# National Convention 2023 General Session V

[ gavel ]

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: The morning session will get underway!

[ Cheering ]

We have a very, very ambitious agenda today, so we're going to jump right in. I would ask you to please take your seat, and if I could have your attention, we're going to start with our morning invocation. Which this morning will be offered by a gentleman who has recently come back to be a staff member at the National Federation of the Blind, but you may not know that he is also in his final year of seminary. He is seeking to be ordained into the Unitarian Universalist Church. He is on that path and should complete his work sometime in 2024. He has grown up in the Federation and has done a lot of things for the blind of this nation. Here is Dan Frye!

[Cheers and applause]

DAN: Good morning.

AUDIENCE: Good morning.

DAN: Please join me in a posture of prayer or reflection.

Spirit of life, spirit of love, spark of mystery and all that is holy, we assemble here in our thousands to try and transform opportunities for the blind of this nation and this world. Please give us the grace and the guidance to succeed at that objective. Spirit of life and of love, we also are here as individuals celebrating accomplishments, joys and delights, while also enduring unknown suffering and discomfort and pain. Let us extend to you our gratitude for the joys, the delights, and the accomplishments that we are individually enjoying, and let us ask you to hold us dear and close. For those in this audience we know are grappling with daily issues that may not be known to us.

Take the world in your hands. Mold it to your liking. Let us create a place of peace, of strength, of love, of joy, of kindness, of compassion and care. Let us work individually, collectively, and in community, to create the beloved community. Spirit of love, spirit of life, we come to you today with our appreciation and our regard. We extend to you so much thank‑yous for all that you do to keep us calm and centered.

May it be so. Amen.

[Applause]

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Thank you very much, Dan. While we wait for a door prize, I know some of you were thinking that part of the suffering was the temperature of the ballroom, but... (chuckling)

Arizona probably still has blankets.

BENNETT: Door prizes we've got. For virtual experiences we got three names here and they're going to win, I'll tell you after I read the names. Stephanie Gutierrez of California, Jeff Buckwalter, and Timothy Beski of Oklahoma, you will win 50 bucks when you send a message to prize@NFB.org  and use the clue... I can't even say it anymore... "civil rights." You'll win 50 bucks. If you don't have that and send within 30 minutes, that email, you won't win.

Now, we have 100 bucks to start out the day. And the winner of the $100 is John Olson from New York.

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Oh, I think he's gone.

BENNETT: Not here? John Olson is not here.

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: He left already. Awww...

BENNETT: Then Esther Gilyard of Pennsylvania. Esther, are you here?

Stay standing, by the way. Everybody please stay standing until the runners get to you with the prize. Otherwise we might lose you and you might lose us. Esther is not here, so...

Corey Amy of Louisiana. Corey, you here? Corey Amy.

How about Cathy Thomas of Mississippi?

I guess nobody is here today.

[ Cheering ]

That's what I like to hear. That cheers me up. Okay!

How about Parker Falk of Texas? Parker? Well, hey, continuing... the next one... the next name is the winner. Tamika Williams of Alabama!

She is here and stay standing.

## Leveraging Personal AI to Build the Organized Blind Movement

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: We're going to jump right in. We have a lot of great things to talk about, and this morning we have with us someone that is not a stranger. Artificial intelligence has been the hot topic of the year, but our first speaker this morning has been speculating with us about various topics, including the implementation of artificial intelligence for many years. It started with a small and relatively unknown company that he came to us with around 2015 called AIRA.

[Cheers and applause]

And today he returns to us to talk about artificial intelligence, but more importantly a topic that the organized blind is very interested in. How do we take control of artificial intelligence and the revolution? And also how do we use it to build the organized blind movement? Here is our friend, Suman Kanuganti!

[ Music playing ]

SUMAN: Good morning, National Federation of the Blind!

AUDIENCE: Good morning.

[Applause]

SUMAN: My name is Suman Kanuganti. I, for many years, spoke to you as the founder of my previous company, IRA.

[Cheers and applause]

SUMAN: And for the past three years, I have been hands‑down developing something called personal.ai.

So today is the banquet day. Banquet day of the 83rd annual convention of the National Federation of the Blind.

[Cheers and applause]

And I am for sure excited and most of you as well for President Riccobono speech tonight, yeah?

[Applause]

It's something we look forward to, isn't it? And thanks for having me. You know, did you ever ask... did you ever ask yourself what makes us human?

Friends, this is my eighth convention, and I haven't missed one.

[Applause]

The very first time I stood alongside with many of you. It was back in 2015, and for those who may be first‑timers to NFB, a total of 2,480 individual members of the National Federation of the Blind joined together to share a mosaic with the world.

This mosaic formed by thousands of umbrellas raised simultaneously represented our collective intention to live the lives we want and transform our dreams into reality.

Friends, I was one of the 2,480 people.

[Applause]

It indeed with a momentous occasion for me. So what makes us human?

Well, I believe it's that connection. It's a connection, it's the energy. It's the energy that flows between us, and the energy of knowledge, the belonging, the sharing, the laughter. All those catch‑ups we do and all the moments of joy we try to recollect at this convention. How, though, do we enhance those connections? What limits the spread of energy between us? Well, sometimes it's actually time. And other times it's access. It's access to people around us. And access to memories that we experience. So what if you can capture one human essence in an algorithm? Or the method popularly known as AI. What if... what if the conversations with people that we love and we follow and we trust are more accessible than ever before? And that's what personal.ai is all about. It's about human connection at scale. We humans cannot be at multiple places at the same time. Well, now we can. (chuckling)

By creating an artificial intelligence model of yourselves that is a digital version of who you are, your facts, your opinions, your philosophies, your stories, and the authentic representation of who you are, including your style. Is that possible? Yes, it is. Because it's what I have been working on for the last three years. I've been working on developing this model and experience that is basically personal to anyone. A version of you that is trained just for you, that is built on top of your own memory, all with your full control and the data ownership and authenticity.

So let's talk to Mark Riccobono about it. But hang on, wait a second... he's busy during the convention. But he's kind enough to allow me to actually text his AI directly. So how about we have a conversation with his AI on the stage live today?

AUDIENCE: Let's do it!

SUMAN: We basically uploaded him and created an AI version of Mark Riccobono that not only myself or furthermore anybody can talk to. So let's start with ‑‑ I'm going to speak into my phone. And I don't have it plugged in. So I'll try to keep it close to the microphone, okay?

Hey, Mark, how are you?

Can you guys hear that?

AUDIENCE: No.

SUMAN: Hey, Mark, how are you?

SPEAKER: Hey, Suman, I'm doing well. How are you?

SUMAN: Okay, we're just getting started. We're going to have a lot of fun tonight.

So, Mark, I'm speaking at the convention. I want newer NFB members to know more about you. I mean you. Why don't you tell us a secret hobby that you have that members might not be aware of.

VOICE FROM PHONE: No, I don't have a secret hobby out in the waters.  as far as hobbies go, sailing is something I've enjoyed in the past. I was a student at the University of Wisconsin when I got involved with their sailing program. I got certified to sail two‑person boats independently. And to my knowledge, I was the first blind person to do so at the University of Wisconsin‑Madison Hofer Sailing Club.

[Applause]

SUMAN: But wait... I thought your hobby was more guitar. Can you tell me more about guitar as well and what's up with that?

VOICE FROM PHONE: I first got a guitar in 1996 in my junior year of college at the University of Wisconsin. I have played on and off for some sometime but haven't been very serious about it, and about 2018 I started to play more regularly. It's something I enjoy. I'm not a natural musician exactly, but it's a good outlet for me.

I took the big step of submitting a recording of me playing a song for the "We Are with You" concert that the National Federation of the Blind participated in to support blind people in the Ukraine. No, I don't answer it, not here, so that is one thing I do to clear my mind and also I pretend to play guitar.

SUMAN: Okay, so there is sailing and guitar. You obviously are excited both of these. I wonder like what is common themes about these things?

It takes a few seconds.

VOICE FROM PHONE: Through a few things that get me excited about sailing and guitar. First, both activities involve exploring new territory. With sailing you're literally exploring new waters. While with guitar you're exploring new musical ground. Second, both activities require a certain amount of skill and technique. You need to know how to sail the boat and how to play the guitar in order to be successful in either activity. Finally, both sailing and guitar can be very relaxing and enjoyable activities. They're both great ways to unwind and enjoy yourself. Since...

SUMAN: Let's get a little more personal. Can you tell me more about how you met your wife, Melissa Riccobono?

[ Cheering ]

VOICE FROM PHONE: I first met my wife Melissa on a cross‑country skiing trip in 1997. We were both students at the University of Wisconsin at the time and we got to know each other better there. Sent by my personal AI.

SUMAN: Okay, let's switch topics. Let's switch topics and go to NFB. Let's talk about NFB. You obviously have a great impact on NFB. We all have our own favorite moments here. Can you tell us one of your favorite moments at the NFB?

VOICE FROM PHONE: One of my favorite moments at the National Federation of the Blind was when we set a Guinness World Record for the largest umbrella mosaic. It was quite an undertaking to get...

[ Cheering ]

... logistics together and organized, but in the end we broke the record and a great moment demonstrating the ingenuity, capacity and the determination of blind people.

SUMAN: So last year I heard about the museum project. And you also had ideas about enhancing the museum experience with artificial intelligence. Can you elaborate and enlighten us, what do you mean by that?

VOICE FROM PHONE: We are still in the planning phase for the museum, but we are exploring ways to use artificial intelligence to enhance the telling of our stories. For example, imagine being able to ask questions and have authentic answers generated from the lived experience of blind people. This would be a powerful tool to positively impact the public image of blindness.

SUMAN: What do you think? Should we do it?

AUDIENCE: Yeah!

SUMAN: We should totally do it. I myself personally, I want to have a conversation with Kenneth Jernigan, because I do remember reading about the philosophy of NFB during the times when I was building IRA, so I totally want to have a conversation with him.

Okay, back to AI.

So artificial intelligence is making waves. I heard about resolutions in the making. Can you tell us about the top priority in the resolutions of artificial intelligence?

VOICE FROM PHONE: Our top priority is to ensure that blind and low vision people have equal access to information and technology. We believe that creators of chatbots have a responsibility to ensure that their technology does not perpetuate harmful stereotypes or misinformation about blindness and blind individuals.

Sent by my personal AI.

[Applause]

SUMAN: Wow, Mark, I do look forward to your banquet speech later this evening. Thank you.

VOICE FROM PHONE: Thank you, Suman, I'm looking forward to giving my speech today. I appreciate your interest.

[Applause]

SUMAN: It's not only fun, but it's also super intellectual. He is sitting next to me and talking to his AI, which is pretty cool.

Wonderful.

So in a way, talking to his AI, obviously I was preparing for the speech, but during the experience, I'm also learning more about him that I never had opportunities or had these conversations before as well. And a lot of today's speech and interactions are also influenced from his AI and me talking to him. So the AI version of you...

So maybe you saw it in science fiction. Well, today we recognize it's real. And it's more beautiful than the dystopian future of what people talk about AI. So you probably are wondering what is going on here. And we are witnessing a future that is great. But it's a future where every one of us will be captured in a model that become an extension of ourselves that will represent us. You must be thinking, I don't want people to talk to my AI, but to me. Of course we should be thinking that. That's the reason why the idea of personal AI is an extension, and it's not a replacement. It is the same philosophy that we had in existence with IRA, where IRA is not a replacement as much as it's an extension of who you are.

It's a choice of for when and who you want to put in the auto‑pilot mode or co‑pilot mode. I was talking to Mark Riccobono, who trusts me enough to have a conversation with him. But it's his choice.

For example, in a situation where you want to have full control, your AI can simply draft those replies for you. If it is accurate, you send it. Else you don't. But as you accumulate more memory of you as an individual, the more your model reflects you and your latest thoughts. We have experienced the world for the past two decades where everything we say on the Internet belongs to some other platforms. Just think about it. What do you own on the Internet? Nothing. You do not own anything, unfortunately.

Those platforms are the ones turning data into AI models to benefit the business. Of course they are creating consumer experiences, but it's not enough.

In fact, the models and the AI that you probably are already interacting with, such as Chat GPT, is already trained on largely available Internet of data. They can perform the task, say, searching the Internet and forming your opinion now is super easy simply by asking a question to the Internet or chatting with a bot about the Internet. Now, these models, I'm sure some of you have heard, are called large language models. Now, their mission generally is to outperform human intelligence. This is normally described as a path to artificial general intelligence or also called AGI.

Now, these are great capabilities, and there are users for that general knowledge. Large models make general intelligence accessible to us. Personal models of you, which I'm focused on, make personal intelligence accessible to us. That is trained on personal data that is trained on our memories.

The approach to the model is different on the contrary to large models, but they complement each very well.

Now, you may ask, Suman, why are you telling us everything about this AI and the models? Because, friends, this is going to be the future. So it's need to be educated and we all need to understand how these models are trained and how we will incorporate it into our lives and how we should be controlling our destiny.

These large models require lots of data and in most cases it's all our data, and they are hard to train, and they require millions and millions of dollars as well.

And more importantly, well, did you ever train your own AI? Or did you train the model? It's not accessible to non‑developers, to everyday people. And it is still in the control of the big tech.

On the contrary to large language models our approach is personal. This works on small and super small datasets. You may ask, okay, personal model, or personal language model, what does it exactly mean?

So I think in the interest of AI, let me go ahead and ask my AI, what is a personal language model, so that way you can also compare and contrast between my AI and Mark's AI.

Are you ready?

What is a personal language model?

VOICE FROM PHONE: A personal language model is an artificial intelligence AI model that is capable of understanding and generating information within the domain of an individual user. They are grounded in the data, memories, facts and opinions of a single person and are highly personal. Personal language models have been in development for about three years now.

Sent by my personal AI.

SUMAN: I left some off my British accent in there. If people know me... it takes two minutes of training data, but I want to sound how my AI sounds.

So for technical people in the room, a personal language model is around 120 million parameters that is in contrast to a 170 billion parameters of a large language model. But let's keep the technicalities aside for a second. The most important thing is it is cost effective. And these characteristics make personal AI accessible to everyone, everyday people and technically create a reflection of who you are, kind of a second you, so it can be in multiple places. So today every message you sent to your family, friends, colleagues does not belong to you. You do not own I. And we want to flip that. And that principally aligns with the resolutions we have passed.

Personally I give you full ownership of all your data and I will not be sold. Meaning the model or the data will not be sold. 40 years ago Steve Jobs said "Never trust a computer you cannot lift." And that was the beginning of personal computing era that began moving sharply away from the large mainframes. Now 40 years later, "Never trust an AI that you cannot control."

[Applause]

Because, friends, this should be the beginning of personal intelligence era, so you can tell stories your way.

So to close, my goal is to put the future of AI in your hands: In the hands of individuals, in the hands of every one of us. It will be accessible for everyone with a mobile app where you can train simply by speaking your memories and adding your memories, and integrating to your daily communications with friends, colleagues, families and whoever you wish. That will be released by the end of July. And you also will be able to text Mark Riccobono's AI if you want to have a discussion about it.

So everybody's story is meaningful, right? Everyone's story and every individual story is meaningful. We just heard from Daniel Frye, and the blind community should have a voice and an AI that is true and authentic representation of what we all stand for.

You can for the first time tell your own story with your own AI, because I believe the future of AI should be personal for all of us, so we can live the life we want.

Thank you.

[Cheers and applause]

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Thank you, Suman, I really appreciate it. This is my real personality.

[chuckles]

We haven't quite opened up the Mark Personal AI, but maybe soon.

## Artificial Intelligence Directed by the Blind: Progress and Possibilities with Be My Eyes

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: It's an interesting topic to think about, and I encourage us to get involved with the personal.ai revolution so we can figure out how to get our stories out there in an authentic way. So artificial intelligence is the theme of the morning so far, and our next person is someone you may not ‑‑ certainly will not know, as well as Suman. But let me ask by show of voice, how many of you are familiar with "Be My Eyes"?

[Cheers and applause]

Okay. Well, you know they launched in January of 2015, and in 2018, "Be My Eyes" received our highest award.

It was in October 2018 that our next speaker started at the company as an investor and board member. So I tend to think that it was the Bolotin Award that encouraged him to get involved with Be My Eyes. In December 2020 he became the new CEO of ‑‑ chairman for Be My Eyes, and he has been working diligently to get to know the community and to bring his extensive business and technical experience to leverage new opportunities for us and the Be My Eyes platform. I met him in March at the CSUN conference and I was immediately impressed with how down‑to‑earth he is, but also how passionate he is about using the power of technology and putting it in the hands of blind people to do what blind people wanted to do.

So, yeah, absolutely.

[Applause]

So I appreciate he's coming to this convention and he's working and rooted in the wisdom of blind people. I would like to welcome to this podium for the first time Mike Buckley!

[ Music playing ]

MIKE: What's up NFB!?

[Applause]

My name is Mike Buckley, I am chairman and CEO coach be My Eyes. It is an honor to be here. I thank you and I thank President Riccobono for the opportunity. In addition to being chairman and CEO, now that we know from Mark's personal AI he's a guitar player, I can share with you that I am a guitarist and vocalist for an '80s cover band called "The Love Handles." And I am hopeful we can play at next year's convention. Mark, that's a plug.

I also want to say the vice chairman of Be My Eyes, Mr. Brian Bastian could not be here today. Thank you for clapping. Those of you who know Brian know he is a remarkable human being. He was former head of the San Francisco Lighthouse for the Blind. He misses you and wishes he could be here. I miss him. He is my friend and also has been my professor to help me learn as much as I can about this community and our issues. I love Brian.

You know, I have given speeches in front of thousands of people before, but a couple of days ago, I realized I have never been as nervous as I am today. And I was trying to think about why that is. And the first reason is my mom taught me that you have two ears and one mouth for a reason. And I think it's really important that I listen and ask questions and learn, so it's a little odd to be up here in any way opining to you, but I'm here and I want to listen and learn at all times, so please know that. But that's one of the reasons I'm nervous. The second reason I'm nervous, my wife said to me two nights ago, I know exactly why you're nervous, Mike. I said, tell me, tell me. She's like, well, everyone likes Be My Eyes, and you better not screw it up.

[ Laughter ]

You have to appreciate your spouse as the most honest person in your life. So...

Look, I know you know Be My Eyes. We have more than half a million blind and low vision people on our platform. We have an astonishing 6.7 million volunteers who are available to assist. 150 countries, 180 languages. And you know what? The volunteers love your calls. In every survey we do, they say it's the best moment of their day. The other thing we have learned is that more than 90% of our calls are successful. So the product works. And what I think about this, the way I think about Be My Eyes, it's a beautiful merger of technology and human kindness. And that's one of the reasons I love it.

[Cheers and applause]

Our values are about choice. Our values are about empowerment. Our values are about openness. And, of course, one of our big values is our products and services will and will always be free.

[Cheers and applause]

Now, when I think about the future of or our products and I think about our responsibility to this community, I think of three words...

Safety. Efficacy. Choice. I'm going to talk more about each of these later, but they're really important. They're important to me. They're important to Be My Eyes and important to our community. Now, I know President Riccobono asked this, but I'm going to ask one more time. How many of you have used Be My Eyes?

[ Cheering ]

As many of you know we recently partnered with open AI to deploy what is called a text‑to‑image model that promises to help our community interpret the world around them. We call this currently "virtual volunteer." And how it works is allows you to take a picture which the technology then describes in fantastic detail.

Now, why did we do this? Why did we introduce a machine and introduce technology to answer questions like this? It's because of you. There are two big reasons you have told us why sometimes you're hesitant to use Be My Eyes. The first reason is sometimes we just don't want to talk to a stranger. I talked to a woman the other day who said, you know, Mike, I downtown always want to call a volunteer because maybe ‑‑ I don't always want to call a volunteer because maybe my kitchen is messy.

So we wanted to be responsive to people in our community who maybe were wary of calling a stranger. The second reason people don't make calls is they don't want to bother a volunteer. They think that the volunteer might be needed more by someone else.

Now, I remind you again how much these volunteers love the calls. So please call. But working with artificial intelligence and trying to put an assistance tool into our hands was directly responsive to the surveys and needs of our community. And that's why we are moving forward to this.

Now media podcasters, Mark, a ton of people have asked me what the experience is like. And I'm very, very wary of the artificial intelligence hype cycle. I'm very, very wary of technology companies overpromising and underdelivering. I am very, very wary of technology companies saying, oh, I'm going to build this for you rather than with you. Right?

[Applause]

So my words don't mean as much as the words of the blind and low‑vision beta testers who are using this product. I'm going to read a few for you, because their words have more meaning than my own.

It's so exciting it feels like 1976 and the NFB's first reading machine.

This is far superior to any tool on the market that it's tough to describe.

I feel an incredible loss if I no longer had access to this technology.

This is life‑changing.

Again, these aren't my words. These are the words of the community. But why don't we do a quick demo for you right now.

So what I'm going to do first is... pardon me.

What we're going to do is take a picture of this room.

No, not me.

AUDIENCE: Smile.

MIKE: Are you smiling?

[ sound of screen reader ]

Dressed in casual business casual attire.

[ Laughter ]

Atmosphere seems to be relaxed and people are engaged in conversations and waiting for an event to start.

[ Cheering ]

MIKE: Pretty cool, right?

Let's do one more.

Mark, would you stand up for us.

Gotcha. Thank you.

SPEAKER: This is a new picture same conference room as the previous picture. A man is wearing a suit and tie. The text is not clearly visible. Standing near a podium with a microphone, which suggests he might be a presenter or speaker at the event.

MIKE: You see this is a pretty cool piece of technology.

We have seen our beta testers use this in airports, in hotels, on subway maps, weather maps, reading electronic schematics in academic papers, helping orient photos, describing things, colors and patterns, describing comics, figuring out just what the vegetarian option is for on a menu. I have never been more excited about a piece of technology in my life.

So the first piece of news today is that we are renaming this tool. We're not going to call it "Virtual Volunteer" anymore because the blind and low‑vision beta testers asked us to change the name. They didn't think Virtual Volunteer was apt or appropriate. And as of today this tool will be called "Be My AI."

I want to report on what the beta testers discovered. But before I do that, I have to tell you something. Artificial intelligence is not perfect. Artificial intelligence is powerful and awesome and sometimes scary.

Suman's product is really cool. But AI Mark Riccobono freaked me out a little!

[chuckles]

It told my colleague, our app told my colleague Brian Bashin that his cane had a red tip. It does not.

AI does something called hallucinations. It's really a term they use in the academic literature where sometimes the AI not only gets something wrong, but occasionally it makes something up out of thin air. So you can get an incorrect answer, and there are times when the AI is confident in its inaccuracy.

There are other problems and issues. The picture that I took of Mark, the AI system blurred out his face. How are we going to go on social media with it then? What if I want it to look at my holiday cards and explain the pictures of my grandkids or aunts and uncles. There are very real questions we have to answer together as a community and we probably have to lobby some regulators to make sure that power of these tools in our hands works for us the same way it works for anyone else who is sighted.

[Applause]

This is exactly why Be My Eyes is being cautious and deliberate about rolling out this technology more widely. But it's coming.

[Applause]

I expect, we expect to get this in your hands later this year, and we're working with Open AI to do so. Now, over the years you have heard a lot from tech companies, this and that. But it's not about us on this. It's about you. And I'm here to tell you that the blind people that are in this beta test are shaping this technology to bend it to your needs. A fundamental design principle of Be My Eyes is "with not for." And so we've been developing with the community hand in hand, from our founder Hans to our vice chairman, Brian, to the nearly 200 blind and low vision beta testers. Ryan Chancey, Gary, Everett, Anil, Mark, and a man behind me, Mr. Jonathan Mosen.

And a guy named Mark Riccobono.

[Applause]

Thank you for your passion, your intellect, your direction, your frankness, and for occasionally kicking our ass a little bit, to help shape this technology. Thus far this group has conducted more than 7,000AI sessions, more than 5,000 chats with the AI. There are 100 new tests performed every day, and we have one of the most robust conversation and feedback groups I have ever been involved in. It started out with WhatsApp with over 1,000 messages and now we moved it to a multi‑channel Slack group and every day there are dozens of messages talking act how to improve the UI, talking about how to make the technology better, talking about bugs and things that aren't working well. Items most exciting project I have ever been involved in and it's functionally being directed by blind and low‑vision people around the world.

We also engage in wonderful complicated messy discussions about privacy, about facial recognition, about ethics, about where this works and where it doesn't work. But it just underscores the fact that safety is our most important value and efficacy is mandatory. And we are going to work with Open AI to improve the accuracy of information at all times. But we're going to make sure that we put this in your hands so that you have the choice for how, if and when to use it.

[Applause]

We will also absolutely maintain our network of volunteers. Why? Do you know what I think the secret ingredient of AI is in the near and intermediate future? Humans. People. Suman said this when he talked. This is an extension, not a replacement. And there are times when we need to verify results, double check results and always make sure we have the option of a human in the loop. So when we put this tool in your hands, you will always have the option to call a volunteer to either double check the results or if the AI fails to answer your question, to get an answer in the first place. That's our pledge and that's our commitment. I'm also excited that we're going to launch a new product that we're announcing for the first time today. And the product is called "Be My Eyes Groups." And how I want you to think about "Be My Eyes Groups" is you will have the power to set up a network, a closed network, of 15 to 20 of your most trusted family and friends who could be the recipient of your first call.

So you will have the power to set up a circle of trust. In case you don't want to call the volunteer because your kitchen is messy, right? In case you have something that is more high stakes that you want to ask about.

So a trusted circle will be another choice that we're offering to community through "Be My Eyes groups" and another extension our principles of safety and efficacy, and another extension of choice for our community. By the way, what do you think we're going to charge for it?

AUDIENCE: Nothing!

MIKE: Ding‑ding‑ding‑ding! You won!

[Applause]

So I'm going to wrap up. But here is where I think all of this ends for us. Suman's demonstration was this wonderful window into the power of AI to assist us in multiple facets of our lives. And I think where this ends ‑‑ I hope where this ends ‑‑ is this community has an affordable, accessible, brilliant, wearable that is your personal digital and visual assistant, that you can choose to use when you want, how you want, why you want, whenever you want. I want it to go there.

[Applause]

And we're committed to building to that future.

I also want to do two things. I want to thank a couple people and it want to ask a favor. The first is... I do want to thank our corporate customers. The reason why is they pay the bills. They help us keep this service free.

[Applause]

Microsoft, Google, Sony, Open AI, P&G, Spotify, Barilla, AARP, and so many others, they help us fulfill our mission and work with you every day on our products and services. And by the way, thank you to the NFB for everything that you do for us.

[Applause]

Lastly, I'm asking you for something. Call us. Yell at me on email. Mike@BeMyEyes.com. tell us what you need. Tell us how it's going. Help us get more people in the community on to this application. There are so many people, particularly in developing nations, who don't have access to tools that they need. And we think that we have so much work to do expanding the availability of this across the community of more than a quarter billion people who are blind and low vision. And we won't stop until we get to all of them. I want your feedback. I want your ideas. I want your criticism. I would love your love, if we deserve it. And I want to say thank you. I have learned more ‑‑ thank you.

[Applause]

I have learned more in the last seven months of this job than at any point in my life, and I will forever be grateful. Thank you very much.

[Applause]

## Together Living Blindfully: Perspectives on the Wisdom of the Shared Blind Community

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: I know that as we get more blind people using this technology, there will be more to learn, and I encourage all of us to stay highly engaged in shaping where the artificial intelligence goes. If we are not in it from the beginning, we know what will happen. So that's the theme this morning. And that is going to continue with the next presenter, who is going to talk about together Living Blindfully.

This gentleman has been blind since birth, and he has a long track record of active engagement and leadership in the blind community, but also engaging audiences over the air, whether it be the radio waves or the Internet. His bio credits his start on radio before he hit Age 5. But that's not the only aspect of him. He says this in his bio... "I have been pointing out injustice since I was a kid, which didn't always make me popular with the teachers."

[chuckles]

His advocacy work has only grown over the years. He was the youngest person ever to be elected to be president of the Blind Peoples Movement in his country. That's the Association of Blind Citizens of New Zealand.

[Applause]

One major effort there he led was to get the primary agencies serving the blind in that country to be more responsive to blind people and blind leaders. Maybe we can get him to teach some of the agencies in this country.

[chuckles]

You may know his work from one of the access technology companies or maybe from one of those helpful tutorials. I know when the pandemic hit we promoted his Zoom tutorial. Thank you for making that available to blind people. Or maybe you know him from one of his Internet radio programs, now under the flag of "Mushroom FM: Home of the fun guys." Or you may know him from his highly successful podcast to the blind community now branded "Living Blindfully." He brings his authentic experience as a blind person to what he does. And we have been honored to work with him on a number of things, including last year's global concert, the "We Are with You" concert for blind Ukrainians, which was a very successful effort.

[Applause]

He was very central to making that a reality, and I'm pleased that he has agreed to come to this stage to share his perspectives. Here is Jonathan Mosen!

[ Music playing ]

JONATHAN: Thank you, Mr. President, for the introduction, and for the invitation to speak today. And good morning to my friends in the Federation!

[ Cheering ]

I am delighted to be at another NFB convention. When I attend one, I always feel replenished, ready to make more positive change, and prouder than ever to be blind. Among the many things I have done in my life, I have a background in radio as the president said, and after all these years of hosting shows about blindness, current events, and technology, and providing entertainment to our community, and raising money for an important cause or two, I still believe in the power of the Internet to do good, to be a vehicle for bringing us together to have a place that is uniquely ours, where we are not trying to explain blindness to sighted people. We are exclusively and unashamedly talking about the things that matter to us.

My current podcast "Living Blindfully" brings blind people together from at last count 113 countries.

[Applause]

"Living Blindfully" discusses a wide range of topics, including policy, philosophy, employment, parenting and more. And we also talk a lot about technology, because it can assist with equal participation in society. And it's technology I would like to focus on today. I do so mindful of the enormous responsibility this organization bears. The companies that develop the major operating systems and much of the hardware we use are based here in the United States. So blind people everywhere are counting on you to be articulate, focused, and resolute, advocating in a way that honors your proud traditions. Any success you have in bringing about more accessible technology has a direct, positive benefit to many millions of blind people beyond your borders.

In an age where technology plays a critical role in all aspects of society, the Federation has been relentless in its advocacy for accessible technology as part of its pursuit of security, equality, and opportunity. To assess the effectiveness of that advocacy, we only need to reflect on how much more information we have access to in 2023 versus, say, 1983. Computerization in general and the Internet in particular mean it's easier for everyone to work, shop, bank, travel, communicate, be informed, and entertained.

The increasing digitization of society was inevitable because of technological change. But the social change required for the blind to be included was not. Accessibility didn't magically appear out of the goodness of people's hearts. It happened because people in this room alongside many pioneers in advocacy and technology who are no longer with us and who we remember with appreciation and respect, put in the effort and made it happen.

[Applause]

Achieving the degree of accessibility we enjoy today required the use of a range of advocacy tools, including building strong relationships, being thought leaders, and when it was absolutely necessary, legislative and legal action.

It was true then and it is still true today that even some blind people decry the advocacy necessary to win those battles using terms like "militant, radical, whining, and entitled."

Now, in January I became a grandfather for the first time.

[Applause]

Thank you for that. My little granddaughter, Florence, is absolutely adorable. And one of the many cool things about being a granddad is that I am reading kids’ books again. Just wait until Christmas when I hit the toy stores.

So the story of The Little Red Hen has been on my mind lately. Now, for those that don't know it ‑‑ spoiler alert ‑‑ the short version is that the Little Red Hen tried to get help to plant the seeds, harvest the wheat and bake the bread. But the other farm animals couldn't be bothered. But when the bread was ready, they happily volunteered to eat it.

Isn't it ironic that those who mall line us as militant, who denigrate the doers, who ridicule us as radical, who attack the advocates, who berate the bakers of the bread, are publishing that criticism using the very tools that wouldn't have been accessible were it not for the advocates that criticize it.

[Cheers and applause]

To those critics, I say the proof of the baked bread is in the eating. And you can eat it, even if you didn't bake it.

So my friends in the Federation, you are the ones who make a difference.

[Applause]

So wear the badge with honor and take pride in being little NFB hens.

[chuckles]

We have baked a lot of bread, but the work is far from done.

AUDIENCE: That's right!

JONATHAN: If the bread does not continue to be baked, we will starve. And I wish today to suggest some of the bread we must bake next.

The provision of assistive technology by mainstream companies has created new advocacy challenges just as important as the battles we have won. I don't begrudge for a moment the accolades these companies receive for their accessibility initiatives. I applaud the fact that we can now walk up to most computers and smartphones and have immediate access to them. We have life‑changing tools. Some of them blindness specific, in the palm of our hand, for a fraction of what they used to cost.

[Applause]

That is staggering progress. But there's a little secret that tends not to be covered in the media. While impressive innovation continues at pace, the quality and reliability of some of the tools we use remains a serious concern. As resolutions at several NFB conventions have recorded. Now I have worked in the technology industry and I know that software cannot be bug‑free. But today we are enduring show‑stopping bugs unique to the blind that significantly degrade our ability to use some of these devices. In my own advocacy efforts, I have found it useful to apply a concept of equivalency. In other words, what would be an equivalent bag to the sighted, and would it be such a show‑stopping bug that the sighted would demand a speedy resolution? I'll give you a few examples. I'm not going to call out any company by name, but if these examples are affecting you, you will know the companies I'm talking about.

If your screen ‑‑ if your screen reader suddenly and regularly stopped speaking... yeah?

That would be the same as a sighted person's screen flickering and then completely blanking out at random intervals.

Do you think the sighted would patiently wait for months until the screen worked properly again?

No!

The media would be all over this and they would call it "ScreenGate."

If you are typing on your smartphone using Braille screen input and you're regularly experiencing unexpected behavior that slows you down or results in your typing gibberish, then that would be the equivalent of the virtual keyboard being next to useless for a sighted person. Causing them to understandably protest loudly about them not being able to do their job, communicate, input data and close the deal.

If you are blind and wear hearing aids and your screen reader is quiet to the point of being unusable when you are on a phone call... this would be the same as a sighted person having their screen so dim every time they make a call that they can't see it well enough to use it.

If you, in good faith, install the beta of an operating system only to find that your screen reader doesn't work at all, that would be equivalent to a sighted person installing a beta understanding there may be defects, but finding with horror that their screen was blank, making their device completely useless. And imagine what would happen to the reputation of that company if it was later revealed that the team responsible released that software knowing full well that this is what it would do.

If you scrimped and saved to buy a popular Braille display, only to find you can't connect your smartphone to it via Bluetooth, because a protocol about which there was an industry‑wide consensus, and that the company promised to support hasn't been implemented, this is the equivalent of a sighted person buying one of the leading printers on the market today only to find that the operating system developer hasn't kept their promise to support it.

I could fill the remainder of my time with examples. If bugs like these were happening to sighted people, it would be headline news. Stock prices would plummet. Senior leaders would be filled ‑‑ senior leaders would be filled with their email boxes overflowing and eventually fired for the accountability.

AUDIENCE: Yeah!

JONATHAN: Now, the eaters, who are not the bakers, will say that we must be realistic and we must be patient. We shouldn't expect prompt resolutions of blindness‑specific show‑topping issues. They say assistive technology isn't the core business of these mainstream companies, so things are bound to be a bit rough around the edges. We must be grateful and thankful or they might take it all away.

We are a tiny fraction of their customers, so we must wait our turn.

AUDIENCE: Boo!

JONATHAN: While the bakers know because they baked it that there is no legislation that covers consumer rights, civil rights, accessibility or government procurement that says it's okay for companies to provide an inferior product to blind people.

[Applause]

But I found plenty of law that gives this start of behavior a name. They call it "discrimination."

The National Federation of the Blind has always been clear... discrimination will not stand.

[Applause]

A poor standard of product for the blind is not merely a legal issue. It's a moral one. It is also a financial one. These large successful companies undoubtedly have the means to resource accessibility properly.

AUDIENCE: They do!

JONATHAN: But when they prepare their annual budgets, they are allocating resources in a way that shortchanges you and me.

AUDIENCE: That's right!

JONATHAN: I would like to address these manufacturers directly. You have made a remarkable difference to our lives, working with us. You have helped to ensure that there has never been a better time in history to be blind. Thank you for all you have done and all you continue to do. But we are not charity cases.

[Applause]

Were you not doing what you are doing, you would lose the business of many entities who would no longer be permitted to buy your products. So the relationship is a reciprocal one. Our money is as good as anyone else's.

[Applause]

We express our thanks like any other customer, by helping to return a profit to your shareholders when we buy what you are selling. When we do this, we create a contract so that you will provide us with a product that is fit for purpose. We then integrate your technology into our lives, and we come to rely on it. These products should not have such egregious accessibility defects that a blind person requires two degrees in order to operate them.

[Applause]

One in computer science so we can work around all the bugs, and the other in Zen meditation.

[ Laughter ]

For those of us fortunate enough to have found work, our jobs were usually a hard one. We got them knowing full well the fundamental truth upon which the National Federation of the Blind was founded, that the problem of blindness is not the lack of eyesight. The problem is what people think blindness means.

[Applause]

Now, if we competent blind people on the job cannot do our jobs as well as we're capable of because of serious defects in your product you decline to fix in a timely manner, you are perpetuating myths about blindness by making us appear foolish in front of our employers.

AUDIENCE: That's right! :

JONATHAN: You are jeopardizing the security of our livelihoods. If there is bias in your defect assessment processes causing our mission critical bugs to languish because they only affect a small number of people, you are preventing our equality by implying through your inaction that we are second‑class customers.

[Applause]

If your products are not dependable, you tantalize us with the promise of opportunity, but it is a promise that is not fully kept. This must stop!

[Applause]

Now, I want to propose the following four‑point plan to ensure these products become as dependable for us as they are for everyone else.

First, in consultation with the organized blind movement, all mainstream technology companies offering assistive technology should agree on and publish a framework that seeks to define a line where an accessibility bug is so critical that it requires extraordinary remedial action beyond the normal software release cycle.

AUDIENCE: All right! Yes!

[Applause]

JONATHAN: As a working title, let's called this the "Defect Equity Framework" or DEF for short. Second, with the DEF in place, mainstream technology companies should collaborate with the organized blind movement to resolve the under‑resourcing that is contributing to the situation. This must include hiring more blind people.

[Applause]

JONATHAN: We use it. We are the best people to test it and fix it. I want to take a moment to express my profound admiration and gratitude for all the blind people working in any capacity on the technology we use every day. They can't ever completely switch off, because when it's time to stop thinking about work for the day, they're still blind.

Sometimes they will be fighting battles on the inside we can never know about. It can be tough work, but it's vital work. So let's be kind to our own who are doing this work.

[Applause]

We need them there and we need many more of us there.

Third, each company should establish a public database for accessibility defects so the blind can check what bugs have already been submitted and what priority they have been accorded.

We must have input into that prioritization. Because right now too many of us feel despondent and frustrated about volunteering our time and considerable expertise to these companies filing detailed bug report after detailed bug report only to be ignored and fobbed off with a canned response and no progress updates.

[Applause]

And fourth, every Global Accessibility Awareness Day mainstream technology companies must do more than just publish marketing hype about new initiatives. They must provide a transparent independently audited report that demonstrates progress as measured against the defect equity framework.

AUDIENCE: That's right!

[Applause]

JONATHAN: Second‑class status is something we stopped accepting long ago.

This proposal is a constructive specific better way. Let the blind and the technology industry work together and get this done!

But, if they will not work with us, we should not continue to accept the status quo. As Dr. Jernigan repeatedly put it... we know how to join together on the barricades!

[Applause]

Inadequate quality control is not the only advocacy challenge we face. Sometimes a mainstream company can kill our productivity with kindness. It's often said that activity should not be confused with achievement. I would also submit that accessibility should not be confused with usability.

If we're not consulted, well‑intentioned sighted people may cause an app or operating system to be so verbose and frankly so patronizing that it slows us down and adds no value whatsoever.

[Applause]

Blind people must be involved in all aspects of the user experience. And finally, as we always have done, we must be vigilant about talented people who out of a genuine desire to make a difference use their talents to create something they assume blind people need. As Dr. TenBroek so brilliantly put it all those years ago "My road to hell is paved with your good intentions."

[Applause]

This behavior is a high‑tech form of colonization. It is also the high tech equivalent of that person, that person on the street who genuinely wants to be helpful but without permission or knowledge of our destination grabs us and assumes that we need help and that they know where we are going.

Knowing the needs of your market that you seek to serve is Business 101.

The ideas I have shared with you today just give a snapshot of the important discussions that we have had on "Living Blindfully." I hope you will be a part of this vibrant, stimulating, global conversation, as well as continuing to do the work so many of us around the world rely on you to do at chapter affiliate, national and international level through the National Federation of the Blind.

[Applause]

Let us all continue to bake the bread of progress. Never forgetting for a moment that we are worthy. Together, Living Blindfully.

Thank you so much!

[Applause]

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: I think that deserves a door prize.

BENNETT: I think it does, at least! What a great group of speakers.

We've got for the virtual experiences 40 bucks. And if Don Hyatt of Nevada, if Preston Rock of Utah, and Tina Manus of Colorado will write an email to prize@NFB.org  and use the word "resolutions," you'll win the 40 bucks.

Now, for people in the room, we somewhere a package from Hawaii with a couple of boxes of macadamia nuts, a T‑shirt, a package of coffee. Big package of coffee. And 25 bucks. And the winner is... Darion Davis of Arizona. Are you here? Stand up and stay up.

AUDIENCE: Not here.

BENNETT: No, she's not. How about Mickey Saltzman of Nebraska? He's here. Stay standing.

We got him.

## Rebuilding What I Should Have Known: Reflections on My Journey to be Accountable to the Blind Community

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Okay. Our first three speakers were invited to engage us in conversation about the things that we might be able to do together. You might wonder why this next person was invited.

In 2021, we pushed back on the very harmful marketing practices and business activities of this company. And this convention affirmed the action of the Board of Directors. The company, accessiBe, had planned to sponsor this convention in 2021. We sent the money back.

By the way, we haven't said it throughout this convention, but it came to mind in Jonathan's presentation. It's really powerful that companies come here and engage us meaningfully, and part of the way they do that is by sponsoring our convention. And we appreciate that.

[Applause]

But just in case any of the ‑‑ any of our sponsors think that by being a sponsor they have bought us off, it does not happen.

[Applause]

And over the years I sat with many of a sponsor who was upset about a resolution being offered by the convention because they were also a sponsor. The fact of the matter is, when you show up here, blind people are much more eager to give you feedback. Which is why people come, right?

This situation was a little different. And we felt it was very necessary to tell this company not to come. And that they needed to do some serious work to stop harmful practices that were taking advantage of the work that we're trying to do to advance blind people in society. They needed to stop attacking our people for being advocates, and they needed to work honestly to be good stewards of the message of accessibility that we want to happen.

Now, the idea of overlays have been around for, I don't know, 15 or 16 years. I think the first time it was ever discussed at this convention that I remember, and we're still discussing the merits of those.

But we will not be misrepresented by the companies that are trying to sell tools into the marketplace to help us with our cause, which is equal access. We will not be used!

[Applause]

Now, it wasn't a certainty that accessiBe would ever appear on this stage. And I have said some very frank ‑‑ many very frank conversations with this gentleman. He sent a letter to our board of directors last fall, and the board decided to allow him to public an apology in the Braille Monitor. We told him that you all would decide whether the apology was adequate or not. That making an apology does not build the trust. It's the first step.

[Applause]

We told him that building trust is going to take time. I also have told him that his appearance on this stage is not an endorsement, and I think he knows he's probably amongst the least popular people in this room.

But to his credit, he still came.

[Applause]

I could say more about the situation, but I want to give the platform to our guest to talk about his journey and his aspirations for how he can rebuild trust and potentially do something to advance our cause in accessibility rather than harm our cause. Here is Shir Ekerling!

[ Music playing ]

SHIR: Hello, everyone.

My name is Shir Ekerling. I'm the founder of accessiBe. I'm very excited to be here today and address you at the convention, and I want to thank NFB leadership and President Riccobono for giving me the opportunity to do that.

I believe that you have already read my apology letter, as Mark mentioned in May's publication of the Monitor or heard my interview on the podcast last month or at least heard about one of these things. The title of my talk here today is "Rebuilding What I Should Have Known: Reflections On My Journey to Be Accountable to the Blind Community."

[Applause]

And this is a continuation of our efforts to demonstrate our commitment and accountability to the blind community, and I will use my approximately 15 to 20 minutes here to talk about that and our path forward.

Many don't know, but in the last two years we have been working night and day alongside many disability community leaders, individuals, and organizations to change and transform a lot of what we do, following two of the NFB's 2021 resolutions regarding overlay products and accessiBe. The NFB guidance was clear, instrumental, and very much appreciated.

[Applause]

I'm aware that the changes I'm talking about took a long time to establish, and perhaps a little too long. But some of the things we have worked to change required us to do a complete overhaul in many aspects. We had so much to learn and understand to ensure that we never repeat the same mistakes again.

Accessibility is a basic civil right. And so we wanted these changes to be as thorough, comprehensive and correct as possible. And today I'm happy to tell you that we have addressed all the points you brought forward in the 2021 resolutions.

[Applause]

I will give you examples in a moment. But before that, I want you to know that this does not mean that our work and changes are over. Far from it, actually. Today we are pushing forward even further and much, much harder. We know that building trust takes time. But we are here for the long term and not afraid for a long and hard process. There is still so much more that we need to learn, do and change, and your feedback and criticism is what helps us do things correctly. We are here to learn from you. You are the experts and you know best.

[Applause]

Also, I know that many of you already have heard or read about some of the changes I'm going to mention here. So after today, our communication to you in conventions and otherwise, will mostly focus on new projects, new initiatives, and all the new things that we are building together with the community. There is a lot of activities and work being done behind the scenes together with individuals and leaders from the blind community, which we have not publicly talked about yet, but you will hear about many of these very soon.

So the resolutions included multiple topics. Today I will focus on the four most major ones and give you examples on how we address to the points relating to, one, our communication, feedback and executive team. Two, our products and services. Three, our technical implementations, and four, our marketing activities and campaigns.

So starting with communication feedback and executive team.

I truly believe that the way we communicated in the past was very bad, to say the least. And I think this was one of the biggest reasons for the issues we had and the mistakes we've made. There are so many reasons for these communication issues, but the biggest, in my opinion, is the fact that we, the three founders of the company, were very much inexperienced in business. We were not savvy businesspeople, and the cultural barriers also were no help. When we started accessiBe, we were very young and ambitious, 26 and 27‑year‑olds, that wanted nothing more but to do a lot of good to the world and create solutions that truly helped people. And although we were software experts and WebEx percentage, including web accessibility, as we have been providing accessibility services for years, we did not really know how to listen, communicate and receive feedback and criticism correctly. And many times reacted inappropriately.

To follow the resolutions, address these issues and overcome our weaknesses, we had to overhaul multiple departments internally, including replacing almost all the management and stakeholders in the company and bring new people that can teach us what we needed to change and how to approach the changes correctly.

[Applause]

So we saw the help of leaders in the disability community who for two years have helped us shape the new version of accessiBe that knows how to hand feedback and criticism, how to communicate properly and is accountable to and driven by the disability community. AccessiBe 2.0, you could say.

And here are a few examples of this. One, we have created a completely new product and research department that is focused on creating product and services with and for the community. This is a huge point, and I will talk a lot more about that in a few moments. But, two, we have incorporated professionals from the disability community into every aspect of our company.

Today everything we do is made with or by talent from the disability community in the process. This includes the creation, review, guidance, or approval in creating products and services delivering marketing campaigns and customer communications and much, much more.

Three, we have created community feedback testing and relations teams that focus on receiving feedback and addressing any problem quickly and swiftly.

[Applause]

And also, I personally hands‑on lead the efforts to receive comments, issues, feedback and problems from users in meetings, emails, and anywhere else. I want to hear from you. Your feedback, your criticism, your advice. We want to learn from you and we want to work together.

In the Braille Monitor letter, I gave everyone my personal email, because I wanted to engage with you and make sure your feedback gets to the right place and implemented correctly. So please use it, my email.

Four, we also have created completely new advocacy and non‑profit departments focusing primarily on working with hundreds of non‑profit and disability‑focused organizations to raise awareness and educate about importance of inclusivity and accessibility in the world. With focus today on giving the disability community a platform to reach and educate the millions of businesses, developers, and the global population directly about civil rights and disabilities without us representing or speaking for the community in any way.

[Applause]

We have replaced our entire marketing department, including all the managers and executives who could not line up with our new way of doing things.

[Applause]

And with our accountability to the community. We moved away from emphasizing legal actions and our marketing today is based on the positive aspects of becoming an inclusive business. We want businesses not to fear accessibility or disabilities but be excited about the opportunities accessibility provides to their business and all the new customers they will be able to attract.

[Applause]

Also we are focused on educating the professional community, developers, designers, managers, about accessibility, both technically and socially so they can start building and designing accessible websites and applications right from the get‑go.

[Applause]

The overarching point in our marketing communications today is that accessibility should become a pillar when building for the web or when doing business in general.

And we advocate and educate the business community in how to achieve exactly that in every business practice. Both on the web and in general.

These and many others are the types of activities mostly focused on today and what we invest funding in.

Back to products and services.

The changes we made on this front are even more significant. Our approach today is very different than our approach two years ago. And this is thanks to all the work we have done together with the community.

Today we no longer believe in air quotes one‑size‑fits‑all approach to accessibility. And we recognize that providing accessibility should be much more comprehensive than that.

In the last two years, we have created a comprehensive ecosystem of tools, products, services, solutions, and educational programs for businesses of all sizes to provide accessibility to the best of their abilities and resources. Our solution ecosystem today focuses on giving any business, even the tiny family business or mom‑and‑pop store ways to address and learn about accessibility thoroughly as if they were a large corporation and budget was a non‑issue.

Our goal is to help businesses implement inclusive business practices through services, products and educational activities many of which would provide for completely free in order to eliminate any financial argument businesses sometimes raise not to include accessibility in a comprehensive manner.

[Applause]

We advocate first and foremost for native accessibility as much as possible. And our company today provides the biggest variety of options, services and tools for business to approach, learn about and provide web accessibility to their users. Our services department provide all accessibility services, including in‑house human audits, user testing can, document mediation, accessibility consultancy on every level, for any project, technical and social training and educational programs for companies and for professionals and we have already successfully ran and finished hundreds of such projects.

[Applause]

We also provide technical guidance directly to end‑users if you need it, this includes comprehensive operational guides, direct technical assistance and provide feedback and bring issues to our attention.

Before my time is up, I want to also tell you about a few other important products we have added to our comprehensive ecosystem. Access Flow is our new platform to test, monitor and remediate accessibility of websites and web applications that help developers achieve and maintain native accessibility with complete source code remediation.

With this product, we enable businesses to treat and address accessibility as another pillar to address while developing for the web. Just like businesses prioritize their security and performance of their websites and applications, with Access Flow, web accessibility now gets the same treatment and the same priority.

[Applause]

Or in simpler words, what Access Flow does is to teach and help businesses and developers to integrate web accessibility natively and seamlessly into their existing software lifecycle and development process.

[Applause]

Access Skin is completely free product but critical part of our accessibility ecosystem. For businesses to consider web accessibility they first need to be aware of it and its importance. And unfortunately we see many businesses, especially small ones, getting so overwhelmed by web accessibility to a point that they sometimes choose to brush it off, ignore it and hope things will be okay and they will not.

Access Skin is designed to raise awareness in the simplest way possible so every business owner can understand where their website stands in regard to accessibility without technical knowledge required on their side.

The whole point in Access Skin is that businesses can get streamlined, simple and friendly introduction to web accessibility and disability education without being overwhelmed or concerned. We see a lot of success with this approach, which is very exciting to me.

Access Campus is one of the biggest focuses for the near future and a major part of our efforts to help businesses create native accessibility and become truly inclusive businesses when it is released. As the name implies, Access Campus is an online education platform only for teaching accessibility and inclusivity. This is both from the technical standpoint and the social standpoint. Teachers in Access Campus are diverse and made of experts from the disability and accessibility professional communities.

[Applause]

Who teaches developers and the businesses from their own lived experiences and expertise. For example, blind expert will teach developers and product managers who I to use a screen reader properly so professional communities will have that basic knowledge when building their projects right from the get‑go. Many of these programs are also going to be completely free. And this is attempt to dramatically increase awareness and further provide a simple and friendly way for businesses and professionals to learn truly how to implement accessibility natively on the web and in many other aspects of business.

And lastly, even though most services and projects today are used by developers and businesses make Access Flow and Access Campus, I'm very excited to tell you that we're working on three completely new products and services created directly for you, the end user, and not developers or businesses. We have partnered with community leaders who directly lead and manage the creation process of these products and services while we provide primarily the engineering capabilities, resources and the funding.

Also are funding community projects and initiatives investing directly in talented individuals from the blind community who are top experts in assistive technologies so they can build new and very exciting assistive technologies both in software and in hardware, and more information on that will be coming soon.

These are products and services made directly by the community for the community or by the users for the users with accessiBe support, assistance, funding and expertise.

That's it. I truly appreciate the opportunity to address you today and very much looking forward to expanding our relationship with NFB members and work together towards creating a much more accessible world. Thank you.

[Applause]

BENNETT: How about a door prize?

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Hold on a second.

SPEAKER: Comment from the floor.

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Who are you?

SPEAKER: Riley O'Connor.

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Do you have a question?

SPEAKER: I do.

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Shir... don't run away.

So, this is a beginning to the conversation. But this organization has never shied away from difficult conversations. And this is part of our effort to do exactly what Jonathan talked about earlier. We have a responsibility to not simply tell these companies what we think, but to steer them in the right direction or to steer them out of business.

We do appreciate you being here, Shir. Briley, go ahead.

SPEAKER: I think what we have here is not a communications problem but an honesty problem.

I'm looking at the website, your home page right now, and you promise things that don't exist. You promise WCAG compliance with an automated solution that can't give that. You promise 508 compliance with automated solution, and that doesn't exist.

You promise two‑minute integration and immediate turn‑around. You can't provide accessibility. If I could do accessibility in two minutes, if the automated solution already existed, I would be out of a job. I don't see anything on your home page about the importance of native accessibility and how accessiBe can help people build a sustainable accessibility practice. There is a place for overlays when they're better, but all the things that you have just said don't seem to be reflected in the communications. Are you planning to change any of that?

SHIR: Thank you for the question. As I said, we're not afraid to have difficult conversations and the long process and hard work. And to answer the question, there are multiple layers to that. First, anything that you or anyone else believe that we have gone wrong or got wrong, our home page or any other place, I implore you to tell me, email or here or any other way, so we can sit down with you and formulate the way that these things should be phrased in a better way.

I can tell you a few other things. The work we have done with the community is exactly on that. The website, all the pages, almost all the pages, and other communication, has been created with the ‑‑ with a lot of experts. Not just experts. Experts and users from the community, not just review but actual creation. And still these will not be perfect and subject to change. If we got something wrong, we will be sure to change that now, in terms of automated remediation and integration, what our home page promises, at least when I read it, and maybe it's not what you get from that, and if that's the case, I want to sit down and make the changes. So it will be clear to everyone, to me what our home page says today is we have an ecosystem of tools and solutions that together, when you implement them, you can achieve accessibility.

The two‑minute integration, the phrase, is that not that you achieve accessibility in two minutes, but our systems are installable and can get in your platform in two minutes. It does not mean you have fully remediated all your product forms and other practices in two minutes. It means you install in two minutes. If that's not clear, we will work to change that. With you or anyone else willing to give us that guidance. Thank you for the question.

[Applause]

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: We're running short on time, but I would say that we do appreciate you being here. This is the beginning of a conversation, and I think the truth will tell itself in what we see accessiBe do and what this audience says about it going forward.

So thank you for appearing on our stage.

[Applause]

I would like to call on Ryan Strunk to talk about the PAC plan.

[ video tones and music playing ]

RYAN: You flow, I remember at my very first convention, we had Microsoft at the convention. This is back in 2001. And we had a very different conversation with Microsoft than the kind of conversations we have today. And the fact that Microsoft even has a chief accessibility officer now is the testament to the power of this organization and working with this organization. So I'm excited at the possibility of building another bridge like that.

All right, I realize that was a bit of personal privilege. So here we go... I'm going to tell you a brief story about some changes that have happened on the PAC plan and I think you'll be excited about this. I'm going to do a different order. I'm going to give you the names of the winners first, and you will notice something about the names. Were you go to yourself... ugh! Who did that!? I'll tell you. It was a Plucky affiliate and a lot of volunteers. Our first winner, Vicki Hodges Farley from Arizona.

Jessica Ediston from Alabama. And now buckle up, y'all... Sue Larson from Colorado!

Barry Arnette from Colorado.

Maureen Needfeld from Colorado.

Now, hold on to that for a minute. Hold those numbers. Why are there so many Coloradoans? Well, yesterday I told you there was a tie between Minnesota and Colorado, eight appease. Right now the race for the pack rat has Maryland at 9, Minnesota at 10, and Colorado at 15!

[Cheers and applause]

When you send seven people back to the PAC table in one session, that's what happens y'all. The mule... the pachyderm, we have Kentucky at 27%, Delaware ‑‑ I'm sorry, but you have been unseated, but you're still rocking a healthy 54% increase. Maine has 143% increase in their PAC contributions.

Last one, this is going to blow your mind... for the PAC mule, the division with the most activity, NAGDU is at 9.

The parents are at 10.

The seniors are at 20.

So if you want to shake the numbers up, get back to the PAC table or go to NFB.org /PAC or call or send an email to PAC@NFB.org . Send it to friends, family, whoever you want, and have them credit your state or division. So far at this convention, we are now up to an annualized total of $468,105.70.

Thank you, PAC!

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Thank you, Ryan. We're running a little behind, I'm going to give it to a note of caution to speakers coming up.

## Defining Meaningful Access and Consumer Control: The Blind and the Evolution of Overlays

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: This gentleman probably needs no introduction. Does everybody know who Curtis Chong is?

[ Cheering ]

Exactly. "Defining Meaningful Access and Consumer Control."

Chong has been a longtime soldier, leader in the trenches, wherever he needs to be, and the thing you need to know about Curtis Chong, although you may associate him with technology, he believes in blind people more than he believes in technology.

[ Cheering ]

And so he is here to talk about that. Our friend, our colleague currently from Colorado to share his perspectives, here is Curtis Chong!

[ Music playing ]

CURTIS: Good morning, my friends and colleagues in the National Federation of the Blind!

I am one of us. Right?

And I remember one time I was in Nebraska and gave a speech about technology and I said, everybody is getting so excited about technology, but it's not the technology that makes us successful. It's the people who use it to become successful.

So I'm supposed to be talking about the evolution of what we are calling overlays and what our resolution in 2001 called overlays in the technology field that says we should call these accessibility widgets.

That sounds a bit more technical, right? They always want to make things more technical. But what is it? It is automation that is supposed to look at the coding for a website, and's supposed to find things that make the site not accessible and to automatically fix them. And there is a part of my mind that wants to know if it's so easy to do, why don't they fix the code so the automation comes up with a zero defect response? Because that's really ‑‑ websites should be accessible without requiring automation. Now there are some things that these accessibility widgets can do to make websites more accessibility. I'll acknowledge that. I don't think there's a single one in the room who will say and support the idea that automation fixes all. Accessibility problems. I'm such a negative person on technology, when I hear the term artificial intelligence, which is hyped a lot these days, I think there's a heck of a lot of artificial there and no intelligence at all.

[chuckles]

So this ‑‑ this idea that automation can only fix some of the accessibility issues that we face, the question is why are companies like user accessiBe, Audio Eye, why do they boast so many customers? Why? What is the thinking of these ‑‑ many of them small businesses that cause them to pay their $49 a month or what have you to make their sites accessible? If you look at accessiBe's website, they say they have 198,000 customers who trust their work. That's a lot of people out there, multiplied ‑‑ if they paid 49 bucks, you do the math. Figure out what that is, right?

I think what the reason is ‑‑I'm going to tell you my pessimistic view why customers are doing this.

They think that this simple automated solution is going to fix their accessibility problems and beyond that they sort of assume that maybe they won't get sued.

No, I think that is unfortunately the reason. But there is another factor we should think about. Small businesses with five, ten, 15 employees. When they want to put up a website, how many employees know HTML, which is core language of what goes on on the web. How many people? None. So they use a tool to develop the pages. They don't care what goes into the page. Nay just want it to look right so that customers will come and buy stuff or engage in them to do business, right?

And these tools do not automatically generate accessible code. I hope all these purveyors of accessibility widgets will think about that and maybe find a way to get a tool that does it automatically so that we don't have to worry about it anymore.

So the only way that troupe accessibility can really be achieved, as we have learned the hard way, with a lot of hard work, a lot of involvement from us who look at the website, and then a continuous process of monitor, monitor, monitor, because when Version 2 comes out, everything breaks.

AUDIENCE: Oh, yeah!

CURTIS: But the small businesses can't do the work that's required, so we live in what I would think of as a fairly imperfect world. What do we do? What do they do, if they have two employees, five employees, ten employees? The first thing we think about, if the website cannot be fixed, then for God's sake, find a way for me to do business with you that doesn't involve me getting online. How many of you... let me just take a random poll here. If any of you are using a ‑‑ use a screen reader like JAWS or NVDA or Supernova or whatever, to get on the web, say aye.

[ ayes respond ]

CURTIS: That's good. I was worried for a minute. How many of you when somebody says "you have to fill out this health pre‑screening survey online," the first reaction is... my God, do I really have to do that!? Say aye.

[ ayes respond ]

Okay. How many of you feel anxious and worried and unhappy that more and more businesses and job applications are forcing you to go online to fill out the application and you are more or less assuming that the application will not be accessible with your screen reader?

[ ayes ]

CURTIS: So all of you website people, not us in the room, but the companies you know, we have two companies here at this convention. User Way was doing listening sessions, Shir is here listening. The act of going online, the task of dealing with websites is still a hit‑or‑miss proposition for most of us.

[Applause]

We are more likely to run across a website that does not work completely. The worst thing is you fill out the stupid form and you get to the submit button and press enter and nothing happens. Now, can the automation from accessiBe or User Way or whatever fix that problem on the fly? It darn well better! Because then otherwise it's not worth anything.

AUDIENCE: That's right!

CURTIS: So the web, the online business, whether we're using a computer or a smartphone, I look at this from the point of view also from the people who are developing accessibility solutions. You know, we don't pay accessiBe or User Way or Audio Eye anymore. We're not paying customers, right? They're not getting the $49 a month from us. However, we are either the beneficiaries, if they do their work right, or we are the victims if their automation makes it worse.

What do we have to learn as responsible active advocates in this computer to deal with the fact that these big companies are here and they're here to stay? They're here. They're not going to go away. Microsoft isn't going to go away. I mean, they're not one of these companies, but you know, when we started worrying about Microsoft, I kept saying to people, they're not going away, these are big companies, they've got a lot of money out there. We can't hate them forever. We have to start talking to them and build bridges with them, if necessary kick them in the butt first and then get them to listen. In our history, do you remember some of our best friends in this accessibility arena are people, when we started with them, we went after them with a hammer and then they became our friends, right? Remember this?

I remember the time when we went after America Online. They're sort of gone now, right? But Target is still here, right? And we went after them.

So it's always the pattern that we ‑‑ not always, but a lot of times it is a pattern that we go after a company ‑‑ and we hope that accessiBe and the Federation that we ultimately establish a very active and positive working relationship, because notice what it's all about.

[Applause]

But I'm perfectly willing to sacrifice a good working relationship if they do something wrong and we tell them they're doing something wrong and they don't fix it. You see what I'm saying?

But how do we know when we come across a website... because, remember, we're talking some ‑‑ one of the companies say they have over a million websites out there that their automation is working on right now. Does that scare you a little bit? Sometimes you don't even know if the automation is there. If the automation is there and working, we are happy. We get our work done. Everything works terrific.

The problem is when it doesn't work and we have no idea who we are supposed to communicate with. Isn't that right?

And also I think there is a big problem when a government or private agency or a company thinks that their accessibility problem is solved if they simply pay the low fees for automated solutions. This means they haven't given us a single ‑‑ well, maybe a single thought, right? They have thought about it and they said, here is what we'll do, we'll pay this company the money and our site will be accessible and everything will be good. That's what they thought. And then if anybody bothers or dares to raise the issue that a certain thing on their website doesn't work, then they are a little worried because now, oh, my gosh, maybe I have to put a little more effort into all of this. But it is our job as people who need and want equal access online ‑‑ I'm not just talking access. Jonathan Mosen made a very good point. Usability is the part that never gets talked about.

[Applause]

I work with some of these companies and they say, yes, we have NVDA and JAWS and our testing team uses this all the time. And I say, well, do you have the monitors running when you do this? No, they have to see what they're doing. Do they really? You're testing a screen reader and sometimes you don't know what you have seen versus what you have heard.

In the final analysis, let me say these accessibility widgets or overlays or whatever you want to call them are not going to go away any time soon. The companies that sell this technology, they're simply too large already, their technology is too pervasive.

I know that most people in this room groan whenever they hear me say "overlay." Go ahead, give me a big groan. Overlay...

[ audience groans ]

But we can groan, but in the end, if we put our minds to it, and if we use the power of our collective advocacy, and if we ‑‑ once we find something that is a problem and we push back on it, we will be able to nudge this in the right direction and get these companies to pay attention to us, to talk to us, and to listen to what we have to say and treat us with the dignity, respect, and equality that we as blind people deserve. And I thank you very much for your warm reception this morning.

[Applause]

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Thank you very much, Curtis. Do we have a door prize?

BENNETT: Absolutely!

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: I wonder if we can get a Give 20 report.

BENNETT: We have a folded blanket in a bag, which is really nice, it's got a chocolate bar and 25 bucks. And the winner is going to be Julia Atkins. Everybody's got to wake up now! Come on, let's go!

Julia.

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Did you get them.

BENNETT: No. How about Scott Michael... let's see... sorry, I messed that one up. But they're here. No, they're not here? I guess we're Scott‑free. Let's see who is next.

Mary Folsom of Georgia. Mary Folsom, are you here? Yes, she's here. Stay up until we get to you.

## Tired of Waiting: Perspectives on Ride Denials from Uber

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Okay. Thank you. All right, we have three more presentations this morning, so I'm going to jump right in. Anybody aware of any issues with Uber? Anybody?

[ audience responds ]

I don't need to give this much introduction, but I do want to express appreciation. We have invited Uber and Lyft executives to this stages many, many, many times. And they have never come. Except for today.

[Cheers and applause]

I have expressed to our presenter today on your behalf, the extreme level of frustration, agony, fear, anger, trauma from having experienced denials by Rideshare drivers. I shared with her every word that I put in the presidential report. And she has seen the evidence firsthand not only the incident that Gary Wunder and Danielle McCann and I had, but other incidents, including a very significant incident that happened right during this convention earlier this week.

[ audience responds ]

With three of our scholarship finalists an the president of our Maryland affiliate. It was a very disturbing incident. So as I said in the presidential report, we're tired of waiting. We're tired.

[Applause]

And I could rant about this for a long time, but the fact of the matter is that we do have an individual who has leadership at Uber. She's the Director of Driver Operations. She has demonstrated a commitment to helping us get this done in the right way. But just as we said with accessiBe, we're waiting to be convinced. But we do appreciate joining us today to talk to us about the perspectives from Uber, Liza Winship!

[ Music playing ]

LIZA: Thank you, Mark, and thank you so much for having me here today. It's an honor to plenty to you all and to represent Uber here at the 2023 NFB Convention. I worked for Uber for nearly a decade, and I'm currently the Director of Driver Operations for the U.S. and Canada. As Mark mentioned, my name is Liza Winship, and my team and I are humbled to be here to present to you today. I want to begin by acknowledging what happened at last year's convention and the condemnation of Uber by this Federation. We are driven every day to uphold our core values, prioritizing safety, building our experience with care, incorporating the diversity of human experience into each of our decisions. Focusing on the details that matter, and above all, doing the right thing no matter what.

While we are proud of the ways in which Uber's platform has expanded accessibility for people who have historically lacked access to transportation and to work, we hear you loud and clear. We have not always gotten it right. I would like to speak to you all today about the changes we have made since we have learned of your decision last July. But I first want to acknowledge that we understand the severity of NFB's condemnation of Uber. We recognize that your experiences as blind and low‑vision individuals are valid and unique. We recognize that each of you is valuable, both as a user of Uber, and as one of our community members. We recognize that we at Uber have a responsibility to each of you and to your organization. On behalf of Uber, I apologize for the negative experiences that led this membership to last year's resounding condemnation.

[Applause]

I would also like to acknowledge Uber's commitment to working with the Federation to ensure equitable access to the Uber platform for your community. We are in this. We are going to get it right. We're dedicated...

[Applause]

We're dedicated to improving the experience of your membership, particularly blind and low‑vision community members who use service animals.

[Cheers and applause]

After last year's convention, we engaged with your senior leadership to address the primary pain points your membership faces. We are grateful for the NFB's partnership, and the opportunity to listen, ask questions, and to begin to iterate on solutions. At the same time, we reached out to other leaders in the blind and low‑vision and service animal community, and invited experts to contribute to a working group to refine solutions. We considered the past year the beginning of a long‑term working relationship. If you will accept us as partners, please hear our willingness and our enthusiasm to building on this together.

I want to discuss some of the concrete changes we have made to the Uber platform in an effort to improve the experiences of your membership. These solutions have evolved over time as we learned about pain points in the experience from your leadership from experts, and from other members of the community. When we met with leadership last fall we learned the nuances of experience related to each of the issues raised in NFB's resolution last July. At the same time, we were doing extensive research with Uber riders who use service animals, and with drivers, to learn more about how and when trip experiences break down. First, we want to be clear that Uber investigates and permanently removes any driver from the Uber platform who is found to have knowingly discriminated against a rider.

[Applause]

If we determine that a driver knowingly denied a ride to a user of a service animal, they no longer have access to provide rides on the Uber platform. This is true in the U.S. regardless of whether or not a driver has allergies or religious or other objection to riding with a dog. We understand there has been some confusion in our communications regarding investigation outcomes. We have gone through an investigation and heard from a support agent that following the trip denial, the driver received a reminder about Uber service animal policy.

We heard from some of you that this messaging led you to believe that drivers were not being removed from the platform for refusing to give rides to people with service animals. We have reviewed and changed our communication to make it even more clear that Uber removes platform access for drivers who knowingly deny receives for discriminatory reasons and we will continue to train our agents in the best ways to support you.

[Applause]

Additionally, we are working to refine the ways riders can submit trip denial reports to Uber's investigation team. Riders traveling with service animals who experience a trip denial can now reach us by phone to report the incident.

[Applause]

The phone support can be accessed directly through the app and the agents answering the call have been trained to support riders with service animals. We heard from this membership your leadership and other experts about the range of complications service animal users face when reporting trips canceled prior to pickup. First, we built a phone support option as an additional accessible way for users with service animals to communicate with our investigations team. In addition to this telephone option, we switched the management of these investigations to our specialized safety team, in recognition that each trip denial of a user with a service animal represents a safety risk.

[Applause]

Now, when you report a trip denial that you believe was due to your service animal through the app or the phone, each incident will be reviewed by a highly trained member of our safety investigations team.

We know that some of you may have tried to use this phone support already, and that it may have not been a perfect experience.

[ Laughter ]

We are diligently training agents and working on quality assurance to improve this experience. We appreciate your patience during the transition and encourage you to use the option again.

To help with another real pain point we have heard about, in addition to the service denial reporting line, we are also working on changes in the app that will allow you to view trips canceled before a pickup in the ride history if you experience one.

[Applause]

We will have way more to share on this very, very soon.

We are reaffirming our commitment to educating drivers about our service animal policy. We heard from you that more frequent clarification of our policy to drivers was necessary to improve experiences. So we implemented a mandatory policy reminder that is displayed to all drivers in the U.S. and Canada, including existing and new drivers within 30 days of onboarding. We have insured that drivers receive this policy information in their preferred language.

We also have implemented a policy to remind all drivers who opt out of Uber Pet that by doing so they are not opting out of their legal and Uber policy obligation to transport users with service animals.

We believe transparency fosters accountability. We want our users with service animals to have evidence of our policy and our solutions at work. In order to shine a light on the experiences of the service animal community on the Uber platform, we commit to working with experts in the community to determine how we can best increase transparency on how Uber hands issues related to service animals and their owners. We are dedicated to build ag process that demonstrates our commitment and accountability to this community. And we have more commitments in the works. We will continue to work with experts across the industry to determine the next steps in developing appropriate education content available to all drivers. And we have implemented internal processes to ensure that all new Uber app updates or features meet accessibility and equity standards out of the box.

[Applause]

We know that the commitments we have made and the plans we are working on towards daily are still just the beginning of this relationship and what you require from us. We look forward to building on these solutions to help meet the needs of the blind and low vision users and for those in your community with service animals. Thank you for the opportunity to work to improve the experience of your members who use Uber, and for the chance to address you here today.

We hope to continue to earn your trust and to build on this work together into the future.

Thank you.

[Applause]

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Are you going to be here the rest of the day.

[Applause]

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Thank you, Liza. I was just asking her if she ‑‑ how long she's going to be here, if you would like to try to talk to her, you could find her up by the stage when we adjourn. Now, two things, Liza, I do appreciate you being here, and the baseline of commitments that you have made. One thing on the technology, I would encourage you to take up Jonathan's DEF frame work to make sure that ‑‑ I think we're not going to have time for questions, so bear with me.

Number one, because, of course, when an update comes out and accessibility is broken, we're left waiting.

Number two, though, right now the burden of proof about discrimination is on the person who is discriminated against. And that just should not be.

[Cheers and applause]

The fact of the matter is, service animal handlers are not abusing drivers. The burden of proof should be on the driver and the rider should not be penalized automatically for being discriminated against.

[Cheers and applause]

Now, we are not asking ‑‑ we are not asking that abusive riders be allowed to continue to abuse drivers. We are not for that. But service animal users, our members who are discriminated against, should not have their accounts locked when they are discriminated against while the investigation is going on.

[Applause]

This is not an equal relationship. The driver is the person in power, and the rider should be the one that gets that benefit. Besides, aren't the customers supposed to be right?

So I encourage Uber to consider that. I didn't tell Liza I was going to say that, so I'm giving it to her. I think that is a significant issue that we should look at. Look, we've ‑‑ this group, we have made the commitment to keep the pressure on and I need each of you out there to do that. And I think we can get there with Uber, and I hope that Lyft will decide to show up one of these days, otherwise we'll be done with Lyft.

Thank you for being here, Liza.

[Applause]

And she will be available to talk to you after the session if you would like. All right, our next item, I want to move to quickly, this gentleman, unfortunately, could not be with us in person, but he is on Zoom.

Oh, I'm sorry, hold on. I got ahead of myself. I got ahead of myself. I called for a Give 20 update, and I do want that.

Before I introduce this gentleman, I'm going to go to Sandy Halverson.

SANDY: Thank you so much. I would hate to throw a tantrum in here in front of my friends in this hall because I didn't get to talk. I promise I will not speak as quickly as the film description or the photo picture that was taken that I could not understand a word of. Remember, I'm a senior.

Anyway, I wanted to say that when we are asked to do something, we do. We have delivered, and I hope we continue to deliver to our Give 20 Campaign. It would be great if our final presenter of Give 20 data could say that we have over 500 contributors. What you give makes a difference. And one of the ways that it is really helpful is when we ask other companies to consider matching grants, we can say we have X number of members who contribute. And these are members making these contributions to our White Cane tenBroek Jernigan and Sun funds. So it's been a great convention be I thank you all for all of your contributions. Keep them coming. And we'll learn something else later today. I'm finished now. No more tantrum.

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Okay. I believe both Give 20 and PAC tables will be open until 3:00 p.m. So you've got to get in before 3:00 p.m. to be included. So please do that now or at the beginning of the next session, because your time is running out.

## Full Participation of the Disabled in America: Nothing without Us

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Okay. I would like to move now to a presentation, which we're very honored to have the chair with us of the National Council on Disability. The National Council on Disability is an independent federal agency charged with advising the president, Congress, and other federal agencies on all aspects of disability in the United States since 2021. Andres Gallegos has been the leader for NCD. He serves as chairman. And that gives him a lot of responsibility for directing the work that is done by this agency. His background is in the law where he has been recognized widely as a leader in disability rights. He's published widely, trying to advance the ideals that people with disabilities are full participants in society and have the right to live in the world. Unfortunately, he was not able to be with us in person, but we are very happy that he is joining us virtually for the first time at this convention. Please welcome Andres Gallegos.

[ Music playing ]

ANDRES: Enhancing medical device accessibility, ensuring the inclusion of people with disabilities in clinical trials, the eradication of subminimum wages, the designation of the disabilities as presumed eligible population under Small Business Administration 8a business development program.

It may seem disparate at first, however, these topics are interconnected by a common overarching condition, nurturing a society rooted in inclusivity. A society that cherishes and values all of its citizens regardless of their abilities. A society that understand that is diversity is a source of strength and enrichment. A society that strives to provide equal opportunities for health and employment but also empowers people with disabilities to become entrepreneurial leaders. A society that includes the full participation of the disabled and understands absolutely nothing without us.

President Riccobono, ladies and gentlemen, good morning. I am a member of the disability community, Class of 1996, having sustained a spinal cord injury resulting in quadriplegia. What a privilege to address the National Federation of the Blind and its attendees of its National Convention on topics of profound importance that directly touch upon your lives.

On July 26, we will celebrate the 33rd anniversary of our civil rights legislation. Legislation that promised full participation of all of us into every aspect of American society. Over the past three decades we have seen a surge in accessible public and private spaces. An increase in reasonable accommodations in the workplace. Improved access to public services, and a shift toward a more inclusive societal mindset. Indeed, the landscape of our society has been dramatically altered and improved by the provisions and protections offered by the ADA.

However, as we all know, our journey towards complete inclusivity and equality is far from complete. We have considerable work to do. One only needs to step outside the National Federation of the Blind's beautiful facilities in Baltimore and attempt to utilize the city's sidewalks to know that work still needs to be done.

But the work that is truly needed to be done is to empower each other to assert our civil rights collectively, so that we hold to account those that are holding us back. To address ableist policies and practices wherever they arise. All to get closer to a society where individuals are not defined by their disabilities.

The National Council on Disability, the federal voice of people with disabilities, in our advisory capacity works tirelessly to do just that. To push us closer to a time where our day‑to‑day life is not dictated by the challenges society imposes or by the immense potential that lies within us. To a time where accessibility is not a privilege or reluctantly viewed as an unfunded man dated legislation. But recognized for what it is, a fundamental right, or the sound of a medical device speaking out your results is as ordinary as chirping of birds in the morning of the rustling of leaves in the wind. We're navigating websites or effortlessly finding your way around your home, a place you know by heart. Where your paycheck is reflective of your talents, your skills, and your dedication, and not your ability to see. Our work extends beyond that. As we push closer to a time where being a person with a disability does not serve as a barrier but instead opens doors to greater opportunities.

Where entrepreneurship and business leadership are reachable for people with disabilities. This is the promise of the ADA that we have yet to realize. We live in a time where technological innovations and medical breakthroughs can be made in weeks or months, where it once took years. These innovations and breakthroughs have dramatically improved the quality of life for countless individuals around the globe. Yet it's imperative that we let our federal and business leaders know that the effectiveness of any technological or medical innovation depends largely on its accessibility and inclusivity.

For the over 32 million adults in America that report having trouble seeing, even when wearing glasses or contact lenses or that are blind or unable to see at all, the need for accessible medical devices has never been more critical.

Medical devices, including home medical devices, like glucose meters, blood pressure monitors, thermometers, insulin pumps, home dialysis machines, weight scales, heart rate monitors, among other devices, all have revolutionized the way we manage our health. They have transferred power from solely the hands of healthcare professionals into the hands of individuals, enabling us to monitor our well‑being right from the comfort of our homes. But those who design those devices don't know what happens when those hands that seek to monitor the health can see the readings on a device. On what happens when a medical device isn't designed with inclusivity in mind. Even those who are blind or have low vision unable to utilize them effectively.

The answer, as all of us here know, is simple yet stark. Exclusion, disempowerment, an increased risk of health complications.

AUDIENCE: That's right!

ANDRES: Blindness and low vision should never preclude anyone having access to the tools they need to maintain good health.

[Applause]

ANDRES: When we talk about accessible healthcare, it's more than just making sure that there is a ramp for me and others like me, or sign language interpreters for the deaf. It is about ensuring that the tools we create are usable by all, regardless of their physical condition or situation.

For those who are blind or with low vision, this means designing medical devices with tactile buttons, large embossed markings, voice output capabilities or Braille compatibility.

[Applause]

It means rethinking our design process, creating devices that do not rely solely on visual cues but also incorporate auditory and tactile feedback. It means having members of our community at the table during the design process. Nothing Without Us.

In February 2022, we released our framework to end health disparities of people with disabilities, designed as a blueprint for our federal leaders to address the decades‑long significant health disparities that persist between us and our non‑disabled counterparts.

One of its 43 components calls upon the Food and Drug Administration through administrative action to establish regulations requiring the intermediate and high‑risk medical devices with a digital interface provide a blind or low vision user access to the same services and information.

Generally the same ease of use as provided to a user who is not low vision or blind.

Over the past year, our main focus has been on working with our federal partners to move towards the implementation of our five core come opponents and enhance data capturing, designation of all people with disabilities as a health disparity population. Designation of all people with disabilities as a special medically underserved population. The adoption of enforceable standards for accessible medical diagnostic equipment, and funding for the development of disability clinical care competency curricula and training.

AUDIENCE: Yes!

ANDRES: We are focusing now on moving forward the balance of the framework's components that includes engaging the FDA to adjust accessible home medical devices.

If we are, in fact, committed to addressing health disparities between us and our non‑disabled counterparts, we must also ensure that we are able to participate in clinical trials.

This is a matter of justice, equality, and scientific validity. We have been historically under‑represented in clinical trials, leaving a significant gap in our understanding of how treatments and interventions work for us.

From a justice and equality perspective, we, like anyone else, have a right to participate in clinical research.

[Applause]

Participation provides earlier access to innovative therapies that could potentially benefit others in the same community.

It is therefore crucial that clinical trials are designed and conducted in ways that are inclusive and accessible for people with disabilities.

From a scientific standpoint, the exclusion can lead to skewed results. Without representation from our community, we cannot ascertain the safety and efficacy of treatments for us. This lack of data may lead to unexpected or ineffectual treatments or miss taunts for effective interventions.

I am pleased to share that we are in the process of developing a policy report addressing the need for inclusion of people with disabilities in clinical trials. About one‑third of clinical trials in the United States utilize eligibility criteria that excludes individuals with intellectual disabilities and cognitive disabilities. And approximately two‑thirds clinical trials have specific exclusionary eligibility criteria. Excluding individuals who may not be able to read or write.

And those requiring assistance with activities of daily living. Those who do not have access to technology. Or those in the view of the research teams do not have the ability to complete study procedures. Safely engage in the research or have the necessary health status.

A study published in "Health Affairs" last year analyzed 97 interventional protocols in four clinical trials. Trials relating to dementia, depression, diabetes, and lung cancer. It revealed that 85% of those protocols allowed broad investigative discretion to determine eligibility. And only 18% explicitly permitted us to participate. Visual disability was stated as exclusionary criteria in 34% of those protocols.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, people with vision loss are more likely to report depression, diabetes , hearing impairment, stroke, falls, cognitive decline, and premature death.

Clinical trials evaluating therapeutics and interventions to address those conditions must include people who are blind or with low vision.

[Applause]

And while the report is yet to be completed you can be sure that one recommendation will be that federal funds should not support clinical trials that exclude people with disabilities without evidentiary based scientific rationale.

[Applause]

We have to stop permitting federal funds to be used to discriminate against us, period. Full stop.

[Applause]

The principle of inclusion extends far beyond healthcare. The empowerment of individuals with disabilities does not stop at equitable healthcare but continues through ensuring equitable opportunities in business and work as well. We shift now our focus from the laboratory to the realm of entrepreneurship and employment. Exploring avenues where inclusivity once again plays a defining role. This brings us to a discussion of the Small Business Administration's 8a business development program and the pressing need to eliminate subminimum wage both are critical areas where we need to foster greater inclusion and equality for people with disabilities.

[Applause]

If you're not familiar with the SBA's 8a Business Development Program, it is a federal initiative designed to support and empower small businesses owned by socially and economically disadvantaged individuals. That program aims to level the playing field by providing these businesses with a range of benefits for federal sole source contracts, competitive set‑aside contracts, and mentor protégé programs, among others.

It provides technical assistance, training and management guidance. A key feature of the program is its presumption of eligibility for certain groups enabling faster and more efficient processes of applications.

It embodies the federal government's commitment to diversity and inclusion in the business sector, recognizing a vibrant diverse business community contributes significantly to the economic health and growth of our nation.

Inclusion of people with disabilities as a presumed eligible population under this program will mark a significant step toward entrepreneurial opportunities for our community.

Small Business Administration's regulations, a business is eligible for the 8a Business Development Program if they are, among other things, at least 51% owned and controlled by U.S. citizens who are ‑‑ and I quote ‑‑ socially disadvantaged individuals who have been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudice or cultural bias within American society because of their identities as members of groups and without regard to their individual qualities, end quote.

The program presumes that Black Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Pacific Americans are socially disadvantaged and presumptively eligible for the program. There is significant body of literature evidencing that people with disabilities are also socially disadvantaged. We achieve lower rates of education, employment, and financial independence, and we live in poverty at more than twice the rate of people without disabilities. We make up approximately 12% of the U.S. working age population. However we account for more than half of those living in long‑term poverty. 17.5% of us participate in the workforce compared to 65% of people without disabilities directly resulting in higher poverty rates

Now, if an individual is not a member of one of the socially disadvantaged groups, it does not preclude them from eligibility in the program. However, absent the presumption of eligibility, each applicant must present facts and evidence that by themselves establish that they have suffered social disadvantage that has negatively impacted their entry into the business world. And each instance of alleged discriminatory conduct must be accompanied by negative impact on the individual's entry into or advancement into the business world in order for it to constitute an instance of social disadvantage. The National Council on Disability believes this is an unduly significant burden to place upon each disabled entrepreneur.

And given stark evidence that people with disabilities are economically and socially disadvantaged, we should be included as a presumed eligible group.

[Applause]

To that end...

[Applause]

In May of last year, I wrote to the Small Business Administration administrator top address that very issue. Since then we have had a couple of extended meetings with the SBA's associate administrator and his leadership team. The most recent occurred this past May. I wish I could announce that there's been progress, but I cannot. The resistance to our categorical inclusion. The SBA is encouraging us to submit a formal application for inclusion, which we the National Council on Disability cannot as advisory body, and therefore we look to engage in conversation with the National Federation of the Blind on this very issue very soon.

While we push for categorical inclusion in the SBA's 8a Business Development Program, the National Council on Disability continues to advise our federal partners to eliminate subminimum wages that are legally permitted under the federal labor standards act, Section 14c.

[Applause]

Established in 1938, Section 14c allows eligible businesses to pay some people with disabilities less than the federal minimum wage. That was 1938. It is now 85 years later. During an amendment in 1986, the wage floor was eliminated by Congress. Elimination of the wage floor has resulted in some employees with disabilities earning as little as pennies per hour.

Quite often earning that little while the employer is making hundreds of thousands of dollars and in some instances millions of dollars from that labor. That cannot be tolerated any longer.

[Applause]

It is a matter of basic fairness, a matter of equity. We should receive the same wage for the same work as those without disabilities.

[Applause]

We have bills to pay, dreams to pursue, lives to lead. We deserve the dignity that comes with earning a fair wage.

In closing, let us be reminded of the strength and resilience that lie within our shared vision. A vision of a time where medical devices speak to all who need them. Not just those who can see. A time with the process of scientific and clinical trials does not discriminate but includes every one of us, valuing our own unique experiences and contributions. A time where no individual's paycheck is diminished due to their visual abilities and where entrepreneurship is not the exclusive domain of any one group but is open and accessible to all, including people with disabilities.

Each of these goals are not disparate goals. They are interconnected pieces of the same vision: A vision of society that truly sees all of its members, that truly values each and every one of us, and that truly fulfills the federal promise that was made to us 33 years ago, a promise of full participation in a society that understands Nothing Without Us.

Thank you again for this opportunity to address you this morning.

[Applause]

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We really appreciate you being here, and we appreciate the aggressive agenda of NCD and especially that this particular agency takes very seriously its charge to be disability‑centered. So thank you for your words and we look forward to working Consent Academy these issues with you.

ANDRES: Mark, thank you, sir.

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: NCD has been a great partner in a number priority areas of the Federation, and we look forward to that in the future.

We have one more presentation, so don't run away to lunch yet, because this is an important one. Because we care about books, right?

[Cheers and applause]

## Expanding the Reach of the National Library Service: A Commitment to High Expectations for Blind Patrons

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: And I had a little introduction written for our next speaker, but I'll just boil it down this way...

When it was announced he was going to be the new director of the National Library Service, we were suspicious. We wondered, who is this guy? What is he going to do with our program? But I will say, we have a regular meeting at the executive level with this gentleman, our leaders are invited to give guidance on important committees of the library and important efforts. We continue to champion certain ‑‑ well, all aspects of the library, certainly the digital roll‑out of the e‑readers, the expansion of BARD, and as you ‑‑ as this convention knows, we have been vocal advocate for moving the library out of its dumpy old building into something that is worthy of this program and the blind of America. So here to talk to us is a gentleman who we are not suspicious of anymore. We call him a friend of the organized blind movement. He is doing a great job. He is here at his second in‑person convention. Here is Jason Broughton!

[ Music playing ]

JASON: Oh, my goodness! I am thrilled to be here, and impressed that you have decided to stay and hear me right before lunch. As a Southerner, I know how important that is to not be in the front or between people and their food. So I am going to make this concise and hopefully very, very ‑‑ I'm going to say "interesting." I'm giving you some updates and things of what we're doing at NLS. Oh, again, thank you to the NFB leadership and what you have done and continue to do. So I'm going to try to do this thing and really get it going here.

The topic today is expanding the reach of the National Library Service: A Commitment to High Expectations for Blind Patrons.

As a new director, I do believe that the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled plays an important role in the lives of people with disabilities by facilitating their full participation in society.

I believe that libraries play an important role in doing this. As a librarian, I love what I do and I love giving people information and making sure they are connected to things that can impact and improve their lives.

[Applause]

How are we going to do this? Well, a lesson is looking at it from a standpoint of offering it as, again, this lunchtime humor... a buffet of services. Within that, that is because ‑‑ and some of you have my number on speed dial ‑‑ we hear from you, loudly, through proclamation, through resolution, sometimes, for some of you, a monthly phone call to the director's office, or an email. And by understanding your needs and your wants, we have developed a very unique strategy for the future.

The strategy, however, is basically one in which we aim to meet our users where they are.

[Applause]

That means we are going to offer different formats, different pieces of technology, and different services. Within that, it means that we are going to have things continue but upgraded for the ‑‑ I would say the workhorse, our talking book player machine is going to be upgraded, known as the DA2. It will have wireless capability and still retain the front‑loading port for cartridges.

[Applause]

We are going through a revival, a Renaissance of Braille. With that the reader is something that you enjoy, but we also have launched some things such as Braille On Demand, in which the item is in our catalog, we will allow on permanent loan up to five printed Braille books for you to have personally.

[Applause]

The most sought after ones are usually ‑‑ and I love this as a former baker ‑‑ recipe and cookbooks.

And for those who also have some trivia, a quick little diversion here. If you are ever going to play trivia in the obviously near future, anyone think they could tell me the most requested genre at NLS at this very moment? It's not a surprise to hear that this even exists. Nope, not history, not science.

[ audience responds ]

Somebody said romance. How specific can you be with romance?

[ audience responds ]

Oh, that was interesting. Well, for time, I will give it to you, because I as a librarian did not know the genre existed. The most sought‑after genre for us at NLS at this current moment is romance, but it is specifically Amish romance.

Bet you never thought about that, did you?

I know, as a librarian, I love little tidbits like that. Most sought‑after.

The number‑two is paranormal romance. I'm in love with a ghost.

So just things that keep you tighter there.

As we go through this, however, we have built ourselves upon strategies that we believe will be successful in making sure that our users have access to a host of things by use of universal design, access, accessibility, and a host of tried‑and‑true options for services. Putting a focus on accessibility helps create a library that can be enjoyed by more people and can connect more people to the information and resources that they need. Our future is bright, but it much brighter being connected to each of you by way of NLS. Onward and upward. With that, I will now go into a few updates that I think you will find quite interesting.

As I discussed, Braille On Demand is something we launched where you can have a copy within our collection at your leisure, up to five within a year, going very, very well. We put up more than 1,000 items since it launched in 2022, but we have had over 14,000 requests. So we are trying to fill that backlog.

The Braille e‑reader program is churning along wonderfully. And I can report, as we look to the closeout at the end of the year, that means we will be in all 50 states by the end of this year.

[Applause]

The Marrakesh updates, we are wonderfully celebrating Marrakesh this year, and those not sure what that is, it was basically created to kind of do with what is known as the global book famine. In doing so, we are able to have a host of international languages from all over the world, and at this moment we have now topped over 100,000 downloads?

By way of you.

We have recently launched a Spanish language website, and with that we continue to see growth and a host of other areas for outreach.

And last but not least, a very important update that everyone should be aware of. NMS has long been in discussions with Library of Congress leadership. Congress, NLS office us moving from the current location in the Petworth neighborhood of Washington, D.C. to the main capitol campus of the Library of Congress.

A few unique things, however, there's a little bit ‑‑ I'm going to be upfront. There's a stopgap before I get to what we really want to cheer about. A wholly new facility will take many years to design, fund and build, extending the use of our current building and the proposal of any new building for years in the future. To bring NLS to the Capitol Hill sooner, as well as to avoid costly rent and potential high cost repairs, the library has identified an interim step before any new building will be built. We have received very positive news from the library leadership at the Library of Congress, and NLS agreeing, we will now depart the Petworth neighborhood and move into, as a temporary interim step, the Adams Building at the Library of Congress.

[Applause]

As we begin to make our plans, we expect to depart no later than the end of 2024. Both NLS and the library leadership are pleased with this interim step, and the Librarian of Congress, Dr. Hayden has said she is thrilled to know that NLS is finally coming back home.

[Applause]

With this, however, since ‑‑ if you're like me, you start thinking about, well, if you want to leave something, that sounds like you're going to be saving money. We will!

In addition to this item we're going to be able to save money to do more library programming. We also will be able to have a large amount of savings due to elimination of rent, and, of course, we look forward to giving you more products and services because of this change.

With that, however, we expect there will be no disruption in services, and, yes, you heard that from the mouth of the director at your Congress actually saying it.

I already have looked at those plans. We are thrilled that we are able to kind of make you aware of what will be going on over the next two years. And, again, thank you for having me at this wonderful conference, and I look forward to talking and being you for many more. Thank you so much!

[Applause]

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: I told the director we would have to get his personal recommendations on Amish romance later, you know. (chuckling)

All right. It's been a great morning. Bennett, let's have some door prizes to take us out. We will be adjourning and coming back at 2:00 p.m. Remember that we will have to clear this room promptly at 5:00 p.m. later today.

BENNETT: We got some good door prizes. We've got a couple of certificates, one for the computer for the blind free computer. It has a positive safety training certificate along with that, and 50 bucks. And the folding blanket with the chocolate bar in it.

Tim Shaw from Texas.

Not here. Okay.

Kimberly Flanigan from Mississippi.

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Kimberly Flanigan, are you here?

BENNETT: Not here. How about David Laniers from Michigan? I guess everybody has gone to lunch.

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Keep drawing.

BENNETT: Not here, okay. How about Pam Allen?

[ Cheering ]

From wherever she's from.

All right, next door prize is we have some health and wellness products and 50‑dollar gift card, like a ‑‑ I think it's a ‑‑ Kimberly Cole, Nebraska.

[ Cheering ]

Is she here, though? That was a great yell. I like that. I wish she was here.

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: I want to know how many books are going to be downloaded in Amish romance today.

We'll have to get a report next year.

BENNETT: We're getting a bookshare I think coming up.

How about Gina Tumrello from Texas? Probably pronouncing I wrong, but... Gina, are you here?

How about Stefan Pitt from the Bahamas?

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: That's 77 people here from other countries.

No Bahamas in the room.

BENNETT: How about Linda Markson from Texas? Nobody from Texas... I guess nobody's from Texas.

Abigail Baca from Louisiana.

Wait... is she here?

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Did you get Louisiana there?

BENNETT: Vaca. I guess not.

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: She just left.

BENNETT: How about Carolina Vigil from New Mexico?

No Carolina Vigil. Well...

How about Donna...

Donna Fair from Texas.

I think all the Texans took off. They're probably headed for Orlando already.

How about Paul Lyons from Ohio?

BENNETT: How about Addie Yates from New York? Are you here? Y‑A‑K‑E. Yake.

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: They want more added to it, Bennett. They want you to up the stakes.

BENNETT: How about Shawn Spears from Colorado? Are you here? He is here. All right!

Stay standing, please. Don't go out for lunch yet. You've got to get your prize.

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Is that your last one.

BENNETT: Last one is coming up.

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Last one coming up.

BENNETT: We've got the Bookshare subscription, Mr. President. And it comes with 50 bucks too. So you can get that book.

How about Daphne Mitchell, New Mexico?

She is here. Stick around, you're going to get your prize.

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Okay, we will remain adjourned until 2:00 p.m.