## National Convention 2023 General Session IV

 SPEAKER: Thank you. If afternoon session for the third time is underway. I know it was a good song... I know... I know...

If Bennett is not going to get at the door prizes, I'm going to let you know that I got an announcement ‑‑

 BENNETT: I'm going to jump right in here, because Mr. President, we've got to get them done. For her debut to read the virtual door prizes is Kenya Flores.

KENYA: Hello, everyone! Okay. So I will be giving out the virtual door prizes. So to everyone giving requests, I may not be your girl this afternoon. So our virtual door prize winners are Andrew Rude from Florida.

[ Cheering ]

Erie Lyons from Texas, Vernice Knowles from Virginia, and the keyword is Jernigan fund. You are winning $50. Please email prize@NFB.org.

 BENNETT: Thank you. Good job, Flores, thank you very much, Kenya. Now we have 100 bucks for people in the room. And Abigail Stengel from Colorado... are you here? We'll give you one more second. Time is up. Okay, now... Anthony Clay from Mississippi. Are you here? Okay, we got him.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Okay, Stacey Gallegos of Texas has given an announcement on behalf of NAGDU, which says "we know that accidents happen, inside or outside. Please pick them up." If it happens inside, tell housekeeping. I just read them when they come, that's it.

We have an announcement here from Emily Gibbs of 64 Ounce Games, who says that 64 Ounce Games, an award winner, will be having a game night tonight from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. in the Texas Hospitality Suite, 21029. All are welcome. There is no relationship between those two announcements.

[ Laughter ]

## Securing Equal Protection under the Law: The Essential Role of the Organized Blind Movement

All right, we got a busy afternoon. So we're going to jump right in to securing equal protections under the law. We ended the morning session with a couple presentations from some dynamic blind women and we have to begin this afternoon another dynamic woman, who is making changes as well. She is not blind, but she is one of those allies that we recognize as truly being blind at heart. She has built a very accomplished career of advocacy in legal work, impacting people with disabilities and many others. She brings to life in the law the lived experience of people with disabilities. At the end of last year, when our general counsel, Scott La Barre passed away, I asked her if she would take up work as our general counsel, because I knew that she not only had the technical expertise but she had the understanding deep within herself about who we are, why our movement exists, and what is needed to advance our cause.

Law 360 recently named her as one of the Titans of the plaintiffs bar for 2023.

[Applause]

And in that article they asked why she was interested in civil rights, and I thought this quote was nice, so I pulled it out. She answered the question by saying, "Injustice makes me mad! "

She goes on to say, and civil rights is one of the places where you can actually do something about being angry about injustice.

[Applause]

It's truly an honor to have the opportunity to work with her on a regular basis, and many of you have heard me say this before. Thank goodness she's on our side! Here from Brown, Goldstein and Levy is Eve Hill.

[ Music playing ]

 EVE: Thank you all. Thank you President Riccobono for that lovely introduction. I want to start off talking about how honored I am to have the general counsel of the National Federation of the Blind and to try and follow in the food steps of the great Scott La Barre. I must admit I nude Scott and I love Scott, and I am not Scott La Barre, but I will try my best every single day to follow in his footsteps.

[Applause]

So one of the things President Riccobono suggested I talk about today is let you get to know me a little bit more. But I hate talking about myself, so I objected (chuckling). But I agreed to talk about why I'm a disability rights lawyer working for the National Federation of the Blind. The first thing I want to talk about is some things that are not why I'm a disability rights lawyer but that frame and help me bring perspective to the work I do for the NFB. My husband uses a wheelchair, and that is not why I'm a disability rights lawyer. I met my husband some 20 years after I became a disability rights lawyer. But the fact that my husband has a disability helps shape my approach top disability rights and the fact that I believe people with disabilities are their own experts, are their own best representatives and really get to direct what should happen.

[Cheers and applause]

In addition I have my own disability. I have bipolar disorder, and that is not why I'm a disability rights lawyer. I was diagnosed some ten years after I became a disability rights lawyer. But my own personal lived experience helps frame the way I approach disability rights and how I know that your disability doesn't define you just as my disability does not define me. It makes the difference in how we approach this work.

[Applause]

Now, I grew up poor in rural Maine. And like many kids I would often stomp my foot and complain that something wasn't fair. And my mother would sigh and say something like, "Life is not fair." And I would scream..." Fix it! ." Now, many, maybe most of us, grow out of that kind of tantrum, but not me. Righteous outrage is still my favorite emotion. I still stomp my foot and complain that it's not fair. And so I'm trying to spend some of my time on this planet trying to fix some of the things that aren't fair. And that is why I'm a disability rights lawyer, and that's why the National Federation of the Blind is the best partner imaginable in that effort.

[Applause]

I have done a lot of things in the disability rights movement. I have worked for the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division twice, both as a line attorney and as a member of the Obama administration. I ran...

[Applause]

Thank you. I ran the disability rights legal center at Loyola Law School, where I did high‑impact disability rights litigation and taught law students to be disability rights lawyers. I started the District of Columbia government's Office of Disability rights, working to make the district a model of inclusion of people with disabilities in government services. And I worked for the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University. And in all of these positions I worked to implement disability rights laws, whether by taking on impact litigation, writing a casebook, teaching law students, making city agencies comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act, or helping state support employment of people with disabilities in competitive integrated employment and not sheltered workshops.

[Cheers and applause]

But now, for the past six and a half years, I have been in practice, in private program practice at the fantastic law firm of Brown, Goldstein and Levy.

[Applause]

Where I also run the inclusivity strategic consulting practice and where I'm incredibly honored to serve as general counsel for the National Federation of the Blind.

So I wanted to talk about why no other organization is as powerful in securing equal protection of the laws as the NFB and why as a result working for the NFB is the culmination of my career as a disability rights lawyer.

The NFB a long history of using and shaping the law to support the equal rights of blind people the founder Jacobus tenBroek was a leading lawyer and constitutional scholar who helped shape the interpretation of the United States constitution to protect the rights of the blind. He used the law to demand the full range of rights and responsibilities of citizenship for people and NFB has been doing the same for over 80 years. Dr. TenBroek and the NFB envisioned the principles that would eventually become the federal disability civil rights laws that we work under today. And they incorporated those principles into their work long before the ADA was even a dream. And once the law began to reflect an equal rights framework for the blind, the NFB developed a legal program to implement it, shape it and lead its development in the courts.

Dr. Kenneth Jernigan and Dr. Mark Maurer developed what is now the NFB's robust legal program in the 1980s. At first the legal program was primarily a defense against attacks on the organized blind movement, on the NFB itself, and on its leadership. And then Dr. Maurer hired the great Dan Goldstein. This deserves applause.

[Applause]

My predecessor, mentor and friend, to take on affirmative challenges to the rights of blind people, including their rights under the Randolph Sheppard Act, their rights to be parents and rights to equal right to employment. Now, bear in mind...

[Applause]

... that for the first few years of this program, there was no ADA. So the NFB's legal program had to be creative using state law, federal law, constitutional law, as well as the expertise of blind people who spoke up for themselves and each other and served as models to teach lawyers, judges, juries and defendants about blind people. It also took quite after put the chutzpah to support equal rights for blind people before the law was set up in our favor.

Now the NFB and the legal program in its current form really began around 1999, when Dr. Maurer recognized that the emergence of digital technology offered a tremendous opportunity but also a huge potential risk for blind people. My friend Dan Goldstein remembers the conversation in which Dr. Maurer noted that in his house he was Abe to independently access his thermostat and kitchen appliances and everything else he needed to control his environment, because everything had a tactile element. But if he moved to a new house all those would be digital and controlled by things like touch screens and would be inaccessible to him. Technology that should make life easier and better for blind people was being rolled out without any consideration of the blind, and as a result was making life harder and less accessible. So Dr. Maurer, not wanting to play small ball asked Dan to get the attention of the folks developing these emerging technologies. As a result the National Federation of the Blind sued America Online. At the time the biggest player in the Internet, challenging their inaccessibility. And they followed that suit with a suit against Die bold, challenging inaccessible ATMs and a suit against Target for its inaccessible website. And the NFB has led the fight for digital accessibility for nearly 25 years now.

[Applause]

The NFB has brought suits challenging Amazon's inaccessible Kindle e‑readers, Travelocity and monster.com, H&R block, and application of the ADA to business websites, educational technology, employment technology, digital books and other forms of technology. It's fair to say that without the NFB the technologies that are everywhere in our world would be completely inaccessible to this day.

In one of the most significant victory the NFB in the Trust case established that making materials accessible for blind people is a fair use under the copyright law. So there is no excuse for the law standing in the way of digital literacy for the blind.

[Applause]

And as other disability rights advocates say to me all the time, "Thank goodness for the NFB."

[Applause]

Now, the NFB understood how the ADA should apply to the Internet, even though no one had thought about it before. And how it should apply to digital technology. And the NFB's legal program developed the legal framework for applying the ADA to that technology, across contexts of employment, education, government services and public accommodations, and the NFB and its lawyers and members persuaded courts across the country to adopt that legal framework. Since then, under the leadership of President Riccobono, the NFB legal program has grown. The legal program today takes a strategic approach to making systemic change. It has established priorities of access to digital technology, employment, education, civic participation, healthcare and the Randolph Shepherd Program. And the NFB's legal program takes on some of the most important issues facing blind people, from challenging employment discrimination, to ensuring blind people are not separated from their children to making electronic books and the Internet accessible to challenging sheltered workshops and subminimum wage to ensuring new transportation mechanisms work for the blind.

[Applause]

And the NFB legal program takes cases that make a systemic impact and reach results that create precedence and models that apply far beyond any individual case. Our cases have ripple effects beyond the individual case. The power of the organized blind to make change through legal action has been evident to me in the years I have worked alongside the NFB, including the six and a half years I have been at BGL. We've advocated successfully for accessible electronic absentee voting in over a dozen states.

[Applause]

As a direct result of NFB's work, blind people in Maryland, Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, Maine, New York, Virginia, North Dakota, Tennessee, Illinois, and very soon Bexar County, Texas, can vote absentee privately and independently.

[Cheers and applause]

The NFB has established the right to accessible websites for everything from retail stores to fast food to tax preparation to travel, to voting, to federal government services. We have established the right of blind federal employees to actually enforce their rights under Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act.

[Applause]

And we've established the right to have other technologies accessible as well, from ATMs, to kiosks, to voting machines, eBook devices to restaurant ordering device, and we will keep insisting on accessibility of all emerging technologies, including those that use artificial intelligence. We also have fought for the right to have important information communicated in accessible formats, such as Braille, large print, and accessible electronic formats. We required the IRS to make tax information available to blind people in accessible formats. And right now we are challenging the University of North Carolina healthcare system to make important healthcare information and medical billing information accessible, and we're waiting for an order from the court.

[Applause]

And the NFB has stood up and continues to stand up for the employment rights of blind people, challenging inaccessible workplace technology at Amazon, Comcast, Williams‑Sonoma, federal agencies and others, just to name a few ongoing now. And we challenged the discriminatory attitudes and policies of employers that refuse to hire blind people because of their misconceptions of blindness, such as employers who believe blind people can't be childcare providers or teachers. We have challenged the prejudices that lead government agencies and employers to relegate blind people to segregated subminimum wage sheltered workshops, and the NFB has stood up over and over again for the rights of blind parents.

[Applause]

We take on these cases in the face of at state agencies acting on prejudices and stereotypes to try to take children away in the face of public agencies making uninformed decisions about blind foster and adoptive parents and in the faces of spouses and courts relying on prejudice to decide child custody.

And the NFB recognizes the crucial importance of education, and its legal program fights discrimination in public education, higher education, testing and credentialing. Just recently ‑‑ you all heard about the case against the Los Angeles Community College District, which went to trial... twice... and culminated in that verdict finding that LACCD discriminated against students Roy Pion and Portia Mason by failing to purchase and use accessible technology and awarded the plaintiffs over $240,000 in damages.

[Applause]

The NFB has also reached comprehensive accessibility outcomes with schools like Florida State University and Miami University, but the fight continues. Now the NFB and three brilliant blind students are challenging Oregon State University's failure to make course materials accessible. And we're challenging discrimination against blind students by the Harvard Kennedy School and the Berkeley college of music.

So what makes the NFB special and especially effective in advocating for equal rights?

I talked to several advocates about this actually, and it's a combination of factors. One is the NFB is the voice of the nation's blind.

[Applause]

The NFB speaks for real blind people and reflects your priorities and principles. It has legitimacy when it sets priorities and takes on cases. And anyone who misunderstands that the NFB is advocating for anything less than justice for the blind does so at their peril.

And the NFB is brave. It is willing to take on the biggest companies and the biggest government agencies, including scary ones like the FBI. We will even challenge entities that are supposed to be our allies when they fail to do our jobs, as we did with the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights. And the NFB is willing to use litigation as a tool and to take cases all the way to judgment and even appeal in order to reach binding and precedential decisions.

[Applause]

The NFB will not accept halfway settlements that don't actually fix the problem. Even if the other side offers cash. And the NFB is not afraid of losing a case. It recognizes, as Dr. Maurer often has said, "We may lose the battle, but we don't lose the war, because we don't stop fighting until we win."

[Cheers and applause]

The NFB is creative. It will color outside the lines when necessary, like it did when it intervened as a defendant when the Authors Guild sued the trust to prevent digital books from being made accessible to the blind. The NFB takes cases for the right reasons and insists on resolutions that further those reasons. Justice for the individual plaintiff is important, but the NFB insistence on public settlements is one of the most important aspects of its legal program.

[Applause]

Each decision, settlement or other outcome is available for others to learn from and acts as a precedent and a deterrent for other entities. And the NFB is bold. The organized blind movement is not going to wait around for somebody else to take on its battles. The blind stand up for themselves and for each other.

[Applause]

While the NFB compromises when it makes sense, it doesn't compromise its principles. And as President Riccobono reminds me often, the NFB will not pull its punches.

Speaking of President Riccobono, the NFB leadership is another reason the legal program here is so incredibly powerful. Judges and defendants often push you to accept half measures or to let go of your legal principles, but President Riccobono and the Board of Directors of the NFB never lose sight of the point of every case. They hold tight to the principles of NFB's mission.

[Applause]

Finally, the reason the NFB is such a powerful force is that the NFB is you. You are the real experts on blindness. You are the best clients in existence. You are willing to be plaintiffs and stand up for principles. You're willing to stick it out all the way to get the right result, and you don't give up halfway through. And you are outstanding representatives of the blind community. Your actions and your credibility educate defendants and judges and juries better than any lawyer can. In short, the NFB is extraordinary.

I will also note that that NFB has some pretty great lawyers working with Tim Elder, Al Alia, Lauren McClarne, Jess ser Weber, Sharon Cover Weissbaum, Andy Freeman and others is an amazing privilege.

I want to leave you with a thought from President Obama that embodies the NFB for me. Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we have been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.

Thank you to the NFB for everything you do!

[Cheers and applause]

 MARK RICCOBONO: I told you it's good she's on our side. We also have supported eve for other certain positions, but admittedly I'm happy they haven't come through so she can continue to work with us.

KENYA: Our first door prize is Denise Miller, you are waiting $40. The word is strategic plan. Our second winner is Mark from Pennsylvania. Third winner is Donna Jean Breeze from South Carolina. Please email prize@NFB.org  with the code "strategic plan."

 BENNETT: We have a live door prize of a bag filled with health and wellness products from Georgia. We have a number of other things in there worth at least 50 bucks and probably more than that, and the winner is... Malaya Reece from South Carolina. Are you here, Malaya Reece?

Apparently not. Let's see. Kristen Comb Michelin from Ohio. Anybody here today? Are we awake?

[ Cheering ]

All right! How about Barbie Elliot from Utah?

She's here. We've got her, Mr. President.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Okay, striving for that door prize over there, yeah.

## A One-Hundred-Year Legacy at the American Foundation for the Blind: What Will Be Different in the Decade Ahead?

This next item is a 100‑year legacy at the American Foundation for the Blind.

What will be different in the next decade?

This next gentleman I'm pleased to invite up, but let me give you a little background. Since our founding in 1940, we have sometimes worked very closely with the American Foundation for the Blind, and we have sometimes been at what you might call extreme odds with each other, different ends of the spectrum. The foundation was established before the blind organized on a nationwide basis. And at times in its history, the Foundation has represented some of the strongest resistance to the organized blind movement. We had the president, a different president of the American Foundation for the Blind at our convention in 2017 under the title "New Directions for the Future." A very hopeful title. Our hopes were quickly extinguished. In 2018 we took action against the Ability One Program for giving the foundation what we viewed was an illegal contract under the federal procedures. And at times, the last number of years since then, various agendas have invited the National Federation of the Blind, the American Council of the Blind and the American Foundation for the Blind to be on a consumer organization panel

We told any organizers of panels like that that we would not participate, because the foundation is not a consumer organization.

In 2021 the American Foundation for the Blind reached its 100th anniversary. And for much of the last year it has not had an executive ‑‑ a permanent executive leader.

So now the foundation has a new leader and we have invited him to our stage. And we do so again with the hope that the next decade will, in fact, be very different from what much of the legacy of the last century of the foundation has been. It is our hope in this presentation ‑‑ we will give him a break because he's only I been at it three months, so we don't expect him to have all the answers, but we do hope that the American Foundation for the Blind can define a place that can contribute to the direction and March for independence of blind people rather than disrupting it. I've had the opportunity to work with this gentleman in his previous capacities, and I will tell you that when we talked about his appearance here at this convention, I did not prompt him, but he said to me, I am not trying to build a consumer organization. [Applause]

He is a gentleman that has worked around especially the public policy space in the blindness field for a long time. He is a blind person. He is a blind father. He exhibits a lot of the characteristics of living the life you want that we appreciate as a leader in the blindness field. It's not just that he talks the talk, he walks the walk. And so here, I think for his first presentation on this stage, but certainly first as he's only been at the Foundation for about three months is the president and CEO of the American Foundation for the Blind, Eric Bridges!

[ Music playing ]

 ERIC: Appreciate the walk‑up music.

Well, thank you so much, President Riccobono, for inviting the American Foundation for the Blind to be part of this convention. Thank you to the Convention Planning Committee. It's great to be here amongst, frankly, a lot of colleagues and friends. I have been in this field for over 20 years. And it's been pretty remarkable what I have been able to participate in during that time working with Eve Hill at various points in my career on advocacy issues, as well as Dan Goldstein, and other NFB staff down through the years.

So I appreciate the welcome. Let me reiterate, I am not here to recreate or create a new consumer organization. I have worked for one for the last 15 years, and I want my nights back. I want my weekends back. I have a young family, and I appreciate President Riccobono's remarks regarding our two organizations and their history. And my overarching observations in participating in this field for the last two‑plus decades is that we can disagree, but we ought not be disagreeable.

[Applause]

So that is what I bring to the table. I am blind. My wife is blind. We have guide dogs. We've got two sighted children. We've got a family circus. Whenever we roll into town, it's loud. Usually happy. Not always, but usually. So I'm here today literally three months that I will have been the leader at the American Foundation for the Blind. And I'm at an organization that has a tremendous legacy. I'm also with an organization that has been without a leader, as referenced before, for over a year, and where a tremendous amount of change has occurred over the last couple of years., so I'm being mindful ‑‑ I also came in, by the way, President Riccobono, at the very end of the fiscal year. How fun is that? The fourth quarter of our fiscal year I started work, and literally my sixth day I started with our AFB Leadership Conference. So I've been drinking from a firehose. I'm glad to talk a little bit about what is in our future. I would like to talk a little bit about what we have going on. Because I fear that over the last year or so, that work has not been communicated to the blindness field, and a lot of that has been because of the transition that has taken place.

So if you would indulge me for just a couple minutes, I'll talk you through some of the stuff we're working Consent Academy and then talk a little bit about our future. A lot of what AFB has worked on for decades is public policy and research. And with regard to the public policy component, we have worked in a collaborative fashion with NFB and ACB and others concerning web and software accessibility legislation that was introduced in the previous Congress and are actively working to have that ball moved forward. And barriers to digital inclusion, folks from NFB participated in, really showed the existing gaps that still dog us a little bit in this field in the community with regard to interacting with websites, apps, in particular, certain problem areas, healthcare, travel and leisure sites, things of that nature. And there's still a lot of folks that are experiencing ‑‑ continuing to experience issues in effectively utilizing productivity apps. So these were some areas that were brought up through the Barriers to Digital Inclusion. I'm very proud that that research is on capitol Hill and at the Department of Justice for policymakers and decision makers to be able to review.

[Applause]

 The reason I'm proud of it is I believe it accurately reflects the challenges that we still face, and I believe it accurately reflects because we are actively seeking to survey you all, consumer groups like NFB.

So we've got that work that is ongoing. A lot of that work is being led by an active Federation member, Ariel Silverman as well as Rosy Carranza. The workplace technology study that was released last year really shows the gaps that, you know, all these years after the ADA we still face with regard to employment opportunities and/or once on the job, the challenges that we face and onboarding.

Two other quick program highlights that I want to bring to your attention. One is the blind leaders development program, which is pretty awesome, and I will... I will readily admit before coming to AFB, I did not know it as well as I do now. This program, which was started just a couple years ago, really seeks to pair up a mentor and mentee and the mentee is not right out of college or right out of high school, going into college, these are individuals that are already employed and are ‑‑ let's call it "mid‑career" and may want to do more than they are currently doing or may be frustrated in their current job, hitting that ceiling that we often hit. They're paired up with mentors that work with them. There is a curriculum and monthly leadership programs. Not blindness leadership programming, leadership programming, that seeks to educate and empower them to make decisions on their career. Figuring out ways to effectively talk to their bosses, move up potentially, or what if this isn't for me right now? And what if I want to go do something else?

I'm very pleased to say that we just graduated our third cohort in May of this year., and 101 mentors and mentees have now gone through this program. Which is very cool.

[Applause]

The final program is talent lab, and this program has been around for about a year, and really what it seeks to do is to educate interns and apprentices that go through it. It's a sighted and/or blind individuals in accessible design. Really getting at the ongoing persistent challenge that we have in getting our folks employed, getting knowledge base up with regard to digital accessibility. It's a curriculum that goes ‑‑ this first cohort of 16 individuals went through about a nine‑month period of pretty intense learning. The ultimate objective is for these individuals to come out and graduate and be certified and have the resume to work at a tech company or at a company that values this sort of digital accessibility, and we're actively working with corporate partners of ours to place these individuals. This is a program that is, again, very new, that we are going to be looking at here in the fall to maybe even shorten that period of time, because companies don't want to wait around 10 minutes, we get that. But this is our ‑‑ this is our first crack at it and it has gone very well, and we're, again, having interest from our corporate partners and being able to place these individuals.

So what is the future of AFB? That's a great question. Thanks, Eric. The...

[ Laughter ]

Mercy laughs... I like it.

[ Laughter ]

So, beginning next month, and really through the fall, the American Foundation for the Blind will be going through a strategic planning exercise. The last strategic plan that the organization had was referenced in my introduction six years ago. It is out of date, out of line for 2023. There are aspects of what we are doing now that deal with the umbrella of digital accessibility that I think are absolutely going to continue. But where we go from here will be educated by external stakeholders, including the leadership of this organization. So what I want for us moving forward is to have an open and honest relationship with the consumer organizations. I want us to be able to collaborate when it makes sense for us to collaborate. I want us to have a good working relationship at bare minimum. And going through the strategic planning process, taking input from external stakeholders from my perspective is absolutely critical. Number one, I worked in this field for a long time. I know many of the leaders. But also I am new to this organization. I have worked alongside AFB, but I have not worked in AFB for very long, and I want to make sure that to the best of my own ability we are able to put together a plan that reflects the ‑‑ some of the needs that the field has, and frankly, also some of the needs that regular everyday blind people going through life would want us to work on, the issues that you all...

[Applause]

So I wake up every day and I'm one of those people, and so is my wife. My role and my desire for AFB is to be more visible, more collaborative. It's likely that we are going to do more research, because that is part of what we have been known for. It's part of what I would like to see us do here moving forward, and a lot of that is surveying the community, surveying the people. And I would like to be able to think that we could count on you all to do outreach, whether it's through the national organization and in collaboration with the national organization, maybe even with state affiliates or other parts of the organization. I want the work that we do to be reflective of the community, and it's something that I'm sensitive of and sensitive to because of my history in blindness movement.

Finally, you know, as I get ready to get the hook here, you know, I am very appreciative to have the time to be able to talk a little bit about what we're up to and what I want us to be doing. We do have a documentary that has been in the works for nearly two years now. And it will be premiering later this year. There will be screenings. It's called "Possibilities" and it looks at the work that Helen Keller did in her life, and how a lot of that work is still very critical and important today. It follows a series of individuals, several of whom are active Federation members. Through their lives, the challenges that they face and the successes that they've had. And giving sort of Helen's importance in 2023. So possibilities, it will be out as I said, it will be out later this fall and we'll be in touch with you all as it's being readied to go out into mass distribution. But it's something that AFB has been undertaking now for a couple years, and know several of you are aware of it. But I wanted to bring that out. Because it was sort of on hiatus for a little while. And finally, you know, I understand that there are differing opinions on a whole host of issues in our field, and it's not just the NFB that will disagree. I've been in many rooms where multiple organizations have disagreed on any number of things. The sky is blue on occasion. I want AFB to be a resource to the field, where appropriate. I would like for us to be able to help convene organizations to discuss the big issues of the day. These are some of the big things that I see in our future. We've got a plan that we're going to work on. I'm not looking to pollute that ahead of time, but these are two key things that I heard in a meeting that I had with about 20 leaders of blindness organizations that registered for our conference in April.. And there will be other stuff we're working on. It's my hope that this isn't the only time that I'm asked to come, but if it was, I really thank you. And have a great rest of your convention!

[Applause]

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Thank you very much, Eric. I want to say that, you know, for us, the title of this presentation is about working to see if we can build an understanding and trust with the foundation, and that direction. I did want to say that we have a strong ethic, and I'm sure you agree with this from your background. Just because someone is a member of the organization does not mean they represent the organization. And so our elected leaders in particular should be called on and invited to participate in those spaces. And I would say invited to those spaces even if our elected leaders haven't registered for the AFB conference. They should be invited. Because they are elected by this group. And so I know that you know that from your work, and I would just encourage that you think about that going forward, because I know in the last five years we have heard a lot about AFB's work with NFB members, but not NFB leaders. And so I just offer that to you. I'm happy to have you comment if you want, but I'm pretty sure I know how you feel about it.

 ERIC: If it makes you feel better, ACV wasn't represented, it neither was BVI, neither was Vision Serve. This was done ahead of my coming to AFB, so there were organizations from, you know, representing the schools for the blind, representing private agencies for the blind, a rather wide swath of our field, and no one was there claiming to represent the NFB.

 SPEAKER: Mr. President.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Go ahead.

 SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. President. A couple of presidents of the AFB ago, we invited the AFB to come to talk to the National Federation of the Blind during the time that I served in the presidency of the Federation. And I asked a question of the president, which I will reiterate with you, and he sat around on the stage awhile and after a time said he couldn't tell me right then what the answer was. And I said to him, the National Federation of the Blind has a right to know what the answer to that question is, and we will await your answer. He never did answer the question. And I never invited him back. And I thought it was fair.

So here's the question for you. The National Federation of the Blind opposes any established program or for that matter any program that authorizes payment of subminimum wages to blind workers.

[Cheers and applause]

What is the position of the American Foundation for the Blind on that topic?

 ERIC: That's an excellent question, and I can get you an answer very quickly. I do believe that there may have been some conversation about this just within the last three to four years. I have my own personal feelings on that, and... but organizationally I, Dr. Maurer, I can get you an answer.

I will... so President Riccobono, can I send you an answer this evening?

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Sure.

 ERIC: Thank you. I am not... so I am not... have been here three months. I have not been a part of board meetings where this would have been discussed. But I will absolutely get you an answer.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Fair enough.

[Applause]

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Thanks, Eric.

Thank you very much, Eric, and we take it on good faith that we are going to continue to work in this direction and we appreciate you coming and we hope that it presents an opportunity for the future.

[Applause]

 BENNETT: Do we do a door prize here

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: We look forward to the answer.

 BENNETT: Here it is with Kenya for virtual.

KENYA: Our prize, $50 for Gail Bryant of Missouri, Tony May of North Dakota, and Gene Mollett from Mississippi. If code phrase is "live the life you want." Please email prize@NFB.org .

 BENNETT: And for all in the room we have a nice prize here, a folding blanket that is in kind of a bag. And if you unfold that blanket, it will reveal two envelopes that will total money of 75 bucks!

The winner is Heather Kennedy McKenzie from Kentucky. Heather Kennedy McKenzie. Not here.

Susie Hernandez. New Mexico.

We found her, so... good luck!

We see her, but don't sit down.

We got it.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Okay. This is a good opportunity to mention ‑‑ and I did not ‑‑ with Eric here, because I thought it was a little soon, but this organization in 2020 passed a resolution inviting other agencies for the blind to sign a parity pledge committing themselves to work toward blind leadership and equity in blind leadership in their organizations. I think one thing that might be helpful for the foundation, but certainly for all agencies for the blind, we appreciate that the foundation has a blind executive director. But it would be great if their board was led by blind people as well. I know you will hear more about the pledge tomorrow. We ‑‑ because of the pandemic, we have not been emphasizing it, but I think it's time for agencies for the blind in this country to step up and get it done!

## Thousands of Voices Lift a Shared Agenda: A Report from the Federation’s Advocacy and Policy Department

And that is a great lead‑in into the next item, which is "Thousands of Voices." Thousands of voices lift a shared agenda. "A Report from Our Advocacy and Policy Staff Team." And we open this by recognizing that our staff are really just messengers for and the coordinators for what the true advocacy team out there, thousands of you strong make happen every day by being actively engaged in the policy agenda of blind Americans. And so these individuals have the responsibility of carrying out and helping to carry out the resolutions we pass, the priority for laws that we have set, and they are charged with advising the president and board on strategic direction for those things. The group works hard and they especially work hard to be rooted in what all of you are doing, and as I emphasized in the presidential report, because so much of what we can get done happens at the local level with moving state level legislation. They help to train and coordinate the work that you all are doing in the affiliates. I'll let our lead introduce the rest of the team. So here to present the advocacy and policy report is our executive director for advocacy and policy, John G. Paré.

[ Music playing ]

 JOHN: Thank you, President Riccobono. You know, if I ever get invited to another organizational convention and they ask me "How do you feel about 14c?" you know, the National Federation of the Blind, in case anyone is wondering, from another organization, and they were listening, we're going to say we have always been, we are now, and we will always be against subminimum wages for people with disabilities.

[Cheers and applause]

We're pretty clear on that.

All right. CNBC recently began promoting the tagline "Live Ambitiously." Their website includes a video where each of their anchors and newscasters describe how their ambition helped get them where they are today. I wonder how many people think about blind people when they think about living ambitiously. Do they think we dream about a good education, rewarding jobs, a welcoming home, and a family? Or are their expectations so low that they think we're happy just sitting at home fighting inaccessible websites, applications and technology?

The Cambridge dictionary defines ambition as a strong wish to accomplish something. That is exactly what I observe with the members of the National Federation of the Blind.

[Applause]

We are determined to live the lives we want, and we are willing to work as hard as necessary to ensure that every blind person has that opportunity.

This concept is not new for us In his 1956 speech "Within the Grace of God," Dr. TenBroek said, our access to the mainstream community life, the aspirations and achievements of each of us are to be limited only by our skills, energy, talents and abilities we individually bring to the opportunities.

Not only are we individually ambitious, bulb we, the whole of the National Federation of the Blind have collective ambition as well. One example is our efforts to pass laws and influence regulations that would improve opportunities and protect the civil rights of blind Americans. You will be hearing more about our specific bills in a few minutes.

On May 18th, Tony Coelho, father of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and Newt Gingrich, Speaker of the House from 1995 to 1999 published an article on website and software application accessibility. They said, "It's about time businesses embrace digital accessibility as a key brand imperative" and took ownership of the role that web and software design play in the employee and customer experience. People with disabilities should have universal access to technology even as innovations occur.

[Applause]

We could not agree more. We are working with Senator Duckworth and Representative Sarbanes is to get the Software and Website Applications Accessibility Act reintroduced in both the House and the Senate respectively.

[Applause]

Regarding ADA Title II and Title III website accessibility regulations, the Department of Justice announced that ADA Title II regulation was going to be released earlier this spring. And then they moved it to May. And then to June. And it's still not out. They also have been working on the ADA Title III regulation. In fact, they have been working on these regulations since 2010. 12 years is long enough. We demand that the Department of Justice release the ADA Title II and ADA Title III website accessibility regulations now!

[Cheers and applause]

By March 27th, Elizabeth Shoane, a member of the National Association of Blind Students, was traveling on JetBlue from Minneapolis to Boston. When she arrived at the airport, JetBlue employees refused to let her board her plane because she was traveling with a guide dog.

[ boos from audience ]

They said there was a problem with her paperwork but then refused to work with her to resolve the issue. JetBlue employees even mocked her when she took the initiative to call customer service.

Well, Elizabeth did not travel that day. She did not stop advocating for herself. She reported the problem to JetBlue and filed a complaint with the United States Department of Justice.

[Applause]

On April 27th, Elia Justin Young and I accompanied Elizabeth to United States Department of Transportation in Washington, D.C. to meet with Blaine Workey the Assistant General Counsel for the Office of Aviation Consumer Protection. Elizabeth told her story and re‑living each dramatic moment. As a result of Elizabeth and so many others that have reported airline discrimination, we now have the attention of the Department of Transportation.

[Applause]

Blind people traveling with guide dogs have the right to travel by air and we will do everything in our power to protect that right.

[Applause]

California SB581 is a bill that would dramatically impact our legal advocacy in that state. Tim Elder, the president of the National Federation of the Blind of California wrote the bill sponsor with our concerns and offered edits to rectify the issue. At the last minute, the state legislature scheduled a hearing on this and other bills.

We contacted Shannon Dylan who coordinates our California state‑level advocacy and asked her to attend and speak at the hearing. Shannon dropped everything she had planned and went to the state legislature for the morning hearing. After several hours, the hearing was adjourned until the evening. Shannon went home and then came back at 5:00 p.m. to learn that nearly 40 more bills would be discussed. She had to wait until 10:30 p.m. before offering her testimony. As a result of her perseverance and persuasive testimony, I am happy to report that California's SB581 has been suspended.

[Applause]

Scott White is responsible for NFB‑NEWSLINE service. NFB‑NEWSLINE is the largest and most effective newspaper and information service available to the blind anywhere in the world.

It is available via the telephone, the web, the NLS digital talking book player, the Victor reader stream, the Amazon Echo, and the iOS app. There are 577 publications and some portion of NFB‑NEWSLINE is accessed every 1.4 seconds. Recent editions include the Modesto Bee, Bismarck Journal, Hickory Daily Record, the Kyiv Independence and others.

If you have not already used NFB‑NEWSLINE, I urge you to sign up.

John steward is our manager of the Independence Market.

[Applause]

He, along with our organizational technology group is working hard to release our e‑commerce system.

In the meantime you can browse our catalog online or order items by calling our main number. We have over 400 items in our catalog, including white canes, Braille and audio watches, kitchen aids, measuring tools and games. We also have NFB logo hats, shirts and jackets. If you don't have any of our logo wear, check out our catalog.

United States Olympic gold medalist Jesse Owens once said, "We all have dreams, but in order to turn those dreams into reality, it takes an awful lot of determination, dedication, self‑discipline, and effort." Our dream is a world where blind people can live the lives we want as valued and respected members of society.

We will not let low expectations of blind people diminish our dream for an equal education. We will not let low expectations of blind people diminish our dream of employment and career advancement. We will not let low expectations diminish our ambition, when we encounter an inaccessible website, we will demand that it is fixed. When we encounter an inaccessible medical device, we will strengthen our advocacy, and when regulations hinder our opportunities, we will demand that they are changed. This work is not easy, but we are up to the task. Our resolve is steadfast. Our determination is relentless, and our ambition is strong. We will work together with love, hope and determination, and we will live the lives we want ambitiously!

[Cheers and applause]

 JOHN: All right, here to talk about some of our other things, along with what President Riccobono said, our team is everyone in this room, everyone listening, and everyone who is a member of the National Federation of the Blind. When it comes to advocacy, it's all of us. We certainly are helped by three great Government Affairs Specialists. The first one at one time was on the Hill, but now he's on our side of the table. Please welcome Jeff Kaloc!

[Applause]

 JEFF: It's good to be with everyone here in Houston. The fact that you are here at this convention, the largest gathering of blind people speaks volumes about what becoming a member of the National Federation of the Blind means by expressing our voices, contributing to the organized blind movement and making progress each and every day.

Houston is known for many things. The same can be said about the entire state of Texas. The saying goes that "Everything is bigger in Texas." Now that I have been here a few days, I have to agree. Let's take that sentiment in line with our goals: To aim big with our policy objectives.

The Access Technology Affordable Act, support has grown enormously since it was introduced several Congresses ago. With politics becoming more partisan, it's refreshing to forward a bill that is bipartisan.

[Applause]

Because accessibility isn't solely a Republican or Democratic policy. It's an American ideal.

The bipartisan support is evident in its reflection of cosponsors, and the 117th Congress, the bill had 165 House cosponsors and 40 cosponsors in the Senate. And the current Congress, the 118th Congress, the bill has been introduced by Representative Mike Kelly, a House Republican, with Representative Mike Thompson a Democrat as lead co‑sponsor. In the Senate the bill is sponsored by democratic Senator Ben Cardin and Senator John Bozeman as a Republican lead co‑sponsor.

The support for this bill has grown in other ways too. Its legislation is known by committee staff and recognized by congressional leadership. None of this progress would have been possible without our hard work and dedication to advocate for this legislation. Whether it be attending Washington Seminar, calling and writing your members of Congress, attending town halls and being active on social media, we made sure our voices were heard, and this bill has gotten the attention it deserved.

We understand the importance of addressing the high cost of access technology that places far too many blind people at disadvantage. Affordable access technology often is the determining factor to passing a class or a playing for a job opening. At it allows blind people to interact in the digital world that has now become a necessity for everyday life. That's why we must stay vigilant in our efforts by continuing to advocate until this legislation is passed into law.

None of the advocacy would be possible without the ability to cast a ballot. How can we feel that our ballots matter if it cannot be cast both privately and independently? That is why we at the National Federation of the Blind have be relentless in our efforts to ensure that whether you choose to go to the polls or remain at home, voting can and must be accessible for all blind Americans.

[Applause]

We need to continue to advocate for enhanced training at polling places. Poll workers need to be properly trained and equipped to operate ballot marking devices. We need to ensure that ballot marking devices are set up and fully operational from the beginning of election day. In addition, we also urge that more blind people become poll workers, thereby becoming involved in the election process.

Since the pandemic, remote voting has increased significantly. Countless states have allowed voters without disabilities to cast ballots from the safety and convenience of their homes. The same principles must be allowed for blind voters. Thirteen states permit accessible remote voting for the blind and print disabled by allowing blind voters to cast ballots through electronic ballot delivery return. These states have worked with security experts to ensure this process is both accessible and secure. Over 30 states have allowed for blind voters to request a ballot to be delivered electronically. While this helps in requesting and marking the ballot, the entire process is not accessible, as it requires us to still print, sign and return our ballots by mail.

We know there is a better way to provide security and accessibility because as mentioned previously, 13 states allow electronic ballot delivery and return. These policies are more important now than ever. We face new challenges that impede our path to accessible remote voting.

Relentless attempts from organizations entrenched with ill-advised policies have provided state legislatures and governor offices with misguided and non‑factual information about election security concerns regarding electronic ballot return.

Attempts cloaked in fear rather than expertise. The baseless attempts have caused havoc thereby stalling efforts to provide electronic ballot return in numerous states. But the National Federation of the Blind has never been known to back down from a fight.

[Applause]

That is why we are continuing efforts to educate lawmakers and state officials about that practice that can be put into place to ensure election security and enhance accessibility. Everything we have worked for is on the ballot in 2024, and we will continue to advocate until every blind voter in the United States can vote with the same ease of use as voters without disabilities.

[Applause]

 JOHN: Thanks, Jeff. Sometimes we like to refer to our next speaker frequently as the smartest guy on the government affairs group. He has an associate degree, a bachelor's degree, a master's degree, and a doctor of education. Please welcome Dr. Young!

 DR. YOUNG: The Merriam Webster dictionary defines progress as a forward or onward movement to an objective or a goal. Over the past year we have made progress in the areas of non‑visual access to medical devices, accessible prescription labels, and ending the payment of subminimum wages. On March 1st, 2023, Representative January Schakowski from Illinois along with 32 initial co‑sponsors introduced HR1328, the medical device non‑visual Accessibility Act. the bill authorizes the FDA to adopt non‑visual access standards for Class 2 and 3 medical devices with digital interfaces.

Some examples include continuous glucose monitors, insulin pumps and CPAP machines. By adopting these new non‑visual access standards, it would ensure that we are able to independently, safely and accessibly operate our medical devices. Between the months of March through May as a direct result of our hard work, we have gained an additional 16 cosponsors, bringing the current count to 48.

[Applause]

This is significant. Because for the 117th Congress, which was a two‑year cycle, we had a total of 65. I know we can and will meet and exceed that number in the 118th Congress.

[Applause]

We are working diligently to ensure there will be a companion bill in the Senate this Congress. Along with having access to medical devices, we must be able to independently and correctly identify prescription medicine. Several affiliates have done work to ensure that pharmacies are required to provide accessible prescription drug labels. In 2023, the states of Maryland and Hawaii passed laws mandating that prescription drug labels are non‑visually accessible.

Additionally the state boards of pharmacies in Washington and Florida are working on regulations to adopt guidelines for accessible prescription labels. Furthermore, Tennessee, which passed a law on accessible prescription labeling last year has begun the implementation process.

[Cheers and applause]

Along with making progress on accessible medical devices and prescription labeling, we are also making progress on eliminating the practice of subminimum wages. Both at the federal and state levels.

On February 27th and 28th, 2023, the Transformation to Competitive Integrated Employment Act was introduced in the United States Senate and House of Representatives respectively.

The Senate bill is S533 and the House bill is HR139 ‑‑ 1263.

This bill will phase out over a five‑year period. Section 14c of the Fair Labor Standards Act, ensuring that we are have the right for a fair wage.

It is time to eliminate this antiquated and discriminatory practice. In addition to the introduction of the Transformation to Competitive Integrated Employment Act, the Ability One Commission adopted a policy that went into effect on October 19th, 2022 which prohibits subminimum wages on Ability One contracts.

At the state level, there has also been progress on eliminating subminimum wages. On April 12th, 2023, the Virginia governor signed HB1924 which phases out subminimum wages completely by 2030, making it the 17th state to eliminate or limit the use of subminimum wages.

[Applause]

There have also been efforts in Minnesota, Illinois, and Kentucky to end subminimum wages over the past year.

It is time for us to earn a fair wage for the work that we perform. With the strong determination of the National Federation of the Blind, we will achieve our goal of living the lives that we want and be valued and respected members of society.

[Applause]

 JOHN: Thank you, Justin. All right, our third of the three Government Affairs Specialist is former president of the National Federation of the Blind of North Dakota and then was doing outreach on our NEWSLINE team, but now we have him doing trips to Washington, D.C. Here is Jesse Shirek.

 JESSE: My path to the national stage has been a journey of discovery, of risk and of reward. I have served in many capacities in the National Federation of the Blind, including serving on the National Scholarship Committee, and the NFB of North Dakota affiliate president. My dreams came true when I was invited to join the national staff in 2021. Advancing the NEWSLINE program, let me take you back to my first job, delivering newspapers in North Dakota. I was age 12. Yes, believe it or not, people used to deliver newspapers.

What do you think is the biggest struggle for a blind person delivering a newspaper? I bet you can't guess. Do you think it was the biting 30 below zero cold? Huh‑uh.

How about trying to keep your eyes open walking a mile at 5:00 a.m. every morning?

No, not it.

The hardest thing is coming home and watching your father read the newspaper that you just delivered. You ear separated by those pages, and you can't read the words on the page because you're blind.

As a young blind person, there were many things I thought out of my reach. Did not believe that I could hold a job at a restaurant, give a speech, graduate from a university, convince a congressman to co‑sponsor legislation. And I did not believe that I could downhill ski. But I have done all of these things, and many more. Each milestone...

[Applause]

Each milestone I conquered involved a risk, physical or emotional. I was terrified starting out. And in some cases, the first, the second time, I failed!

Let me tell you about learning how to downhill ski. This activity involves risk. In my case, more to other skiers than myself.

If you have never skied blind before, you are matched with another person, hopefully an advanced skier, to be your eyes and give you instructions like "Turn left." "Turn right." "Slow down." Stop... stop... stop!

When I started out, I skied the beginner hill for a half hour. I was feeling shaky and nervous. We went up the ski lift to the intermediate hill. What could possibly go wrong?

My first run. Gravity took over. I slid under the orange fence that was meant to keep me out of the trees. I got up, brushed the snow off, made my way down the hill.

I gave it a second try.

On the next run, my guide told me to turn left. I turned left. I sensed somebody in front of me and shifted right. I felt two bumps under my skis. I realized I just ran over somebody's skis. And I hit the ground. I sat there shocked. I then heard a familiar voice say, "What was that?"

Her ski guide, Dale, responded, "That would be your boyfriend."

My now wife, Sherry, in her infinite wisdom said to her guide, "Dale, you have to teach him to ski. This ski guide doesn't know what he's doing an he's going to kill somebody."

With Dale's good instructions, soon I was skiing from the top of the mountain.

[Applause]

Thank you.

With good instruction, soon I was skiing from the top of the mountain.

Sorry.

I share this story because I want to remind us there's no reward without risk. It's always important to get up when we crash. And most of all, be careful who we trust to guide us.

If we want to find success as a blind person, we need to look within our Federation family. Reach out. Ask for help. And be guided successfully down the mountain by a fellow Federationist.

[Applause]

Each person in this room guides government affairs as we ski our legislative priorities down the mountain. We share what issues are important to blind people. We share personal stories. Legislation is crafted. Based on the collective experience of our movement. And our leadership formulates a plan. By now you may have guessed that I have traversed my way from NFB‑NEWSLINE to government affairs. I have two major areas to move. Autonomous vehicle legislation and Social Security.

[Applause]

We will get the blind Americans return to work introduced into Congress. This legislation, as we know, affecting blind people who receive Social Security disability benefits.

Currently there's a limit to the amount of money that a blind person can earn each month before you completely lose benefits. This is called substantial gainful activity or SGA. We refer to this as the earnings cliff. Because we, as blind people, are harmed by the earnings cliff if we fall off.

For example, if a blind person receives $1,000 in disability benefits, you would lose $12,000 in earning potential. That's what it looks like to fall off the earnings cliff.

Blind people are limiting our opportunities because we don't want to fall off the earnings cliff.

Our movement wants to make working less risky for blind people.

[Applause]

We are asking the government to eliminate the earnings cliff.

[Applause]

We propose a two‑for‑one phase‑out.

For every two dollars of income that a blind person earns after SGA, you would give back $1 of benefits. We would gradually be moved down the hill to full employment without the need for benefits.

[Applause]

When this legislation is introduced, we'll hear about it through our many channels of communication. We will call on the organized blind movement to contact our congressman and senators, to ask them to co‑sponsor our legislation.

I want to encourage each of us... take some risks in our lives. Help the National Federation of the Blind with our advocacy efforts. We cannot expect the future to change unless we're willing to change our beliefs about question what is possible, try something new, push harder. We have a strong voice. Our voice matters. I challenge each of us... change our future. Push forward our priorities today.

Thank you.

[Cheers and applause]

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Thank you very much to our advocacy group here.

Now, as a supplement to this report, we invite many dignitaries to come to the convention, and, you know, we get a lot of people who turn us down for various reasons. We have a longstanding tradition of the president of the United States telling us that they can't come. One of these days, though... one of these days.

But because of some of the things that have ‑‑ that the team has discussed here, especially related to the airlines, we did have Secretary Buttigieg at our convention, one of our virtual conventions. He was not able to make it to this convention, but because of the issues we're having, specifically with the airlines, I told the Secretary's folks that we would accept a video from Secretary of Transportation, and in the video he responds specifically to a question that he was asked at the virtual convention and live by Raul, who is president of our Guide Dog Users Division. And he references a number of other things. So I think the video is worth giving to you. Here is Secretary Buttigieg.

[ captioned video playing ]

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: We appreciate the acknowledgment of the secretary. We know we have more work to do, but we are glad that leadership at the highest levels of the Department of Transportation are paying attention to our issues.

Bennett, do you have a door prize or should we go to a fit break?

 BENNETT: I'm going to introduce Kenya Flores to again do her debut in‑person one.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Oh, the suspense. Kenya has a lot of new friends all of a sudden.

KENYA: I sure do. So this next door prize is a certificate for computers for the blind and safety positive foundation fundamentals. And this goes to Syd Moon of Louisiana!

Are you here?

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Okay, how about a fit break?

 SPEAKER: You know, you can't go to Texas without doing a little square dancing. We've got to get all the kinds of dancing in that you would do in Texas, right?

So we're going to stand up, and we're going to use modified ‑‑‑this is Jessica modified square dancing version.

So we're going to march in place. It's going to be our base move.

[ Music playing ]

Different fit break than I was expecting. So we're going to jog.

All right. Stretch our arms to the sky. Right. And left.

Shrug your shoulders. Keep jogging in place. Step right, step left, step right, step left, step right, step left.

Now back to the jog. Let's run away. Yeah!

All right!

Wave those arms in the way. Wiggle those fingers. Now if it feels good for you, take a stretch down to your toes.

Good job, guys. Sorry I lied about the square dancing.

[chuckles]

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Okay, I would like to go to Ryan for the PAC plan.

 SPEAKER: I got a mic. How is it going, my pack? Everybody feeling loose? All right, I'm going to give you some updates and then I'm going to give away more prizes. First of all, I want to throw out thanks to Nebraska and to Maryland for donating some additional prizes.

And I want to tell you about the changes in some of these things. So pachyderm Delaware is running away with 38% and Kentucky right behind at 28%, and Nevada at 19. So get out and increase those percentages. The pachyderm, I want to tell you we actually have 16 people, which is more than any other division of people who said, "Oh, shoot, I can't think of a division." So if you want some of those 16 votes, you have to go start lobbying those people. But the seniors are absolutely smokin', y'all, with 15. NAGDU is at 8. And parents are at 7. So we're going to need to get some activity going on there. Now, for the Pac Rats, the leading affiliates are tied with 88 apiece.

With eight a piece, and that is Colorado. I said you're tied. I didn't say you're winning. And Minnesota, this is our house, we have to defend it.

Maryland, six. Alabama 5. So before I give away prizes, remember to come to the back of the room. We're going to do drawings for all of the people who contributed in the session. We'll do drawings tomorrow morning. Also if you start a new pledge or increase your pledge you will be put in the drawings for $250 gift card tomorrow at the banquet. So go to the PAC Plan table between doors A and B behind the international section.

Here are the six winners from this morning's session.

Number one... Steve N. Shannon from South Carolina.

Number two... Jan Bailey from Minnesota.

Number three... Jason ‑‑ I think this is pronounced "Eien" from Arizona. You know how to pronounce it.

Number four... Eileen Gallegos from Colorado.

Number five... Katrina Towns from Pennsylvania.

And number six... the Mile High Chapter from Colorado. That, my Federation community is my report for this afternoon.

[ video game tones/music playing ]

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Okay, thank you to the PAC team. We are now going to move to the consideration of our resolutions.

So a couple of notes. First of all, a reminder that the microphones are in the same location as two days ago at Indiana, Maryland, New York and Texas. And if you wish to speak on a resolution, they're all posted to the web. You should know when it's coming up. We won't have a lot of time to wait for you to get to a microphone. When you get to a microphone, if you wish to be acknowledged, I will ask for your name. I'm very well aware of mine. So if you could give us your name, that would be great. And we won't pile on. So if there is 100 people that want to say they're for a resolution, we love you, we would love to hear what you have to say. But we can't spend all day on resolutions. Now, I didn't talk with the chairman about this, but I wanted to see how the convention feels about it.

In recent years, a number of years now, behave only read the resolves of the resolution unless there is going to be discussion and debate. We read the whole resolution. Do you still agree with that approach?

[ audience responds ]

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: I heard some "yes." Is there a "no"? Okay, seems like people agree.

Obviously we will read the whereases, in all cases where we need though, but since the resolve is the action, that is important part. Here to guide us through the presentation of the resolutions from the committee, the committee considered the resolution us and will now present to us the resolutions it has passed and now owns for the convention is our chairman in his first year as chair of the resolutions committee, from Arizona, here is Donald Porterfield!

[Applause]

 DONALD: Thank you, Mr. President. We have 16 resolutions that will be presented to the convention for vote this afternoon. So starting with Resolution 2023‑21 regarding the promulgation of Americans with disabilities website ‑‑ excuse me, give me a second.

Be it resolved by National Federation of the Blind and convention assembled this day of July 20, city of Houston this organization demand the United States department of justice immediately release the previously announced ADA Title II website accessibility NPRM and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this organization

demand the United States Department of

Justice immediately begin the process of

promulgating the ADA Title III website

accessibility NPRM.

 SPEAKER: The committee recommends do pass.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Is there any discussion?

 SPEAKER: Yes.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: You are?

 SPEAKER: Yes, I am... Sailor from Texas.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Are you for or against the resolution?

 SPEAKER: I'm for it, however, I'm just confused, because I wrote a resolution similar to this one last year. I wonder why it was introduced again. It's very similar.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: I can't answer the question. We can only consider the resolution that is in front of us. So you said you're for it? Good to know. Thank you very much.

Is there any other discussion?

 SPEAKER: Mr. President, Denise.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: For or against it?

 SPEAKER: For.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Okay.

 SPEAKER: Good afternoon, fellow Federationists. In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed. It required under Title II that public entities would be accessible to people with disabilities. It also required that places of public accommodations would be accessible to people with disabilities. Now, today we use the Internet to perform critical parts of our lives. We use the Internet to sign up for government benefits. We use the Internet to do our grocery shopping, to do our banking, to take care of our healthcare needs. But if you are a screen reader user, there is nothing like going to a website and finding accessibility barriers that really slow you down in terms of accessing any kind of services. And there is nothing like facing usability challenges. Sometimes it can be so bad that you have to have a sighted person helm you, thereby violating your right to keep things privately and your ability to operate your own life privately and independently. Now, the Department of Justice recognizes that Title II and Title III applies to the Internet. The problem is that, although it has promised to do so on several occasions, it has not issued the regulation for website accessibility. In 2010 there was an Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, nothing was done. In 2017, the notice was rescinded. Then last fall, in the Department of Justice promised that by the spring it would issue a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking with regard to Title II only. But that has not been done. We are tired of being frustrated by inaccessible websites, by websites that are barely usable. Businesses are tired, because they want to include blind people as part of their business model.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Denise, I'm going to ask you to step on it, because we somewhere a lot of resolutions.

 SPEAKER: But nay don't know what accessibility means. Therefore we demand today, right now, that the Department of Justice issue the Title II Notice of Proposed Rulemaking that it promised last fall and that it start the process of issuing the Title III Notice of Proposed Rulemaking. Thank you, Mr. President.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Is there anybody that wishes to speak against this resolution?

Okay, I've heard a call for the question. All those in favor say aye.

[ ayes respond ]

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Opposed say no.

The resolution passes.

 DONALD: Resolution 2023‑02 regarding the preservation of the vocational rehabilitation system in the United States through the liberalization governing federal expenditures.

 SPEAKER: Be it resolved by the National Federation of the Blind a convention assembled on the 5th day of July 2023 in the city of Houston, Texas, that this organization call upon the Rehabilitation Services Administration the council of state administrators of vocational rehabilitation and national council of state agencies for the blind to join together to develop policies that may be relied on to support state VR agencies to spend their federal VR grant resources responsibly and consistently.

 SPEAKER: Mr. President, the resolutions committee recommends do pass.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Let me see if there's been moved and seconded. All those in favor say aye.

[ ayes respond ]

Opposed say no.

The resolution passes.

I could suggest to our readers that all of the resolutions will be passed ‑‑ well, so far, on this date in Texas, so that we could skip the part of the results if you felt a mind to.

 DONALD: Resolution 2023‑03 regarding the accessibility of Twitter.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this organization

demand that Twitter build back its commitment

to creating more inclusive experiences by

prioritizing accessibility.

Resolution 2023‑04: Regarding the Opposition

 SPEAKER: Mr. President, the committee recommends do pass. Moved and seconded. Is there any discussion?

[ ayes respond ]

Opposed say no.

I believe the ayes have it.

The resolution passes.

Resolution 2023‑04: Regarding the Opposition

of the Brennan Center for Justice, Common

Cause, and Free Speech for People to Fully

Accessible Vote‑By‑Mail

print disabilities, privately, \* and

independently, and to amend their position on

fully accessible vote by mail to reflect the

actual security status of the

state‑of‑the‑art systems currently in use,

and to reflect the requirements of Title II

of the ADA.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: The committee recommends do pass.

Moved and seconded to pass the resolution. Is there any discussion?

Hearing none, all those in favor say aye.

[ ayes respond ]

Opposed say no.

The resolution passes.

Door prizes over there, Bennett?

 BENNETT: We have a great door prize. One‑year complimentary subscription to book share and 50 bucks.

And that goes to...

Keith Carol of Virginia.

Are you here?

Keith Carol.

Jeffrey Collins of Mississippi.

Jeffrey Collins.

We see him, he's here.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: I have a quick announcement that says Megan Benning was a brilliant young blind woman who loved technology. We lost her too soon. In loving memory, our parents division established a fund to provide free technology to blind children. That's to blind children. All the adults sit down. It's for blind children.

[chuckles]

But you can support this project by donating $5 for a pair of angel wings. You can see Carol Castellano in the New Jersey delegation to get your angel wings and support the Megan Benning Technology Fund. I have my angel wings already. I encourage you to get yours. Back to you, Donald.

Resolution 2023‑05: Regarding Audio Delays

During Live Radio Play‑by‑Play Broadcasts

 SPEAKER: Be it resolved that we urge all of the professional sports organizations in the United States including but not limited to major league baseball, National Football League, national basketball association and National Hockey League to develop policies standards and best practices collaboration with the National Federation of the Blind with their franchises, broadcast partners to eliminate audio delays during live play‑by‑play broadcast.

 SPEAKER: Committee recommends do pass.

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

I'll delay for a second here to see.

Okay, nobody is at a microphone, so all those in favor say aye.

[ ayes respond ]

Opposed say no.

Okay, the ayes have it. The resolution is adopted.

Resolution 2023‑06: Regarding the Enforcement

of Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of

1973

 SPEAKER: Be it resolved that this organization demand federal agencies immediately seize the development purchase maintenance or use of I inaccessible information and communication technology as well as the publication of inaccessible website content and PDFs. And be it further resolved that this organization demand federal agencies develop and publish a roadmap by July 5, 2024, to remediate all Section 508 violations and be it further resolved that the organization demand the United States Department of Justice publish the next accessibility report no later than January 2025 and every two years thereafter, and be it further resolved that this organization urge Congress to introduce and adopt legislation that gives the Access Board and EEOC the authority to enforce Section 508 and hold federal agencies accountable that fail to make their ECT 508 compliant. And be it further resolved that this organization strongly urge that Congress and executive branch federal agencies adopt the recommendations in the December 1, 2022, report of the Senate Committee on Aging, and be it further resolved that this organization commend Senator Bob Casey of Pennsylvania and Tim Scott of South Carolina for leading a bipartisan effort to demand the Department of Justice publish the Section 508 report and improve Section 508 across the federal government.

 SPEAKER: The committee recommends do pass.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Moved and seconded to pass the resolution. Is there any discussion?

[ ayes respond ]

Resolution passes.

 SPEAKER: resolution 2023‑07 regarding text formatting and realtime refreshable Braille.

 SPEAKER: Be it resolved that this organization call upon developers of screen reader technology to prioritize the implementation of displaying the Braille indicators for boldface, italics and underline and other attributes with assigned Braille indicators wherever these attributes appear in print so that the user can show or hide the indicators as preferred.

 DONALD: The committee rec mends do pass.

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

Hearing none, all in favor say aye.

[ ayes respond ]

Opposed say no.

The resolution passes.

 DONALD: resolution 2023‑08 regarding the Transportation Security Administration.

 SPEAKER: Be it resolved that this organization demand that the Transportation Security Administration adopt proper training on dealing with blind passengers. Including how to handle long white canes, guide dogs, assistive technology products as well as respectfully asking blind people if they would like assistance to be consistently used at all airports while interacting with blind travelers and be it further resolved that this organization demand that the training be developed in direct consultation with the National Federation of the Blind, thereby ensuring best accommodate blind travelers’ needs.

 DONALD: The committee recommends do pass.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Moved and seconded. Is there any discussion on the resolution?

All in favor say aye.

[ ayes respond ]

Opposed say "no."

The resolution passes.

 BENNETT: Another door prize? Here is Kenya.

KENYA: All righty, we are giving away another certificate for computers for the blind, and $25. This goes to Jordan Devereaux of Indiana.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: What was the name again?

SPEAKER: What about Desmond Bullard of Oregon?

He's here. Thank you.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Okay. We good?

Over to you, Donald.

Accessibility of Training Administered by the

American Red Cross.

Be it resolved

that this organization strongly urge the

American Red Cross to take meaningful steps

to make all training programs and services

accessible to the blind and print‑disabled;

and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that we call upon the

American Red Cross to seek the input and

partnership of blind consumers, notably the

National Federation of the Blind, in its

efforts to obtain and maintain accessibility.

 DONALD: The committee recommends do pass.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Moved and seconded to pass the resolution. Is there any discussion?

Hearing none, all those in favor say aye.

[ ayes respond ]

Opposed say "no."

The resolution passes.

Resolution 2023‑10: Regarding Opposing the

Revival of Eugenics for the Blind

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Mr. Chairman, we have had a request to read the whereases.

 SPEAKER: This resolution addresses suicide.

Suicidal thoughts or actions (even in very

young children, older adults, and people with

life‑threatening illness/disability) are a

manifestation of extreme distress and should

not be ignored. If you or someone you know

needs immediate help, call or text the

Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at 988.

WHEREAS, people faced with vision loss often

go through an initial period of depression,

sometimes including suicidal feelings, that

are actually calls for help in living with

blindness, coping with depression, dealing

with anxiety about the future, managing

grief, identifying ways to avoid inadequate

care options, and learning independence as a

blind person; and

WHEREAS, some people who become blind

encounter lack of control, fear, and

spiritual despair; and

WHEREAS, for most people who express suicidal

desires, public agencies operate a network of

services from public health, medical, and

legal agencies to prevent medical

professionals, caregivers, and family members

from taking advantage of or encouraging a

person's impulse for self‑harm or suicide;

and

WHEREAS, people with disabilities are

sometimes denied access to this protective

network of services based solely on a

doctor's "good faith" diagnosis of terminal

disability, where terminal disability

describes a medical condition that some

doctors would describe as an incurable and

irreversible disease that has been medically

confirmed and will, within reasonable medical

judgment, result in death within six

months‑with or without medical care; and

WHEREAS, far too many people consider a loss

of sight as a dying, as evident from the

opinion of one professional: "When, in the

full current of his sighted life, blindness

comes on a man, it is the end, the death, of

that sighted life. It is superficial, if not

naive, to think of blindness as a blow to the

eyes only, to sight only. It is a destructive

blow to the self‑image of a man…a blow almost

to his being itself." Father Thomas J.

Carroll, founder and director of St. Paul's

Rehabilitation Center for the Blind; and

WHEREAS, under the guise of "mercy" and

"dignity" in dying, nine U.S. states and the

District of Columbia have passed laws

legalizing physician‑assisted suicide, which

is a revival of old eugenic ideologies that

steer people with terminal disabilities away

from necessary mental health care, medical

care, and disability supports, and toward

death by suicide; and

WHEREAS, this misguided concept of mercy and

dignity creates a two‑tiered medical system

in which people who are suicidal sometimes

receive disparate treatment responses from

their physicians and varying levels of

protection from the state; and

WHEREAS, people without disabilities are

encouraged in response to suicidal desires to

seek counseling, medical care, and other

protective supports; and

WHEREAS, those with disabilities are regarded

as facing lives of incapacity and despair

that are not worth living, and thus directed

toward suicide itself; and

WHEREAS, people who are newly blinded often

seek information from the medical profession,

and they encounter doctors who, although they

have much experience in curing ailments, have

essentially none in managing the disability

of blindness; and

WHEREAS, these doctors sometimes conclude

that they could not possibly function in

society without sight and therefore

mistakenly believe that their patients who

are blind must face irreparable incapacity

and irreversible sorrow from an incurable

condition that can never be reversed, making

the lives of these patients no longer of any

value; and

WHEREAS, a number of groups without knowledge

of disability have decided to persuade state

legislatures that physician‑assisted suicide

is a benefit to people with disabilities,

which has led to the adoption of assisted

suicide legislation in a number of states;

and

WHEREAS, such groups argue that to permit

people with disabilities to escape the

dreadful conditions of their lives is the

kindest thing that society can do; and

WHEREAS, it becomes clear to legislative

committees that assisting people with

disabilities to achieve suicide preserves

scarce resources available to the medical and

social services communities‑suicide is

cheaper than providing service; and

WHEREAS, in direct contrast to this flawed

perception, the National Federation of the

Blind, in the words of its founder Dr.

Jacobus tenBroek, recognizes that "…the blind

as a group are mentally competent,

psychologically stable, and socially

adaptable. And that their needs are,

therefore, those of ordinary people, of

normal men and women, caught at a physical

and social disadvantage. This thesis affirms

the capacity of the blind for self‑reliance

and self‑determination, for full

participation in the affairs of society and

active competition in the regular channels of

democratic opportunity."; and

WHEREAS, the National Federation of the Blind

asserts that laws legalizing

physician‑assisted suicide violate the Equal

Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment

by treating people with terminal disabilities

differently as compared to everyone else who

expresses a wish to die to their medical

doctor and fails to include sufficient

safeguards to ensure that a

judgment‑impaired, or unduly influenced

person does not receive and/or ingest lethal

physician‑assisted suicide drugs without

adequate due process in waiving their

fundamental right to live; and

WHEREAS, the National Federation of the Blind

knows that blindness is not the

characteristic that defines you or your

future and encourages and supports those

individuals faced with vision loss

contemplating suicide, their families, and

friends to come to an understanding that

blind people live full and productive lives,

adding value to society: Now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED by the National Federation of

the Blind in Convention assembled this fifth

day of July 2023, in the City of Houston,

Texas, that we categorically oppose assisted

suicide and euthanasia public policy for

people with disabilities as inherently

discriminatory violations of the Americans

with Disabilities Act Section 504 of the

Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Equal

Protection and Due Process Clauses of the

Fourteenth Amendment of the United States

Constitution; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this organization

call upon the United States Department of

Justice to enforce the protections for people

with disabilities granted under the Equal

Protection and Due Process Clauses of the

Fourteenth Amendment of the United States

Constitution, the Americans with Disabilities

Act, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation

Act of 1973 to assure that disabled people,

including people who are blind, have access

to adequate services from medical

professionals, social service personnel, and

law enforcement agencies to prevent

fast‑track assignment to suicide; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that we demand that

State medical, social service, and

rehabilitation agencies immediately desist in

supporting assisted suicide and instead

provide supportive services to affirm the

value of the lives of people with

disabilities; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that nothing in this

resolution shall be construed in a manner

that limits the autonomy of any blind or

disabled person with the capacity to make

their own medical decisions in considering

and exercising end‑of‑life choices.

 DONALD: The committee recommends do pass.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Moved and seconded. Is there any discussion?

 SPEAKER: Yes, sir.

[ overlapping voices ]

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: I heard Jordan Moon and Dominique Lawless and Dominique Bacon. Jordan, for or against?

 SPEAKER: Against.

So I am a journalism graduate. I have a degree in journalism. And in the title of this resolution is the word "eugenics." Eugenics is the study of how to arrange reproduction within a human population to increase the occurrence of heritable characteristics regarded as desirable, developed largely by Sir Francis Galton as a method of improving the human race, eugenics was increasingly discredited as unscientificcal and racially biased. During the 20th Century, especially after the adoption of its doctrine by the Nazis in order to justify the treatment of Jews, the disabled, and other minority groups. So today is my birthday.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Happy birthday!

 SPEAKER: Thank you. And I'm not saying that to get applause, although I appreciate it. I'm saying it because it's the perfect opportunity for me top really think about and appreciate life. And I appreciate the sentiment of this resolution to ensure that blind people have all aspects of control, and the beginning and the end of their life.

But this resolution tries to deal with euthanasia. It lays out that blindness, rightfully so, obviously, is not a terminal disease. And it does encourage, as it should, psychologists and medical practitioners to embrace the positive philosophy of the Federation.

However, as many of y'all know, you go to a doctor for your foot and they might ask you about your eyes. Nay are ignorant. But ignorance is not eugenics.

[Applause]

We cannot pass this resolution, because it won't be clear on exactly where we stand. Although the intent is there, understand that there are different situations for different populations, and we need to be clear on what our stance is from a blindness perspective. It mentions other disabilities, and I understand the sentiment and, you know, the negative connotations that are there, but understand that we are a blindness consumer organization. So please vote "no" so we can go back to the drawing board to be clear on what actionable outcomes we are trying to achieve, so that anybody who is blind knows that there is a better option other than to end their life because there are organizations like us, the National Federation of the Blind.

[Cheers and applause]

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Thank you very much, Jordan.

So, let me see. Dominique, were you for or against?

 SPEAKER: Opposed and I'll be brief.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: No, we had one against. I'm going to try to take them alternating.  So Everett, for or against?

>> EVERETT: I am for.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: I will take Everett and then Dominique.

EVERETT: I'm going to get more into why I am for the resolution, and I'm going to bring in kind of a Hollywood theme to it. A few years ago ‑‑ I don't remember exactly when, maybe 10 ‑‑ but there was a movie that was widely popular, widely accepted, won the Academy Award called "Million Dollar Baby." Clint Eastwood and Hillary Swank was in it. The end of the movie, the main character, who was a boxer, gets a traumatic brain injury in the ring, and is now completely paralyzed, and also then would be confined to a feeding tube and not able to ‑‑ whatever they called have a quality of life. The movie portrayed that in a real positive manner that her quality of life would be impossible to have. It never mentioned once that there could be a quality of life or there could be something that she could enjoy in life or strive to be. It just mainly ended on this theme that her life for all intents and purposes is over. And then, of course, at the end, her friend helps her commit suicide and die.

The problem with that is we look top Stephen Hawking, who had a terminal disease that would eventually take his life. But if we would have used that Hollywood philosophy, that quality of life would have been over, we wouldn't have that Stephen Hawking, we wouldn't have things like that and people like that. So I really support this resolution and the intent behind it, because I think it's something we need to look at. As an organization, and then I'll mention one other thing. There was a country, not the United States, obviously there were two blind women, they were twins and they found out they were going to have blindness, late 60s, early 70s, I don't have the exact age, but they honestly thought their life was now over and the government that the country that they were in agreed and because assisted suicide was legal there, they were allowed to do just that. And I don't think we need to go there, and I think we need to be very open and forward on this kind of conversation.

Thank you.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Thank you, Everett. Okay, Dominique is against. Go ahead.

DOMINIQUE: Yes, sir, I think that we have to set aside our individual beliefs about assisted suicide, and I think we have to examine the fact that there is a conflation in this resolution between assisted suicide, eugenics and euthanasia. Those are all very different things. I don't think this is specifically a blindness issue. Although I can respect the intent behind the resolution. I think that in the National Federation of the Blind, since my 20+ years in the organization, we have not been known for dictating what someone can or cannot do with their bodies.

[Applause]

Everyone in this room shows we are thriving and succeeding as blind people and proving that blindness is not a terminal illness. If we vote yes on this, it will divide us and it will be very bad business for our organization.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: I know the original proponent, Anil Lewis is at the microphone. I assume he's still for it. So I call on Anil.

 ANIL: Thank you. I know this is a difficult topic, as I expressed at the resolutions committee meeting, it came up in the conversation with an attorney who is doing some litigation around this issue, and I'll be honest with you, because I'm a member of the National Federation of the Blind and have been so for so long, I had completely forgotten that when I lost my sight in 1989, I contemplated suicide. And that's not unique to me. There have been others that have come to me during this convention that have echoed the same sentiment. I do want to caution us ‑‑ well, let me clarify that I'll caution us, the resolution speaks to eugenics as a relationship to the ideology of eugenics. And if you don't believe that the ideology of eugenics, that we have no value, that's why our lives should be forfeited, it's not the underpinning of this issue, then you're missing something. It doesn't say it's for or against eugenics. It's just that we recognize this is a reawakening of that ideology.

The other piece is, I was very careful in crafting, because it is a very sensitive issue, making sure there was no language that stated we were for or against assisted suicide.

The resolution speaks to the systems that are in place that for everyone without a disability gives them full information and services to allow them to continue to value the life that they have.

The resolution speaks to the fact that because people feel we don't have value that we're not afforded those same services, interventions, and that's true.

The other piece that I echo is that in respect for individuals who ‑‑ well, one piece, and I'll go to that.

The issue of the definition of the terminal illness. Someone questioned me on that. Well, we know blindness is not going to result in death in six months or less. Well, yes, we know that. But you're fooling yourself that there are a lot of medical professionals out there and even social workers who echo the same sentiment. That's just not true. They feel that death is a dying.

And the last piece I will offer is, if the services were in place ‑‑ and I also didn't want to write a play‑by‑playbook on how to write laws that really allowed for, you know, euthanasia. That wasn't what my goal was. But if systems are put in place, and if the individual that is contemplating death by suicide has gotten the same intervention, support, and hopefully has come to know the National Federation of the Blind, and they still choose to make that decision, it's their decision to make. I do say pay attention to the last resolve, which makes that very clear.

The last thing I will echo is, please, let's not let the fact that we, who know the Federation, who in all honestly are a significantly small percentage of the blind people this is going to impact, not let this resolution pass and have the majority of blind people who have not yet gotten to know us, make this awful decision thinking that their life has no value because of their blindness.

[Applause]

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Okay, I know there's a long line. We heard from two people against and two people for. Let me just get a sense of the room. Are you ready to vote?

AUDIENCE member: No! No!

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Okay, I will ‑‑ and I'm watching the clock. So I'm making sure we get equal time. I will give one more minute to someone against and one more minute for.

 SPEAKER: Daniel son.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: And then we're going to vote. Chris, for or against?

 SPEAKER: I'm against, sir.

 SPEAKER: [indiscernible]

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: I will take Chris and then Sarah, and then we will attempt a vote. Go ahead, Chris.

CHRIS: My friends, I am very reluctant to oppose this resolution because people whom I love and respect support it, and I know that. And if it truly only said the things that my friend Anil says that it does, then I would wholeheartedly support it. But it doesn't.

[Applause]

It accuses legislators who support death and dignity laws or assisted suicide laws, whatever you want to call it, of wanting to save money by killing us. That is not a statement that is going to win us any allies. It says that assisted suicide laws violate the 14th amendment of the constitution. That is a position that if we take it, requires that we demand the repeal of existing suicide laws and that we oppose new ones, instead of just asking for safeguards. I absolutely agree that there should be no question that blindness is not a disability where, based on it alone, people should be candidates for assisted suicide. But this resolution needs to say that and nothing less and nothing more. Please vote against it.

[Cheers and applause]

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Sarah, go ahead.

SARAH: So the human services division, I do want to say this is a very complicated issue, and we recognize that, and everyone does have a choice to make the decision they think is best for them. And although some think it might be a little harmful or might could lead a harmful way, I do recognize that from the people who have spoken before me. I do think that this does have potential, especially if the human services division is walking alongside board members to make sure no harm is done and that this resolution is going to be helpful and does educate in the best way possible, and so I do hope that the human services division, if passed, is able to work alongside. Thank you.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Okay. Thank you.

[ chanting in audience ]

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: We're going to get there. Okay, I got it... I got it. (chuckling)

Okay, so a couple of reminders. We're going to take a vote. The vote is not based on volume. So that's number one.

Number 2, if it's not clear, we're going to move to our delegates. I would urge the delegates to be ready.

[chuckles]

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

[ ayes respond ]

All those opposed to the resolution say "no."

[ no's respond ]

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Well, I believe the resolution fails.

[Cheers and applause]

And thank you to everybody for a spirited and cordial debate.

While we're getting things together up here, I don't know if we're going to have a door prize or another resolution, but I want to let you know some good news. It's taken a little bit of effort, but the convention center has agreed to leave the doors open so you can use the skybridge this evening. this evening until 11:00 p.m. But tomorrow it will be open until midnight.

 BENNETT: We got to have a door prize for that.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: There ya go.

 BENNETT: They might want to take one of these blankets home with them across the skybridge. We have one of these folding blankets and 25 bucks. And the winner is... Pamela Rinemacher from Nebraska. Oh, she's right there. Nebraska. We got her.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: All right, Mr. Chairman, back to you.

Resolution 2023‑11: Regarding the Nonvisual 1 Accessibility of hearing aids.

 SPEAKER: Be it resolved this organization call upon all hearing care professionals, marketers and manufacturers to work with the National Federation of the Blind and deafblind individuals can incorporate independent management of their own hearing aid and assistive listening device profiles and be it further resolved that the organization urge the Food and Drug Administration to require that all hearing aids be accessible to blind and deafblind people.

 DONALD: The committee recommends do pass.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Moved and seconded to pass the resolution. Is there any discussion?

I can tell you the aisles cleared quickly. All those in favor say aye.

[ ayes respond ]

Opposed say no.

The resolution passes.

I'm going to pause to recognize Catherine Webster.

CATHERINE: Hi, everyone! Good afternoon. The power of democracy in this room is so awesome. Patti Chang and I made a bet a few minutes ago. We're at 382 contributors to Give 20 right now, and Patty thinks we can go over 400. I'm not sure about this crowd. I encourage you to make sure Patty wins this bet. Give back to the Give 20 table, and help us get 400 contributors today. Thank you, President Riccobono.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Great time to Give 20 so we can do the work we need to do. Back to you, Mr. Chairman.

Resolution 2023‑12: Regarding Expediting the

Plan to Achieve Self‑Support Processing

 SPEAKER: Be it resolved that this organization urge the Social Security Administration to issue rulemaking procedures that will delegate authority to state vocational rehabilitation agencies to approve individual plans to receive self‑support.

 DONALD: The committee recommends do pass.

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

Hearing none, all those in favor say aye.

[ ayes respond ]

Opposed say "no."

The ayes have it. The resolution passes.

Resolution 2023‑13: Regarding Artificial

Intelligence Chatbots and their Information Regarding blindness.

 SPEAKER: Be it resolved that we urge the creators of Chat GPT barred and any future chatbots that may be developed to work with the National Federation of the Blind to build their chatbots in a way that ensures the provision of accurate non‑stereotypical information about blindness and blind individuals and be it further resolved that we call upon the creators of these chatbots to collaborate with the National Federation of the Blind to develop and implement best practices for ensuring that their technology is accessible and inclusive for all blind and low vision people and that their best practices should include the use of blind and low vision people in the development and testing of their chatbots.

 DONALD: The committee recommends do pass.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Moved and seconded to pass the resolution. Is there any discussion?

Hearing none, all those in favor say aye.

[ ayes respond ]

Opposed say "no."

The ayes have it. The resolution passes.

Resolution 2023‑14: Regarding the Schedule A

Hiring Authority for Individuals with

Disabilities

 SPEAKER: Be it resolved that this organization emphatically urge the Office of Personnel Management to provide federal agencies with clear instructions concerning the non‑applicability of 5 CFR 302 to the schedule A hiring authority for individuals with disabilities and direct agencies to reinstate non‑competitive hiring procedures for applicants with disabilities. And be it further resolved that this organization urge OPM to update the schedule A hiring authority for individuals with disabilities regulations to reduce the trial period to one year for new hires and eliminate entirely for promotions and transfers consistent with competitive hiring principles.

And be it further resolved that this organization commend the Biden administration for elevating accessibility, including the schedule A hiring authority for individuals with disabilities. And be it further resolved that this organization urge OPM to promulgate updated regulations to implement the schedule A hiring authority for individuals with disabilities that update and modernize the authority consistent with the federal government school of being the model employer of individuals with disabilities and include stakeholders with disabilities, including the National Federation of the Blind in that effort.

 DONALD: The committee recommends do pass.

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

Hearing none, all those in favor say aye.

[ ayes respond ]

Opposed say "no."

The ayes have it. The resolution passes.

Resolution 2023‑15: Regarding the

Inaccessibility of C‑SPAN's Coverage of

Congressional Votes

 SPEAKER: Be it resolved that we urge C‑SPAN to audibly update viewers as votes progress every few minutes and be it further resolved that this organization urges other services that offer coverage of state and federal legislatures and government proceedings to add an accessible mechanism for following vote tallies and other pertinent information that is readily displayed on the screen for viewers at home.

 DONALD: The committee recommends do pass.

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

I will audibly describe that there is no one at the microphones. So all in favor say aye.

[ ayes respond ]

Opposed say no.

The ayes have it. The resolution passes.

 DONALD: Mr. President, before we read the last resolution, once again, I would like to give thanks to the resolutions committee for their diligent work on these resolutions, as well as the proponents who submitted them. In addition, I would like to thank our readers, Ms. Patricia Smith and Ms. Jennifer Dunn ham, for reading the resolutions here today.

[Applause]

 SPEAKER: Urge member agencies and administrators to accept certifications issued by the national blindness professional certification board, NBPCB and treat them equally to their counterpart certifications issued by the Academy for certification vision rehabilitation and education professionals, ACVREP and to require contractors to accept NBPCB certifications wherever they accept ACVREP certifications.

 DONALD: The committee recommends do pass.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Moved and seconded to pass the resolution. Is there discussion?

Hearing none, all those in favor say aye.

[ ayes respond ]

Opposed say no.

The resolution passes.

I would like to echo the appreciation of the committee and of our chairman in his first year, thank you very much.

And appreciate the support of our committee readers, Jennifer Dunham and Patricia Miller. Also a number of other people helped prepare the resolutions as they were going up on the web. Kyle Walls, John Pare. So our resolutions page will be updated. Those resolutions that passed will be updated on the web as final, and those that did not will be deleted, and they will be available at NFB.org /resolutions. Great job to the Federation. And this is one more opportunity to send a get‑well wish to Sharon Maneki.

[Cheers and applause]

The last I heard, Sharon is at home. She said she doesn't have a full tank of energy yet, but she'll get there I'm sure.

We need some door prizes.

 BENNETT: Door prizes.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Yeah!

 BENNETT: We've got at least two, Mr. President. You can determine whether you want more, but we have ‑‑

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: I have no other business, so just give it away!

 BENNETT: This first one is a certificate for some fundamentals training, and you get 50 bucks. And that goes to Vanasha Washington of Des Moines, Iowa. Are you here? Jumping up and down. Vanasha Washington.

Looking in Iowa...

Okay, if not, how about another Iowan. Terry Wilcox.

Terry Wilcox, okay, that's good.

And the other one, we've got 100 bucks.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Before you do that, Bennett... sorry.

 BENNETT: I'm not sorry. I'll wait.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: I do want to let the convention know, first of all, related to Mr. Bridges, I do at least appreciate a guy who says he doesn't know the answer. More than a guy that won't answer a question. So I give him credit for that.

We, in our organization, give our executives authority and power, and we expect them to use it.  but other organizations operate differently. So I at least give him credit for saying he didn't know the specific answer. We did get an email that came within probably 40 minutes or maybe half an hour of Eric leaving the stage, and it sends along a position paper from the American Foundation for the Blind that was apparently released in 2020 that says they are against the payment of subminimum wages.

[Cheers and applause]

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: I'm sorry. I undersold it. And also says "fully supports the abolishment of subminimum wages."

So I know John Pare is up here on the stage still. It seems to me, John Pare, we should get the American Foundation for the Blind to be working the Hill on this issue with us.

All right, Bennett, last door prize.

 BENNETT: Last one is 100 bucks. And this is a great thing to win. And it's Gabe Gazares from Texas. Are you here? Not here? Poor guy.

Let's add 50 bucks to that so we can get more... can we do that?

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: That was nice of Gabe not to be here. Upped the ante a little.

Alexandra Alfonzo from Tennessee. I'm sorry, D.C. I can't spell.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Give us the name again.

BENNETT: Alexandra is right here. We got her... oh, I'm sorry "not here."

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Not here. They want you to add more to it.

 BENNETT: I've got another one. Sidney Smith from Maryland. Sidney Smith.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Wave your arms if you're out there.

 BENNETT: Apparently not here. Okay, so... Barry Arnett from Colorado.

We got him. We got him.

 PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Okay, we have a busy day tomorrow, longest day of the year. We will stand adjourned until ‑‑ we will stand adjourned until 9:00 a.m.

[ gavel ]