagination, and it will stretch us in new ways. Most certainly we need to do all of the other core work of the movement to this bold new initiative. In one quiet year of raising financial pledges for this effort, we have already secured commitments for more than $2.7 million.

[Applause]

Our ultimate success will require much more. Our stories are important, and centering them in a new way will accelerate the change we want in society. Together we will open new doors to understanding and bring new allies to our mission of equality.

There is much more progress in our work during the past year than I have time to cover in this brief report. We have not detailed our increased communications effort, including the distribution of new video public service announcements, the establishment of a Federation community in the Mastodon fediverse, and progress on improving affiliate websites. We have not detailed the growth of NFB‑NEWSLINE, providing free access to hundreds of publications using multiple delivery methods to over 125,000 blind subscribers.

[Applause]

There is not time to cover our work to train Braille transcribers, to educate blind youth in science, to disseminate a teaching curriculum from our blind engineering grant from the National Science Foundation, and to provide access to a Nemeth Braille curriculum.

If there was time, we would detail our distribution of thousands of free long white canes and hundreds of free tools for writing Braille, as well as our collaborative effort to give wings to the Monarch ‑‑ a device to revolutionize the use of Braille and tactile graphics.

We would also talk about our work to hold technology companies accountable for providing meaningful access to the blind, to train people on important technology related topics, and to evaluate products and give feedback from the lived experience of blind people.

Without more time, we cannot detail our work to break down barriers at the Social Security Administration, secure, accessible communications from healthcare entities in North Carolina and ensure that public agencies in Iowa provide equal access to their application processes.

[Applause]

It would be impossible for us to take enough time to cover in adequate detail the true strength that lies deep in the heart of the Federation. That strength is in the thousands of individual stories of blind people who, in the process of striving to live the lives they want, commit to working together to make the community better for everyone. You, the members of the National Federation of the Blind, are the strength, energy, ingenuity, and heart of this movement. Our success is a result of your actions to build our movement every day. Every time you answer a call from a newly blind person, help to plan a chapter meeting, contribute to our financing, take a moment to educate a public official, or talk about our priorities at the bus stop, you are making a difference!

[Applause]

Deep in my heart, I am filled with hope, energy, love and gratitude for what we share together deep in this movement. It is my greatest honor to serve you in this movement. While our progress has been good, I know that you demand our future to be even better.

[ Cheering ]

You have my full commitment to do what is needed to help us go the rest of the way to fulfilling our mission of equality. I cannot do this without each of you. I pledge to you my continued commitment to the work ahead, to the continuous improvement of our great organization, and to stand with you through whatever challenges we will face in the future. I continue to be energized by the hope that radiates from the bond of faith we share deep if the heart of this Federation. Hold strong to that bond. And there is no dream that we will fail to meet together. This, my fellow Federationists, is my report for 2023. This is our progress in advancing our mission!

This is the future we built with love, hope, and determination. This is the blind people's movement!

[Cheers and applause]

[ chanting in background ]

BENNETT: What a great report by our president. It's outstanding. And I'm here to say that I think it deserves door prizes for both virtual participants and for people in this room. So let's start with giving you three names of people who could win as virtual participants. Sheila Smith of Colorado. Carlton Walker of Pennsylvania., Teresa Langford of Oregon will win $50 if they send an email within the next 30 minutes to prize@NFB.org  with the clue "Riccobono."

Now, for the in‑person door prize is $150.

The winner is or could be Samuel Lebinski of California. Are you here? If you are, we've got to see you. Jump up and down and keep ‑‑ nobody yelling either.

How about Sharon Muncie of Minnesota?

All right, we got her. Thank you very much. And thank you, Mr. President.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: I would like to recognize Everette Bacon.

EVERETTE: Thank you, Mr. President. What a tremendous report, sir. What a tremendous report. I don't know about all of you, but after listening to that report, you know, earlier we had the roll call of states and some of you were asking for different members of us. You should always ask for the president first. You want him as your national representative. We will always be playing second to him. He's the man! That's who you want.

I'm excited to be up here to talk to you about the Give 20. Now, after that kind of report, how many of you think you could come up there and just give $20 to the National Federation of the Blind?

You see, all of the wonderful things we are doing to provide blindness and making things better for blind people all over the country, all over the world, and yet all we need is a little bit more dollars to do that. I know I sound like a car salesman trying to do that, but...

But that's what we really need. We need your dollars to help us do this. And so we're really excited and honored and just, you know, really thankful for our partnership with IRA, which is now Visual Interpreting and human access, a human right, that's what we want, and that's what IRA does for us. And so they have offered to give us a match of $25,000. We are over $20,000 towards that match. We think we can get to that 25,000, right? It will make me look good to my boss, right?

Okay. So let's do it. Let's go out and go to NFB.org /Give 20, and you can give to the National Federation of the Blind. Add you get something in return. You get put in that drawing to win a chance to come to Orlando. You and a friend or a spouse or whoever you want to bring, you could come to Orlando, and you could have a great time. All of your expenses are paid, and you get $1,000 walking around money. So we want to see you in Orlando. If you want that chance to give to these wonderful programs, like the white cane fun, the Jacobus tenBroek fund, go back to the table, the dream maker circle and the Give 20 table, go back there and help us meet the match of 25,000.

Let me hear the pack!

All right, first of all I want to give away some prizes here. There are drawings for prizes for people who contributed.

So from Colorado, Andrea Brandis, if you're in the room, please come back to the PAC table. I'm just going to read more names. From New York, Bernice Bird. Ohio, Shirley Patterson. From North Carolina, Dorothy Harris. In Alabama, Barbara Manuel. And Jerry and Wendy McKey. Please come back. I've got some prizes for you. I want to let you know we have already had 27 new pieces of activity, which means we're above 1300 now in terms of people contribute. Please come to come back to the Pack table and go to NFB.org /pack, and send your friends and family to NFB.org slash pack. My mother re‑upped her contribution this morning, I want you to know. Right? Yay, Mom!

And also you can also have people call 1‑877‑NFB‑2PAC conditioned make your contributions. Let's get on the PAC line. Was specifically asked if we could sing.

[ singing ]...

Get on the pack plan ¶

¶ Sign up today ¶

¶ We need your contributions right away ¶

¶ Funding our movement ¶

¶ It must be done ¶

¶ So all our battles can be won ¶

¶ Hey! ¶

¶

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Thank you very mump PAC plan. Our next agenda item is "Sharing Heart On Route 66". It is unusual for us to welcome to this stage a referee from the National Hockey League.

## Showing Heart on Route 66: A Ride for Literacy

And it's not every day that we welcome to the stage someone that we didn't meet too long ago. But this gentleman came to us and said he had a dream to use his experience of riding a bicycle along Route 66 to honor his own dad, who was a blind person, and to honor the work that blind people do to be self‑sufficient and live the lives they want every day.

Now, we invited him to come to our national headquarters, and I admit I was 50% ready to figure he was going to be a crackpot, because we get a lot of those.

But it doesn't take long, and if you get a chance to know him at this convention, you will find out too that this gentleman is the real deal. He's not just the son of a blind person, he is blind at heart, and he wants to share the message of the National Federation of the Blind. Here's Dan O' Rourke!

[ music playing ]

 DAN O'ROURKE: Wow! Thank you, President Riccobono, for having me. . I would like to thank all the members and everyone here today and watching via Zoom, I really appreciate being here and given the opportunity to represent this group. Just bear with me. My phone ‑‑ there we go.

That was a very gracious welcome. As a referee in the National Hockey League, that does not happen.

[ Laughter ]

Okay? I would feel probably more at home and more comfortable if you guys were yelling and booing me.

[ Laughter ]

[ boos from crowd ]

 DAN O'ROURKE: There we go! Now I feel a little bit better. Because this ‑‑ public speaking is not something I have done since about 12th grade back home. So to just give you a little bit of who I am and how I got here...

So I grew up... pardon me.

So to be here at this great event, I would like to let you know a little bit about who I am and how I came to take on this Route 66 Ride for Braille literacy. I was born in Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

[ Cheering ]

We've got some Albertans, perfect!

I was raised in a small town in British Columbia called Summerland...

[ Cheering ]

Jeez, lots of Canadians, I like it!

Hockey has been a large part of my life for as long back as I can remember. I probably started skating around three or four years old, and I played hockey until the age of 25.

I went to training camp in the early '90s with the Oilers.

[ Cheering ]

Yeah.

[ comment from audience ]

 DAN O'ROURKE: He just had been traded to LA at that point, so I just missed him, but I did run back into Wayne later in my career. Just like every other kid who grew up in Canada, my original dream was to play hockey in the National Hockey League. Well, we don't all get exactly where we want do go, but I found another way to make it into the NHL, and that was through officiating. I learned this love for officiating back when I was around 12 years old.. And I had always, agriculture I got older and more competitive in hockey, it took away the time that I had to officiate, so I had to put it on the back burner with the idea I would come back to it when I played as much hockey as I could. I do remember telling my dad when I was about 13 years old that when I played as much hockey as I could and made it as high as I could, was going to come back and be an official. So that actually came true.

At the time I just finished playing hockey in the East Coast Hockey League and I talked to the head of the officiating department and I had heard that they were looking for ex‑hockey players to become officials. We talked at the end of that season and he hired me to work his league the next year. I was extremely lucky. Just a quick funny story about that...

I was coming in for ‑‑ it was going to be the start of Game 5 in the Finals of our League, and my coach called me into his office. And I just happened to be that the head of officiating was sitting in his office and wanted to talk to me. And I had probably done something I wasn't supposed to do the night before, and he suspended me from my last game. But he also hired me for my new career. So it was a good and a bad story.

So the following year I started working for him. Spent two years in the East Coast Hockey League as a linesman, and then my big break came with the NHL when they hired me on to their team in 1999. I was a linesman for two seasons in the NHL, and the league and I had decided that it might be a good idea for me to try refereeing. So I went back to the American Hockey League to start my training as a referee. I spent four years working on my craft and then the NHL brought me back as a full‑time referee in 2005. I have been very lucky in my career as an NHL official. I'm closing in on 1500 games in the regular season.

[Applause]

Thank you.

I'm not too far away from 200 playoff games.

[Applause]

And this past season I worked my sixth Stanley Cup Final.

[Applause]

Those things that I just talked about are pretty cool, but the reason I'm here today is because I'm the son of a blind father.

[Applause]

Forgive me if a get a little bit emotional, but when I talk about my dad, I tends to happen. He is the inspiration behind my Route 66 ride. I'm doing it to honor him and how he raised myself and my brother. My father has RP, and for as far as back as I can remember, he had issues with his sight. But that never defined who he was or what he felt he could do. And that is why I feel so fortunate to be partnered with you here at the NFB, because you guys also believe that you can live the life you want.

[Applause]

Absolutely. Yes, I heard a "boo" out there, thank you.

[ Laughter ]

My dad inspired my brother and myself with how we approach life. It didn't matter what we asked him when we were kids, Dad found a way to be involved, whether it just be out and about in the backyard, or if it was him coaching us in our youth sports.

Or getting us back and forth to any of the events that we needed to do. Dad probably drove a little longer than she should have. But the one thing he did do was he taught me how to drive at fairly young age, and we did live in a very small town with one stoplight. So it was probably sometimes safer for me to get us home after it was dark.

My brother and I would guide Dad, especially at night, but as kids, sometimes we got a little preoccupied and probably weren't the best guides for Dad. There's a few stories back there that thank God I had an aunt or uncle that was nearby, or probably wouldn't be here talking to you.

To see this many successful people in one room reminds me of my dad and how his determination and his stubbornness helped him succeed as a blind person.

[Applause]

He is a great father, but I would be remiss if I didn't mention his support team. Which is my mom.

She has been by my dad's side since they met in high school and they have been a great team ever since.

So to give you guys a little bit more information on my Route 66 Braille literacy ride and what I want to accomplish with this ride, is to obviously raise funds for the NFB, but just as important is to get this great organization's name out there in the public.

[Applause]

I would love for the funds to help kids come to the Braille literacy camps.

[Applause]

So they can come in and learn Braille. But I feel just as important is to come in and meet other kids like themselves, and also realize they can accomplish anything in their life.

You can definitely live the life you want.

So to do this and accomplish this, we will be starting our ride July 27th in Santa Monica, California ‑‑ yes!  ‑‑ and finishing September 8th in Chicago, Illinois.

We will be going through California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Missouri, and Illinois. And when I say "we" that is my wife, which will be driving the RV as my support crew, and our one‑year‑old yellow lab puppy named Bailey.

Yes.

The plan is to ride three or four days in that row and try to average between 50 and 55 miles on each of those days, and then take in a rest day or two along the way. The total mileage is close to 2700 miles. Yes! As long as I don't take too many wrong turns.

So we should have about 35 or so ride days with some rest days in there. We definitely will have some early morning starts to stay out of the heat of the desert. That's what the original plan is. But as we all know, plans can change due to weather, mechanical issues, or just life in general. So let's follow us along on the Route ‑‑ so please follow us along on the Route 66 ride. You can find more information about the ride on NFB.org /route66. We will be adding some social media coverage and I will livestream as often as I can from the road. We don't have the links yet, but as soon as we do, we'll add them to the website.

[Applause]

We will be stopping at some of the affiliates along the route. The locations and specific times, as we get closer, will be posted, and we'll have the events up, so that anybody that is in the area can join us and get the word out. One other thing, I have to make sure I mention is I need to thank Patty, Patty Chang.

[Applause]

Patty was the first person I spoke with at the NFB. And for her trusting me and giving me the chance to represent your organization is one of the most special things I have had in my life.

Also want to say to you in this room, that to be here has been a great honor. It's very humbling to be in this room with you guys. And I would like to thank you very much for your time today. And what I'm going to ask of you is that you share this ride with as many people as possible, so we together can make this ride a great success. Thank you so much for your time!

[Applause]

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Let's give him a big "boo." There ya go! Make it sound like a hockey stadium in here.

 DAN O'ROURKE: I feel at home now.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: You know, usually we like to treat our guests with dignity, and that's what he likes, so, you know...

Now, before we get a door prize ‑‑ because it is worth a door prize, we're going to have a very special fit break. Maybe Dan will participate in the fit break. But here is a fit break.

 SPEAKER: So you know I sometimes like to bring friends up forfeit breaks, so I have some presidents who are along the Route 66 route. Say your name and your state. Real quick, come on.

 SPEAKER: Sheila Wright, Missouri

 SPEAKER: Oklahoma!

 SPEAKER: Tom Page, Kansas!

 SPEAKER: Tom Page, Kansas, and Oklahoma...

 SPEAKER: New Mexico!

 SPEAKER: New Mexico!

 SPEAKER: [ bells ringing ] Donald porter field, Arizona!

 SPEAKER: All right, so I've got everybody up here, and we are going to have you guys set a little scene. So we're riding down Route 66 on our bicycles. We've got sore butts going on. We're going to be pedaling. You can either sit in your seat and pedal your feet like riding a bike, or you can stand up and pedal your knees, right left, right left, right left... and Will cues the music for us, our state presidents are going to tell you other fun things to do. So if you can hear them, that will be great. If you cannot, I will try to repeat what they say into the microphone.

So... let's ride!

[ music playing ]

 SPEAKER: Arms up and hands out. Woo!

Sheila says "hands in the air, reach for the sky!"

 SPEAKER: Your arms straight up from your shoulders.

SPEAKER: Pedal backwards. Riding that back backwards, yeah!

Thanks, guys!

Thanks, Dan!

I look forward to seeing you guys on Route 66 this summer. Woo!

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: How about a door prize?

 BENNETT: Okay, we've got a folding blanket that you can carry with you in a bag. It's got a $50 Visa gift card and that goes to Sandra Evans of Oklahoma. Sandra Evans, are you here?

 SPEAKER: Yeah, she is.

 BENNETT: Okay, we got her.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Excellent.

## Reflections on Four Decades and Growing Hope for the Future: Celebrating Parents of Blind Children within the Organized Blind Movement

Well, we're launching one endeavor, which is the "Ride for Literacy" this afternoon we are celebrating another. And this item is reflections on four decades. Four decades of growing our organization with the National Organization of Parents of blind children.

You know, 40 years ago our movement took a leap of faith. We created a division for parents of blind children, and recognizing that, although there are certainly blind parents of blind children, most of the parents who we need to bring into the Blind People's Movement are not blind. So we permitted the constitution and the leadership of this division to dictate that it could be made up of non‑blind people. That was a leap of faith for us.

The parents took a leap of faith too. By choosing to embed themselves and operate within the organized blind movement, they took a leap of faith that this would be good for them, that we would create a welcoming place, not just for them but the future of their children. And in my opinion, it has made all of the difference to multiple generations of blind youth in this nation.

Our convention is a family event. And a huge part of that is embedding families of blind children into the convention. And many of you know that my background has been in the area of the education of blind children I think my first was the first year we had NFB camp. So when you think about it, it's not that long ago. But it has made such a profound difference, and I'm really proud that I have in my time of being in the first had the opportunity to be part of the many activities, especially managing educational programs for the Federation. So here to present a special celebratory presentation on behalf of our National Organization of Parents of blind children in its 40th year, we have the founding first president of the division who built the foundation for what we're celebrating, and we also have the current president, because we know that while it's nice to celebrate what has been done and what is important scholarship winner but what are we going to do in the future. Please welcome Barbara Cheadle and Carla Keirns.

[ music playing ]

 BARBARA CHEADLE: Thank you. You know, when I sat down to write my part of this speech, I remembered something Dr. Jernigan told me once when I asked him for advice in writing one of my very first public speeches. I was totally taken aback when all he said was "be entertaining." And he was right.. If you can't entertain, no one is going to listen long enough to be informed or inspired. Now, those of you who were around and remember the jokes, Dr. Jernigan always told at the beginning of every recorded presidential release, they were hopelessly, terrible, terrible jokes. Real groaners. But within minutes we were happy and eager to be informed and inspired by the rest of the release. So in honor of and in appreciation for all that Dr. Jernigan taught me, here is, I hope, a real groaner to get us started today. You ready?

What kind of shoes do frogs wear? Why, open toad sandals of course.

Come on! You can groan better than that! Come on, a real groan.

[ audience groans ]

There ya go!

My husband John and I adopted our blind low vision son, Chaz in 1980. He was two years old when we met him at the airport with his escort from South Korea, and I felt instantly, irrevocably in love. He was perfect. We were living in Omaha, Nebraska, at the time and I had a job ‑‑

[ Cheering ]

Yes!

And I had a job at the local Red Cross. Shortly after his adoption, a job came open in my department that I was positive could be done by a blind person. What an opportunity it might be for the right blind guy if we could get this job description out through the NFB. I was so excited when I went to the boss to lay this suggestion before her. But as soon as she heard the word "blind," she shut me down and shut me out. Her husband, she said, had limited vision. Me couldn't drive or read print or cook or clean and most certainly could not hold down a job.

I was stunned. All I could think was that in 20 years or so, it could be my newly adopted beautiful son who without ever knowing it had a door of opportunity slammed shut against him. I left her office. I locked myself into the nearby bathroom stall and I sobbed. I knew then that it wasn't going to be good enough to raise a competent, confident child with good blindness skills and a strong work ethic. If I didn't do something to help the change the world in which we would live, he might never be given the chance to live the life he wanted.

[Applause]

My husband and I, by the way, are both sighted. In the mid‑'70s, before we had a child or were even married, we both worked for the State Rehab Agency for the Blind in Nebraska.

We joined the NFB because we wanted to learn more about blindness from the real experts.

[Applause]

By the time Chaz joined our family, we had been back tracking ‑‑ and ask ‑‑ nap tracking, and ask your neighbors about that if you don't know what that is, attended a state convention and national convention and I had even helped organize and conduct a statewide seminar for parents of blind children. Very few parents showed up at that seminar, and those who did looked so sad and desperate. They clearly didn't know what to make of all these blind people and were too frightened to even ask questions.

I remember thinking, if only there was some way NFB members could get invited into their home so that they could get to know and be comfortable around blind people and start to learn that it really is okay to be blind. Fast forward to the 1981 NFB convention. At that convention I approached the NFB parental concerns committee, most of whom are blind parents, and suggested that we start a newsletter for parents of blind children. And, oh, by the way, I'll volunteer to be the editor.

I had a vision for the magazine. It would republish some classic and upbeat articles, but mostly it would aggressively seek to generate and publish new material from blind adults, parents and teachers of blind children, teaches like Doris Willoughby, and to give practical tips and strategies that were deeply embedded in the philosophy of positive attitudes about blindness. As soon as the first issue came out Dr. Jernigan contacted me to let me know that henceforth the national office would be publishing the newsletter and I was continue working from my home in Jefferson City on a volunteer basis as the editor. And then you ‑‑ yes, you!  ‑‑ you, the leaders of local chapters and state affiliates, got to work. There was no Internet or social media in those days, but somehow affiliate leaders like Joanne Wilson and Gary Wunder got their hands on mailing this to parents in their states, and slowly the newsletter started showing up in mailboxes around the country.

As you know, that newsletter was later renamed "Future Reflections."

[Applause]

That's right!

And under the capable editorship of Debbie Stein, it continues today to be invited into thousands of homes of parents and teachers nationally and globally. If you haven't read the recent issue "The World of Work," you should. I read it on the plane on the way to convention, and my heart soared with gladness at the inspiring stories.

But the magazine alone wasn't going to be enough. Dr. Jernigan had a vision that encompassed so much more than mine. His was a vision of blind people working side‑by‑side, hand‑in‑hand with sighted parents to bring about the cultural legislative educational and deeply personal changes in attitudes and expectations required if blind children were to ever have the opportunities needed to live full productive satisfying lives as adults. We needed parents to be engaged as fully participating members to achieve these goals.

Historically very few sighted parents of blind children have joined the organization. Mostly sighted parents didn't even know about the NFB, and if they did find out about us, the information came with warnings from teachers, rehab counselors, and even some eye doctors, telling them not to get mixed up with that radical group of blind people.

To make his vision a reality, Dr. Kenneth Jernigan sent out an invitation to me, Doris Willoughby, Doris and Ramona, and Susan Ford. Come to Baltimore he said. He wanted us to sit down with him to write a constitution for a new NFB division, one for parents of blind children, to be presented and approved at the upcoming 1983 NFB convention in Kansas City, Missouri. Why us? Ramona was a powerhouse national and state leader within NFB and worked closely with Dr. Jernigan in Iowa. Doris, a sighted teacher of blind students and spouse of NFB member Curtis Willoughby, who perhaps was one of the first competitively employed blind engineers in the country, Doris was already well known for her book published by the NFB about the education of blind children and Susan Ford was a parent of a blind child and was person in the parental concerns committee and active officer in leadership, and her state affiliate, and all of us including me, had experience in organizing local chapters. Dr. Jernigan had plenty of experience in writing affiliate constitution, so most of the details and decisions were not difficult or controversial, except one. The most important decision made at that meeting was to positively affirm the right of sighted parents to run for all offices in the new parents division, including and especially the presidency.

This was a big deal.

In the 1980s, many members of the NFB could still remember historical attempts of sighted professionals to take over and run for their own purposes groups originally organized by the blind.

It was and still is fundamental to the very nature and purpose of the NFB that as an organization of the blind, not for the blind, but the Office of the Presidency at the local, state and national levels be filled by a blind person.

[Applause]

This decision was acknowledgment that sighted parents of blind children had common cause with the organized blind and guardians and spokespersons and advocates for our children, we were allies and partners. That was 40 years ago. So what have together we accomplished in those four decades? In 1982, the year before we organized, the NFB started selling canes sized for children. I mean, really young children, toddlers even. Did you know the NFB was the first entity, agency or organization to ever do that? Did you know that?

[Applause]

The first program was ready to go in 1983 to get those canes into the hands of kids. We started by distributing the Nebraska Services for the Visually Impaired video "Kids with Canes." Yay, Nebraska!

[ Cheering ]

Across the country. And for years Doris Willoughby stocked and mailed those videos from her house. Next we started giving away kids canes to children who came with their parents to convention. Have you ever tried to take a cane away from a kid?

The result? Once blind kids got a cane in their hands, they refused to give them up. I saw parents trying to gently tug them out of their hands and had to give up and let the kids take the cane home.

It changed forever the educational practices concerning white canes for children.

In 1984, we voted to sponsor a national Braille reading contest for school children. Braille Readers are Leaders was born. Soon, parents and teachers were complaining that the youngest kids were reading so much, so fast, that they were running out of books to read, and maybe we should drop the categories for early readers. Of course we did not do that.

Instead we pressured the Library of Congress to increase the number of Braille book titles for children and we went to organizations such as the National Braille Press, Seedlings, American Action Fund for Blind Children and adults and we asked them to get us more Braille books for children, and they did.

When the contest established a category with prizes for children with additional disabilities, the participation of schools for the blind skyrocketed. And in the '90s, students who participated in the contest formed an important cohort of research subjects for the ground‑breaking Braille literacy research conducted by Dr. Ruby Riles.

For almost 30 years, NOPC's test proved that Braille reading kids can be competitively literate with their sighted peers. And now the contest is back with a new sponsor and updated structure and it's more vibrant and vital than ever. Thank you Debbie Stein and sandy Halverson.

Toward the end of the decade in 1987, NOPB parents in Minnesota ‑‑ come on, Minnesota, where are you?

Minnesota!?

They were instrumental in helping the NFB affiliate in that state pass the first Braille bill. Many states followed, including Maryland. Ten years later a Braille literacy provision was included in the reauthorization of IDEA.

Despite legislative progress, the struggle to make Braille the default for blind and low vision children still continues, but we have not given up.

There was an enormous growth spurt in the decade of the '90s. In partnership with the instructor Joe Cutter we established the cane market convention. Could I hear from those who have helped teach in the cane walk?

All right!

We created and distributed numerous videos for parents, including "It's Okay to Be Blind." "White Canes for Blind Kids." And a six‑video set "Avoiding an IEP Disaster." We published "The Bridge to Brill" an instruction book for educators, co‑authored by Carol Castellano. In the era of 2000s we established what is one of our most beloved convention programs with a grant from UPS. "The Braille Book Fair." By this time parent leaders were also beginning to age out as their blind children grew up and left home. So in 2006, under Carol Castellano's guidance, the parent leadership program, PLP was born. And from there to the present, we have done so much more. A website, Facebook presence, more books, articles, videos, Braille reading pals, kid talk, IEP workshops, slate tiles, Braille technology workshops for parents. But the most important program is the one the NOPC voted to establish in 1984. At that meeting we unanimously voted to hold an annual parent seminar every year at all future NFB conventions.

[Applause]

The seminar expanded to become a multi‑day conference embedded ‑‑ and I'm glad you used that word, President Riccobono, in your introduction, because that is crucial. The seminar has no impact, the seminar would not be what it is today or has become today if it were not embedded within this convention.

[Applause]

I did a quick count this year and NOPC had about 35 or more named programs, workshops or activities listed in convention. And I know we had over 100 volunteers working behind the scenes to make all those programs happen.

[Applause]

Of all our successful programs, how can I assert that this is the most important?

Because parents need you. You, the individual members of the NFB. We need to meet you, talk with you, laugh with you, cry with you, debate with you, collaborate with you. We need you so we can imagine together, with you, what the future might be for our blind children. And when we are new and a little raw about this blindness business, we need your understanding, your love, your patience, and your sense of humor, to help us get over our fears and awkwardness. We need you to be the models not only for our blind children, but for us. You are a reflection of what the future can be for our children. And as we sighted parents grow in our understanding of blindness, you need us. We demonstrate for each other and the world what it looks like when sighted people accept blind people as equals.

[Applause]

The pandemic upended so many things in our country, and has had a profound negative impact especially upon the educational and social development of our children. More than ever, we and our children need to be in community together in person with your blind colleagues. For all the wonderful opportunities that the Internet and social media presents to us for the spreading and sharing of the NFB philosophy of blindness, there is no substitute for the personal one‑to‑one connections. And this can only bubble up from the grassroots, our local chapters, state affiliates and divisions. You are the key to our continued progress and successes.

So, remember the joke I told at the beginning of the speech. I found it on a plaque in that little nature center near where Chaz and his family lives. Just a few weeks ago, my husband John was reading it with our ten‑year‑old grandson, while our son Chaz was chasing down and corralling our 18‑month‑old grandson who runs as if he's competing for a place on a high school track team. Chaz is a great dad. He brings home a paycheck, changes diapers, walks his son to and from the bus stop, shares with his wife cooking and laundry and house cleaning duties and still finds time for some of his favorite fun hobbies, photography, ham radio, or woodworking, and he and his wife are active in a local committee to make their community safer and more accessible to pedestrians. I never have asked him if he's living the life he wants. But I think I know the answer.

Thank you.

[Applause]

 SPEAKER: I didn't tell Barbara how old I was when she started the NFOPC. Should I keep it a secret?

So my older sister is not blind. She has autism. And she was born in 1967.

So for those who can do math, my young son can help us out. Five years later, what year is it?

1972. So in 1972, my mother took her five‑year‑old to the local school to enroll her in kindergarten. And what happened?

They turned her away at the door. Now, my mother tells the story that they said it's too bad you taught her that she's five years old. Because if she didn't know, then it wouldn't be so bad.

It is impossible for me to imagine an educator really could have said that. But when you and I talk, when people in this room talk about what we are facing, about the challenges we have today, a lot of times we get discouraged. We think, you know, we've been fighting this fight for decades, and it just doesn't seem like we're making progress.

You all know we are.

The next year they had to take my sister. They didn't know what to do with her though. Six years later, my mother ‑‑ my family moved from New Jersey to New York, and my mother decided she didn't have to have these words, but she decided that my sister needed access to the general educational curriculum. They had her stuck in the resource room for six years.

[ boos from crowd ]

Exactly. My mother thought about this and she decided that the best first strategy would be not to tell them. Yeah, that worked for about like the morning. Because my sister had pretty moderate autism, and it was pretty clear that there was something else going on. So my mother decided that the island shell was going to die on, the hill she was going to die on, was that my sister deserved an education.

[Applause]

Four years later, my other sister had a visual impairment and dyslexia and she failed the first grade ‑‑ twice.

And my mother says that when they went to sit in the meeting to decide what to do next with her now eight‑year‑old with the vocabulary by the way of a 16‑year‑old, her first‑grade teacher was maintaining that she was not smart enough to learn to read. And the plan was to keep her in the same classroom with the same teacher and the same instructional method for a third year.

So, one, my mother is a force of nature. Two, she was raised a Southern debutante. Three, her first job in the mid‑1970s was a chemical engineer for Exxon. So she had to decide... Southern skills, Yankee skills... debutante skills, chemist skills. Cry, argue. Cry, argue. She went with cry. And she got my sister placed in one of the first twice exceptional classrooms in the country, what at the time was called "gifted handicapped." So that was the year of the first NOPBC convention. And we have come so far. And the reason we have come so far is that my mother was on her own. And I have you.

[Applause]

We have the laws that you fought for. We have the teachers you have educated. We have the infrastructure that you have built, and the other infrastructure that you have torn down.

We have a future. And when my son was diagnosed as blind, we found ourselves in the library conference room of a small library in Long Island, New York. Anybody over here from New York?

[ Cheering ]

And we went to this room. There were 12 blind adults. And my little baby boy, who was five months old.

And he gave a high‑five to all the grown‑ups and everybody who wanted to hold the baby got to hold the baby. And then my husband and I sat down in this room full of blind adults, and they were polite. They didn't say "Why are you here?"

But they said, "Hey, can you introduce yourself?" We explained we were sighted and our baby was blind. And almost on the verge of tears, I said, we're here because we don't know what he needs and we need help. And the president at the time of that chapter was David Stayer.

And so you all can imagine how this went. David looked me in the eye and said, "You don't worry about that. We know what he needs."

Your kids are our kids.

[Applause]

So our plans for the NOPBC are to continue to do what you do so well. My son has been to Albany for state seminar. He's been to Jeff City. He's testified before the Education Committee at the State legislature. I'll tell you later, Gary, me, Russell ‑‑ after that the special education administrator in the room who was there to testify against our bill cowarded out and didn't talk.

[Cheers and applause]

Educating parents, advocacy, partnerships, mentorship between blind children and blind advocates and you all. But I have a struggle with advocacy. My problem with advocacy ‑‑ I've been thinking about the dark side of advocacy ‑‑ is that advocacy is only necessary when the system doesn't work on its own. So what I want for all of us is to build a world in which we no longer need the level of advocacy that we need today.

So thank you to everyone here for partners and supporting our kids. Our kids truly are your kids. Thank you.

[Applause]

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Let's have a big celebratory cheer for our parents!

##  The Braille Flyway: Giving Wings to Literacy through Partnership with Monarch

[Cheers and applause]

Now, underneath your chair you probably found something. If not you should look.

I have mine. It's a

It looks like a set of antennas that you could wear on your head. So I'll put mine on right now.

To get ready for the next presentation.

I'm told that it looks better than the cow print cowboy hat I got from the Utrecht.

So get your antennas ready. Because we're going to talk about the Braille Flyway. "Giving Wings to Literacy."

And, you know, we don't use the word "partnership" lightly. We don't use the word "partnership...

I should have told you earlier to get your antennas out. Because I knew this would be disruptive.

We don't use the word ""... if I could have your attention.

We don't use the word "partnership" lightly. And when we were approached by the American Printing House and HumanWare about being a partner on this project, you know can, the initial action ‑‑ the reaction, of course, we're very excited about the idea. But we have heard a lot of people talk about creating a tablet multi‑line Braille with graphics, you know, it's been talked about to death.

We have been invited to be a partner, and I think this is very significant. The printing house and HumanWare are financially vested in this project. They have put money in. We have not put a penny into it. We do not have a financial interest. We have been invited to criticize it. Because... (chuckling)...

Because they said, we want this to be best of the best. And you all are the best to tell us how to make it better.

Now, we do, of course, in one sense, as individuals, have a financial interest. Because if this device ‑‑ when this device does what we hope it will do, it will create greater opportunities for us.

So when we say "partnership," we mean it. It's not just words. It's action. And we are now observing the results of the partnership starting to take wings. And if you haven't gotten a chance to put your hands on the monarch at this convention, don't miss it. Because this is the beginning of the future.

I suspect that you have made at least one of our speakers nervous from the earlier booing, so, remember, that was Dan's thing.

Please welcome our great partners from APH and HumanWare, Craig Meador an the president of HumanWare, Bruce Miles!

[ Music playing ]

SPEAKER: Great walk‑up music. Can't go wrong with Tom Petty. Good afternoon, NFB. It is so good to be here. Thank you, President Riccobono, for inviting APH and HumanWare to come back and be here once again and talk to you about what we believe will be the game‑changer in Braille literacy.

Thanks to your support, "The Monarch." I'm Dr. Craig Meador, president of the American Printing House for the Blind, and I believe moths of you are familiar with APH, so I will spare you the whole history about APH and what we do. But we somewhere had this mission since 1858. And that is to empower people who are blind or low vision by providing accessible and innovative products, materials, and services for lifelong success. Because we envision an accessible future with opportunity for everyone.

[Applause]

It's been a year since Bruce and I were on the stage in front of you, and at that time we had a rough rudimentary device, and we were introducing this concept about a dynamic tactile tablet. This was going to be the holy Braille. It's the holy ‑‑ it's the device we've all been dreaming about for decades, a digital device that not can only render multi‑line Braille, but also tactile graphics on the same surface at the same time. Something that many companies have been working on ‑‑ it's not just been an APH HumanWare thing, but there are several colleagues here who have been working on very similar attempts. We've tried to do it before at APH. And I will tell you, it is a steep, steep challenge.

During our remark we talked about the magic of partnerships and how that magic could make these ‑‑ turn all those efforts into success, and we gave you all magic wands. How many of you remember those?

[ Cheering ]

All right!

Those were annoying. It was so...

[ Laughter ]

It was a great... I mean, I was a great gag, but every time you wave them, they would go off and my train of thought would be lost and we have to find your place back and continue on an intelligent conversation, which is enough of a challenge for me as it is without a magic wand. But every time we said the word "partner," you responded.

I know for some of you at the time it sounded like science fiction. Because you have been promised this dream so many times. But we're here to tell you today that that magic wand has worked.

[Applause]

The dynamic tactile device is a real thing. We now have more than 100 of these in circulation for beta and field testing.

We expect it to be on the market in a little more than one year. This past January, with the NFB, we were proud to launch the official name "The Monarch."

[Applause]

So instead of magic wands this year, as Mark explained, you all have been given Monarch headbands, these little curly butterfly antennae to wear during this presentation. And why? Well, not only do we need more of your magic, but we need to take flight together. We need to build a highway ‑‑ or we should better say "a flyway" for the Monarch, and that is a pathway of support that will help make all of our dreams a reality. The one incentive we learned at APH a long time ago but really emphasized during the last few years is we cannot create products simply for the sake of creating products. without things like training and information, deck support, resources, those products just sit on shelves. And we made a concerted effort to do these things through our Hive Learning Center, the APH Connect Center, the Center for Assistive Technology, called CAT, and of course most importantly working with organizations like the NFB. We know that when parents and teachers are more informed about the technology that students are using, and when they have the proper training that students actually will have better access to that technology and they will learn important skills that prepare them for school and life. So for that device like "The Monarch," which shh something we have never seen before, and we believe a real game‑changer, we need this ecosystem of support, the flyway. It's even more critical that we do this in partnership. But before we talk about that, I know you're eager to hear some about "The Monarch" device itself. Where we are now and how soon it will be in your hands opinion and we are so proud to have HumanWare as partners in this effort. They have been working very hard to trail‑blaze this new technology with us and bringing their many years of experience into this process. And at this time I would like to introduce Bruce Miles.

[Applause]

 BRUCE MILES: Thank you, Craig, and thank you, President Riccobono. I think everyone looks fantastic with those curly little Monarch headsets. And Craig, you pull it off really well with your bowtie there. It's a nights accessory, and President Riccobono, it looks nice with your suit. I'm quite happy this year that we don't have the 500 wands as well. That was like quite distracting. But I guess it did its work and we are where we are now.

As Craig mentioned, my name is Bruce Miles, I'm the president of HumanWare, and many of you may know HumanWare. We have been around.

[Applause]

Yeah, for sure, thank you.

We've been around for 35 years, and actually one of the founders is here at the show Jill, if you get a chance to talk, we'll make sure he's at the booth later. And we've been committed to working closely with the NFB and the blindness community since those 35 years and to develop products that support your lives, which include, you know, some of these products: The Braille No Touch.

[ Cheering ]

The brilliant line of Braille displays.

The new stellar trek. Not as popular yet, but come to the booth and we'll show it to you.

And last but not least, the new Victor Reader Stream.

Yeah, I got a lot of good feedback yesterday on that product. So thanks for your support.

So the last time we were here, I told you about how "The Monarch" partnership with APH came about. It's really part of a journey with APH. We have built a very successful partnership with APH and developed really strong products together, such as the Matt Connect, the Chameleon and the Mantis, and we've worked on other projects like Co‑jumper and Good Maps. So it seemed like a great next step to respond to that request for proposal to develop this very ambitious and game‑changing dynamic tactile Braille device now called "The Monarch." Thankfully I don't have to say that again many times. So now it's the "Monarch" and this is exactly the type of project HumanWare was built for, and we are absolutely thrilled to be part of this. Fast forward, we've been working on "The Monarch" now for almost two years, and this is unlike any other HumanWare project we've ever worked on. In some ways we've been able to build on our experiences and learnings from the past like Braille No Touch, but in many ways this is unchartered territory, and we have the most talented, committed and creative minds in the world working on this project, from HumanWare and APH and through our partnership with got, and the great guidance from our partners at NFB.

[Applause]

Thank you. And being surrounded by this energy and the persistence of these teams and working together to create these new solutions has been amazing to watch. Personally I mean, this is hands‑down the most fulfilling project of my lengthy career. I'm really happy to be part of it.

Everyone working on this knows how important this is to this community. And that's why for like every new problem that comes up, we ask the question: What do blind people really need? And then we ask you, the NFB membership for the answer. So that's why this is working really well.

Our philosophy is that the device will be powered by the people. So that's why from the very beginning we have involved as many blind adults, students and TBIs in the development as possible. And we have literally traveled around the world to meet with blindness organizations, schools, mainstream corporations, to find out what they really need and how we can best do this.

So "The Monarch" has been to Microsoft, it's been to Amazon, it's been to apple, it's been to all the major publishers. It's been to the blindness organizations in the United States, and the schools for the blind. It's been demonstrated to representatives on five continents. So get ready for this, because a lot of countries... including Germany, France, Holland, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Finland, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Turkey, Russia Slovenia, Australia, Canada, and South Africa.

So that's not bad for one year of work. Right?

[Applause]

So a lot of credit goes to the sales team. So thanks tore the sales team for that. It's really become a global phenomenon. And we're determined to make sure it works for everyone no matter where their ear located in the world..

If reactions we get, they're really interesting, from around the world, and they're basically identical no matter where you are. What hear most often is "this is a game‑changer." I can't believe I'm actually holding this technology in my hands. Is this for real? This will change everything. This is a day that I never thought I would see. And we also hear some things that I really can't repeat in front of you.

So a few four‑letter words are thrown out there too, but in a good way. So that's good.

So, you know, all that to say there is a very high level of excitement. And now we know we have to deliver.

So all of these partnerships I mentioned are important. But without a doubt, it's our partnership with NFB that has been responsible for getting "The Monarch" to where it is today. I know President Riccobono said they're there though criticize, but you're there to do a lot more than that (chuckling).

So the NFB has been there for us to help answer the difficult questions, and thanks for that Pap the NFB has been there for us to help ups make the right connections that we need to make this happen. The NFB has been there for us to help break down barriers. NFB has been our North Star, keeping us going in the right direction. And NFB has been there to encourage us that we have to keep going even when the going gets tough.

But most importantly, our partnership with NFB has allowed us to share all of this with all of you. And to get your expertise, your dreams, and your ideas. As you may recall, last year we spent about 20 hours with 50 of you showing this proof of concept and getting feedback. And this really did guide our development and helped us build a beta device that we have now. Again, this year we doubled that. So now we've had in‑depth testing with 100 testers. So we're really happy about that. And that is going to allow us to continue to develop. So we've been able to make huge progress with your input.

You may recall last year we were only showing this proof of concept that was like a tactile array hooked up to a computer. We called it the Frankenstein device because there were all kinds of wires sticking out of it. It wasn't really pretty looking. But now if you've had a chance to see the new one, we do have "The Monarch," and it's a beta device working on its own and it's there for you to try yourself if you care to join pups if you haven't participated in the focus groups, you can see it at either the HumanWare or the APH booth. How many of you have seen "The Monarch" or stopped by the booth?

[Cheers and applause]

 BRUCE MILES: That sounds pretty good, but if you haven't, or if you would like to see it again, you can see it between 7:00 and 9:00 and tomorrow between noon and 1:45. We've love to see you come by and give us feedback. We've love to see you. Just a reminder what you will see, if you come by, what the new Monarch is looking like and feeling like, it has ten lines now of 32 characters of Braille you will experience tactile graphics and Braille in the same surface. Like how exciting is that?

[Applause]

Yeah, that is really cool. And with all of though technology, it only weighs 4.5 pounds. So we managed to put it into a more compact product. And it has about the same dimensions as a gaming laptop. So it's still very portable. It includes the latest Braille cell technology from our talented Braille cell partners, who are here this week, if you get a chance to see them. There's going to be WiFi and Bluetooth connectivity. There's stereo speakers for text‑to‑speech and audio feedback. There's an internal microphone for voice input.. And, of course, a headphones jack. But also we have HDMI port that allows for video output to display the Monarch's content on an external monitor, not only in Braille but also print. That will allow teachers or parents to easily view what the students are working on.

[Applause]

Yeah, that's a big one.

And then the other question we get asked a lot is, oh, what about the battery? And I would say so far with the current battery, the Monarch can fly all day long, from being here, we were testing all day long and there was still battery remaining for the next day. So we have been able to go over a full day with the battery.

[Applause]

The Monarch is going to come with a protective case included. We know it's an expensive device and has to be cared for. And it's going to come pre‑loaded with software, including a book reader, Desmos scientific calculator, a word processor, and access to tactile graphics library, which I hear is huge. And much more. It's going to function like a computer, so you'll be able to surf the Internet and send emails and all these fun things. That's just really the beginning. You're probably saying, yeah, this is all good, Bruce, but to truly make an impact, we have to have it in our hands, right? So, are you saying that?

Good, because that's what I would be saying. Okay, this is all really good. So you know, just also want to give an update where we are with that. We have started the manufacturing, planning and manufacturing itself, and we expect the first production units, they're planned to be underway and first delivery in early 2024.

Yeah, that's really quick.

[Applause]

And we're planning the full launch around this time next year. So hopefully at next year's convention, if I'm invited back to speak or I don't do anything wrong at this one and can come back, that would be great. We'll be able to announce the dates and details and pricing and all that fun stuff. We're hoping next year we're going to have all to have details. So, yeah, really happy to be able to announce that.

[Applause]

So, that's really on the device side, but that's really only part of the story, and as Craig mentioned there is the Flyway, and that is having all the underlying support infrastructure ready at the same time. So Craig is going to come back and tell you about that and how you can help us prepare to get the Monarch for flight. So thank you. Craig, welcome back.

 CRAIG MEADOR: We're going to bring it home here with the last little bit. The Flyway, that is the ecosystem. The device is amazing, and those who have seen it, you will agree with that. But the most critical part of the device and its success is creating that ecosystem that allows this device to flourish. We're going to have the first units in early 2024, and we talked about that. Those will not go on sale immediately. Because what we're going to do first is we're going to get that into the hands of teachers and professionals who work with students and adults, because what we have found with technology is that if you do not train the trainers effectively, then the students get the short end of the stick.

So we got to do a better job of that.

[Applause]

So we are going to put out a call for applicants next year and we're going to get that up and going. Another element of the Flyway is standards. We all know that the BRF is great. But it's antiquated. And it won't even begin to level the ‑‑ all the functions that are available in the multi‑line Braille device. BRF was not designed for that. So for the last two years, APH has been working with more than 40 Braille organizations around the world, including the NFB, to come to an agreement on a new electronic Braille‑ready file, the EBRF standard.

[Applause]

And I am happy to say, and sometimes even shocked ‑‑ I mean, you're talking 40 organizations from around the world, and not everyone agrees on how to do Braille, but we have an agreement with all 40, the standard has been set, we have asked Daisy Consortia to take the lead in that, and they are the ones taking the charge on that, which is really exciting, so the EBRF is now a reality. We also need to look at standards for digital tactile graphics. Different groups have done that, but we need to get a universal standard for that. Tactile graphics will be available at the touch of a button on the Monarch, and that opens up a whole new set of needs for the field. So we have groups meeting to talk about those standards, and at APH we're talking about what needs to be done to expand the existing graphics that we have. We currently in our library call the TGIL tactile graphics image library have about 17,000 graphics. We have been at talks with agencies from all around the world, you know, Bruce named off all the countries that have libraries similar to ours of tactile graphics. We want access to all those graphics. Literally taking us to the hundreds of thousands of graphics that will be available to individuals using the Monarch at the touch of a button. A quick search and find and then a decision made as to what is most appropriate graphic to use for the occasion.

The other thing we're going to need on this is we have to develop a software development kit. If you think about when the first smartphones came out, the iPad, they were very limited, and what made them successful was this ability for everyday users to create apps that would make the whole smart universe a wonderful place to go to get tools. We want to do the same thing with the Monarch. We're going to be releasing an SDK kit. That would allow any of you in this room, or any company that wants to create apps for this device to be able to create those apps so they can be downloaded to the Monarch.

[Applause]

Of course a key piece of the Monarch Flyway is funding the Monarch is going to be expensive. I'm going to be frank there. I always said when I was an educator in Washington State, the kids we serve, it cost a lot of money and I will never apologize for that. Because it's all about equity.

So we know this is going to be expensive. Thankfully not as expensive as five years ago. But we know there's going to be a cost. So what are we going to do about that? Well, we're looking at funding strategies, and just as seriously looking at how to improve the technology. For last year APH and partners, including NFB have been visiting Congress. We have been making our case at every single student should have access to a device, such as this. And I'm happy to say that we have not been met with any ‑‑ no one has pushed back on that idea. Everyone says you're right, this is a game changer, every student who uses Braille should have access to this device.

[Applause]

So now we are seeking the funding for that device. So here is where we need your help. We need you as members of the NFB to use your wonderful loud voices and speak up for ‑‑ not only for the Monarch, but for all technology for students who are blind or low vision, because students as well as our adults deserve equity. We want you to partner with us and talk to your local representatives at state and federal levels to he get that message across.

So, I'm going to wrap it up here, but I kind of got off my notes, but that's okay, I do that sometimes. I just want to tell you how grateful I am that we have this partnership with the NFB and the opportunity to speak with you once again. We want to carry this message of partnership even forward, and we have asked and President Riccobono has agreed and will be gracing us at our annual meeting this October as our keynote speaker. So we're excited about that.

[Applause]

Because I think that sends a clear message. And it's something that... there's a change in our field. And it's been a change long time coming, and we're not there yet, but we need to push this idea that in order for agencies to be successful, is you have to partner. We are better together. We know that. And we cannot operate in a vacuum of ‑‑ like we talked about earlier, we cannot create products and then come back to you and say, well, what do you think? Is that going to do it for you? No. No, we have to do every product moving forward with the voice of people like here in the NFB who will tell us, like, President Riccobono said, we need your criticism, we need your support. We would love you to let us know when we're doing something right, but make sure you tell us when we got it wrong. Because if we don't get it right on the very beginning, then we are just ‑‑ we're just doomed to fail.

All right, by the time the Monarch gets launched, I hope everyone in the room has a chance to see that Monarch or will provide us some level of expertise or some input, so all of you can say that you had a part in letting that Monarch fly.

So, as we close out here, there just really aren't the right words to finish this up, so we have asked Paul for a song. So those ‑‑ if you don't know, Paul Slader, our VP of Outreach and impact from APH is down here and Paul is going to take us out with a song. What have you got for us?

PAUL: Let's see what we're going to do. Glad to say Tom Page is up here too from the Haymakers.

Let's hear it for a little ‑‑ join the rhythm a little bit.

[ guitar strumming ]

PAUL: So those who grew up in the '70s, there was a conversation about Flyway, and then somebody said Braille. And I thought Flyway to Braille, I think I know where we're going. Some of you may know. We're going to change the lyrics a little bit.

[ guitar strumming ]

¶ wasn't easy, Braille graphics on the same display ¶

¶ With a partner ¶

¶ NFB ¶

¶ E‑Braille is gonna come and read your way ¶

¶ Send them textbooks in digital files ¶

¶ Students welcome it with big smiles ¶

¶ Monarch is here from APH ¶

¶ HumanWare has gone the extra mile ¶

¶

PAUL: We're going to the chorus. Are you ready!?

¶ we're on the flyway to Braille ¶

¶ Flyway to Braille ¶

¶ Flyway to Braille ¶

¶

 SPEAKER: Get up with those antennas!

¶ flyway to Braille ¶

 SPEAKER: The first NFB rap video.

 SPEAKER: ¶ makes ten lines... ¶

¶ Eh...

¶ no punk is gonna slow us down ¶

¶ Hit this scroll bar ¶

¶ Find the Zoom ¶

¶ The dot tech makes an awesome sound ¶

¶ Hey, Congress, we need you too ¶

¶ With that funding we won't fail ¶

¶ Hey, teachers ¶

¶ Come along too ¶

¶ We're on the way to the holy Braille...

Are you ready?! ¶

¶

¶ we're on the flyway to Braille ¶

¶ Flyway to Braille ¶

¶ Flyway to Braille ¶

¶ Flyway to Braille ¶

¶ Once more time... through let's let the Congress hear our song ¶

¶ Everybody...

¶ Flyway to Braille ¶

¶ Flyway to Braille ¶

¶ Flyway to Braille ¶

¶ Flyway to Braille ¶

¶

One more!

¶ flyway to Braille ¶

¶ Flyway to Braille ¶

¶ We're on the...

¶ Flyway to Braille ¶

¶ flyway to Braille ¶

¶ You can't stop us now... ow... ow ¶

[Applause]

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Had we known that's why Paul missed his door prize, we might have given it to him. But thank you APH HumanWare!

 SPEAKER: We got door prizes.

## Unlocking the Power of Our Stories: Imagining a Museum and Building Our Future

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Well, let's hold the door prize. We're going to have some grand door prizes at ‑‑ we have one more great presentation coming up, and I want to make sure we can get it in. But we will have some door prizes at the end. So you want to stay around for this. We've got some big, big, big announcements coming up here too. So you don't want to leave. This next item is "Unlocking the Power of Our Stories."

You can keep your antennas on or off for this one. But this is imagining a Museum. A museum in building our future.

Now, we've talked some about this idea. But we have made some great progress in moving in this direction. And we want to celebrate that progress, but we also want to invite each of you to be part of the movement of conceptualizing of what we're going to do.

So we have a panel of individuals, and it will be moderated by the chair of the Federation's Jacobus tenBroek Memorial Fund Committee. Here for this presentation is Kathryn Webster.

 SPEAKER: Convention and beyond we open the doors, from the past, the present to the future.

[ captioned video ]

KATHRYN: Good afternoon, Federationists! I am honored to be moderating a panel with such esteemed colleagues on stage with me today. But before we jump in, let's orient ourselves to who is going to be sharing their thoughts with you today. So if you are facing the stage, our panelists from right to left are Jordan Caster from Colorado, Marilyn Green from Illinois, Sharon Crever Weissbomb from Maryland, and last but not least, Donald Porterfield from Arizona.

So if you asked me a year ago my opinion of museums, I would have probably told you I hate them. I go into a big bustling building with lots of pretty things that I can tell you absolutely nothing about. I hardly can touch anything, and when I can explore with my fingers, it's usually the glass window that protects whatever artifact they're trying to show me enough of that negativity, though. I didn't know what an inclusive immersive and accessible museum could really be. Because I don't think they exist. I loved the idea of museums and what it can really educate and offer the public, but my wondering stopped there. Now, when President Riccobono pondered over the idea of starting this initiative to build a Museum of the Blind People's Movement, I think we can all agree in this room... who better than us? So there are so many reasons this museum excites me. But I'm going to hand it over to Sharon Krever Weissbaum to share what excites her.

SHARON: Hello, members of the NFB. I live in Baltimore, Maryland, I'm the managing partner of your old friend, Brown, Goldstein and Levy. We are a law firm that has been with you and we signed you and learned from you for the last 35 plus years. And no one could teach others around the world and around our country about inclusion and accessibility better than the NFB.

[Applause]

That is why when President Riccobono told me about this initiative and invited me to hear about the museum and asked us to support you, we talked to the partners and in about one day called him back and said, we're in. So we're excited to be a supporter and can't wait to visit the museum.

 SPEAKER: Thank you. Marilyn, what excites you?

MARILYN: The experience. Those in the room who know me know that I'm all about the stories. Is stories of people learning about their lived experience, and that's what is so exciting to me about this museum, us sharing our stories. The diversity and inclusion of it, to let people know that blind people are everywhere. That we are in the tapestry of the great country we live in. We're in the politics. We're in the entertainment. We're in the food. We're in the religion. So much of who we are is a part of this country. And I think that is so important. And that's what excites me. And also the fact that it's not just plaques on the wall. It's immersive. It's something that we can experience ourselves as blind people. It's not others telling us what is there. It's us being able to touch and experience it on our own, and that is what excites me about this museum.

 SPEAKER: Thank you, Marilyn. Jordan, what about you?

JORDAN: Hello family!

When I first got a call from President Riccobono telling me about the museum, I got goosebumps. I saw that video and I got goosebumps. I started dancing. I am so excited, so thrilled. This museum is going to be anywhere and everywhere. There's going to be traveling exhibits, online components. We can share our history and our dreams for the future with educators, our sighted allies, people in remote areas who don't know what is possible yet. We can open our hearts and history and home in Baltimore to people all over the world. And I am pumped!

 SPEAKER: Thank you, Jordan. Donald, tell us what you think.

DONALD: Before I tell you what gets me excited, I have to say that I once visited the United States Supreme Court and was not allowed to experience it. And what pumps me up about the museum of the movement for the people of the blind ‑‑ or for blind people, excuse me ‑‑ is that this is going to be inclusive to people with disabilities from various intersectionalities. If you are deaf or hard of hearing, deafblind, you are going to be able to access this museum. It is going to set the standard by which all museums of the future will need to follow. Because it is going to be open and experiential to everybody, no matter what cross‑section of disability or intersectionality that you have. And so that is one of the things that is truly, truly exciting about this journey that we are on.

 SPEAKER: Thank you, Donald. So we hear "intersectionality," we hear to catering to people with multiple disabilities, the virtual component, companies having a way to turn and understand what museums can look like. And there are so, so many way that is you can be a part of supporting our museum. Whether giving personally within your company, as family, affiliate chapter, but even more so spreading the word about what we are doing.

So before we hear from our fabulous supporters, bear with me on some of the logistical pieces. So grab a slate and stylus so you can jot down the information I'm about to share. So main museum page can be found NFB.org /museum. So here you can find all the updates and information, anything that you want to tell others, this is the place to go.

To be placed on the formal honor roll, we're looking for $10,000 commitments. So right now we're looking for at least $1,000 pledges over five years, but if you want to be placed on the honor roll, the higher amount of 10,000 is what we're looking for.

But the power of your voice in sharing our initiative with your colleagues, family and friends is so, so important. So if financial means is not your comfort right now, what I challenge each of you to do in this room is talk about the museum with five people who don't know what we're up against right now. Pledge at the Give 20 table or online by visiting NFB.org /museum‑pledge. We are seeking prospect ideas for if capital campaign. So you can send an email to Museumcampaign@NFB.org . Or bring to the Give 20 table any of those ideas we are asking for members who are willing to help make asks in relation to the museum capital campaign. That address is MuseumCampaign@NFB.org. And if you have ideas on content for the museum, please contact Nicole, who is our archivist at the Jernigan Institute sitting in the Maryland delegation, or can be reached at Extension 2310. If you listened to none of the last minutes of blabbering on the logistics piece you can visit Patty Chang in the back, at the Give 20 table who can share all the information I just shared with you.

So now to share cool stuff of how all the panelists had the a‑ha moment of taking the step toward giving, let's start with Jordan. Why are you giving individually?

JORDAN: When I was thinking about donating, honestly, I prayed about it. And I always think about leaving a legacy. What can I do to leave a legacy? I'm coming up on my 30th birthday. I'm feeling really old, guys. But don't laugh! Don't laugh at me. I'm a deep thinker. I think about, what can I do? Sometimes I feel, you know, like just a small part in the grand scheme of things. But I'm passionate about our history, and I love, love, love technology. So when President Riccobono called and asked me, I knew that this museum was a perfect fit for me to give. And I have two younger brothers who will blind. And we also have a third blind host student in our family from Kyrgyzstan, and I think about them. I think about my brothers. I think about you know, all the blind children and the next generation. You know, there will be blind people running these exhibits and mentoring and having experiences with a successful competent blind adult. But what got me into the NFB, and in our youth slam, President Riccobono said, this is your home now and we're going to give you the keys. And I hear, you know "We are the keys to the museum." And that just really lit a fire in me, and I hope that it will light a fire to... for the next generation, to continue writing our stories. And there's no better way to show the whole world that we can live the life we want. And let's be the keys.

 SPEAKER: Thank you, Jordan. Donald, how about you and Amy?

DONALD: Amy and I, when we first heard about the museum and that we were gathering donations so that we could fund the museum, I was never ever a question about whether we would give or not. It was a question about how much were we going to give. Because it is so incredibly important that we the blind tell our own story, that we ‑‑ each and every one of us in this room has a part of that story to tell, whether it's a sentence, a chapter, a paragraph, or a section of that history, each and every one of us has a part, and the National Federation of the Blind is the driving force behind us telling that story, so that others don't tell it for us. Because others won't get it right.

 SPEAKER: No, they won't! Marilyn. Sorry, Donald.

DONALD: What I was going to say, just kind of closing it out is that it's important for us to talk about the struggles that we had, the failures and successes, all of it. Because all of it is going to shape our future. I have a family that is fully invested in the blindness business. My father‑in‑law, my mother‑in‑law, Lenny and Marion, my stepson, my nephew, they are all heavily invested in what Amy and I work really hard, you know, to do, which is advance the rights of the blind. Thank you.

 SPEAKER: Thank you, Donald. Sorry, your remarks got me so excited. Marilyn, why did the Illinois affiliate take this step?

MARILYN: I am blessed to be a member of an affiliate that is so rich with history and passion and activity. I have a membership of active past president. We have a charter member. We have students. And they understand how important this is. So that is why we knew that it was important. People who have advocated in the '70s regarding subminimum wages, getting Braille for blind children, we all know the importance, and each and every day they teach me why this museum is important to all of us as blind people. That's why my affiliate decided to give.

 SPEAKER: Thank you, Marilyn. So when we saw VG on the list, no surprise how much support we receive from amazing people, but tell us why BGL took that step?

 SPEAKER: Our law firm is a civil rights organization, but we only do the things we do because we learn from our clients, in that case the NFB. We can't tell your story, but we try as best we can to tell the story through the advocacy we do for you. I would like to see other companies, I'm sure there are many already, and there will be more, but I'm hoping other law firms, other companies from around the country who are both in the industry of blind products and things, and who are not, can come together and support this amazing museum to be.

 SPEAKER: Thank you, Sharon. So, folks, today we are making history. We are going to be the go‑to museum that showcases what immersive, inclusive, accessible experience can and should look like in museums across the world. Thank you, President, Riccobono, for highlighting our excitement this afternoon, and thank you all for supporting this first of its kind mission. Have a great Tuesday!

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Thank you very much to our panelists. Not quite door prize yet. I got an important announcement. First of all, let me say thank you, again, to all these folks on stage who have made contributions. You should know that as Catherine highlighted with the honor roll, which I'm going to share with you in a moment, highlights contributions $10,000 and up. But every contribution matters, and 100% of the Federation's Board of Directors had made contributions. 100% of the Jacobus tenBroek memorial fund Board of Directors has made contributions and many other people who are not listed on this honor roll. I wanted to say about Brown Goldstein and Levy, they were our first major gift commitment. And when I went to Sharon and said, I have a big ask for you, and I asked her for half a million dollars and she said... yeah, that's a big number. [chuckles]

But as she already highlighted, she did come back a day or two later. It didn't take much time at all. So I think it speaks to the tremendous commitment of Brown, Goldstein and Levy.

[Applause]

Now, I mentioned in the presidential report, we have gotten over $2.7 million in commitments, specifically $2,790,280 have been committed from 73 individuals or organizations.

Our honor roll, which is on the website, starts at the Dream Promoter level, which is $1 million and above. We currently don't have anybody in that category. So if that is you, you could own it for the moment.

We would like a million dollar contributor.

We have the expectation builder, which is 500,000 to 1 million, and there we do have, as noted, Brown, Goldstein and Levy and the American Action Fund for Blind Children and Adults. Under our accessibility ambassador level, which is 250,000 to 500,000, we don't have anybody currently. So you could be there.

At the Braille booster level, which is 100,000 to 250,000, we have listed there Ray Kurzweil. Ray will be with us at the banquet later this week. Under that level also we have the organizations that was the individual contributor listed. We have organizations that include Ira Corporation. We heard about that earlier this week. Also Blackstone Consulting. Blackstone does a lot of work with our blind merchants. And also Gardner insurance. And thank you to our 100,000 and up contributors. And then community connector level, which is 50,000. And we have ra couple of individuals there. First and foremost, Francisco and pat if I Chang and Kevin Worley. Organizations listed at this level ‑‑ get this ‑‑ the Chicago Lighthouse for the Blind. Market Development Group. And we have the National Federation of the Blind of Illinois, Maryland, Minnesota, Nevada, Oregon, New Mexico, Oregon, Texas, and Utah. And also our National Association of Blind merchants.

So a number of Federation affiliates getting in. We also have the Saturn Corporation at this level. And then we have the next level as our inclusion influencer. These are 25,000 to 49999 individuals in this category include Jordan Caster, Mark and Patricia Mauer, John, Jr., Mark and Melissa Riccobono, Terry and Aaron Rub, Ramona Wallhoff. Thank you to individuals at that level.

We also have a number of organizations at this level. We have the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, CNIB. And Connelly and Associates Fundraising LLC, and also Harpo LTD, which is a technology company.

Our storyteller level, which is 10,000 to 24999 includes these individuals: Dana Ard, Roland and Pam Allen, Everett Bacon and Angela Peters, John Berggren, Ron and Jean Brown, Shawn and la Tonya Callaway, Glen and Norma Crosby, Christopher S. Danielsen, Sandy and John Alverson, Everly Hairston, Dr. Dan and Joe Ireland, Mary Ellen Jernigan, Anil Lewis, Barbara Manuel, Ron Othman, Donald and Amy Porterfield, Tony and Pam Schnur, Carlos, Tracy, Sophia, Franco and Sharon, Catherine Webster and Jeff and Sheila Wright. Also at this level ‑‑ I guess we don't have organizations at this level thank you to all the contributors. There are others who are not listed on the honor roll.

But the thing I want to leave you with is we need many, many, many, many more gifts. But I want to announce today that there is a member of the Federation, and although they have opted to remain anonymous today, there is a member in this convention participating who has made a million dollar contribution to the Museum of the Blind People's Movement.

[Applause]

But it's going to take many more. So you should thank anybody you came across because it could be them. If it's not them, you can get them to think about it. We need many more cricks. We need many more ideas. It's going to take all of us. I wanted to leave you on the that high note. Bennett, don't you have a door prize for that, or three?

 SPEAKER: Of course I do. We have lots of door prizes here. And I want to do the virtual folks too. I want to read three names from the virtual group, and if they go to the prize at NFB.org within the next 30 minutes and write in the clue ‑‑ I mean, the Route 66 is the code. You will win 25 bucks. It's Kenneth Mitchell, like look Maryland, and Sue Ott from Ohio, and Montague Brooks from Montana. You get 25 bucks if you go there and put in Route 66 as the clue.

Now we have about three prizes that are going to be wonderful to have. The first one is a cookbook in honor of the 40th anniversary of the National Organization of Parents of Blind Children, and it's of course companied by a $50 gift card, Visa gift card. And by the way, that 40‑year ‑‑ the cookbook says it's got 40 kid‑friendly recipes in it. It's great. Braille and print. And the winner is Eric Smith of Georgia. Eric Smith. Pretty quiet in here.

How about Ryan Cantazar of Michigan?

Nope?

Next.

Avery Pierre from the Bahamas. No Bahama Mama here, okay.

How about Zahir Williams of New Jersey?

Is anybody out there?

[ Cheering ]

All right, here we go.

Sonya Virgil of New Mexico. He's here. We've got him.

All right.

And we have ‑‑ okay, now we have a voucher to get a computer that has been refurbished and made for us by ‑‑ the vouchers were given to us by Computers for the Blind. And these are a value of about 200 or so dollars and they're really good computers. They fix them and get them done. So the winner of this voucher is Shaquinta Robinson of Texas.

Well, she's probably out trying to find a computer somewhere.

How about Samantha Nutson from Louisiana. Are you here?

Well, I guess you lose‑i‑ana.

How about Lori Questwell of Michigan? Oh... Loriiii...

How about Kristin Merit of Texas? Are you here?

Oh, she's a real scream. She's here, okay.

Okay, we got one more to go. One more to go and then we'll get out of here. Anybody wants to leave right now, they can.

But the door prize is going to be 100 bucks.

Could be for a good dinner for you tonight maybe.

Vicki Tenario of Texas. Another Texan!

Probably already at the Astros game.

How about Jamie Crane of California?

He's here?

Thank you! Oh, she's here. Good. Congratulations to all you door prize winners!

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: You got her? Okay. We will stand adjourned until 9:00 a.m. tomorrow.