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AUCD

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CLOSING PLENARY SESSION

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>> JULIE FODOR: If everybody could be seated, we're going to start in just a few ‑‑ well, in a few seconds. You got quiet so quickly!

Welcome, everyone! Good morning, and welcome to the final day of the 2014 AUCD conference. I hope you've had an enjoyable and productive conference experience so far. This morning is going to be great, and the first thing we're going to start with is the passing of the gavel.

I will soon be the Past President, and we will have our new President come up here. I think she is making her way in, but in the meantime, I want to just tell you our new officers for this year will be Olivia Raynor as President of the Board, Karen Edwards as President‑Elect, Brent Askvig as Secretary, and Harold Kleinert as treasurer. As I indicated, I will become the Past President, and Julie Fodor will become the past, Past President. We don't have a past, past, Past President yet. Though Tony Antosh that's coming in at the back, we've tried to encourage him to become the past, past, Past President of the Board.

I would also like to introduce to you our newest members of the Board. And we have fabulous new members. Our membership has elected as our new member at large Harolyn Belcher who is the diversity program liaison with the Kennedy Krieger Institute LEND and cultural ‑‑ coordinator for cultural competency for the Maryland UCEDD.

We also have two new individuals joining as Board Members representing councils. And they are Jerry Alliston with the Mississippi institute for disability studies, who is the new community education and dissemination council chair. And Mark Smith from Monroe institute in Nebraska is the new family co‑chair of the council on community advocacy. Also this year our Board trainee representative is Elaine Eisenbaum for the Texas center for disability studies. I would call on all of our Board Members to either stand or wave so that everybody can recognize you now!

[ Applause ]

We are really looking forward to working with the new and returning Board Members in the coming year to further the goals that we've developed under our strategic map, and to represent you as leadership of the organization.

All right. The time has now come, if I can find the gavel. We take this gavel out once a year for this very important task. It's been a real honor for me to serve as President of AUCD over the past year, and I am so looking forward to joining Olivia in her leadership year. I know she is going to do a fabulous job. And welcome our new President of AUCD, Olivia Raynor!

[ Applause ]

Please accept this as the symbol of the office, and as your responsibility and power to unleash AUCD in the year to come!

[ Applause ]

>> OLIVIA RAYNOR: Good morning, everyone! I am really thrilled to become your new President, and in my first official duty I get to award all of you with prizes. So I think that I will ‑‑ the feeling will be very positive as you leave here, particularly for those of you that receive an award, and those of you that are in anticipation right now.

I do want to quickly say if Taryn Williams from the White House liaison comes as we're speaking and giving out prizes, we're going to segue very quickly to her to take advantage of the precious time that she has dedicated to generously share this morning.

So now let's move quickly to the fun part. As usual, our prizes reflect the latest in technology. Where is my Vana White helping me with my prizes? Liz? Great!

As usual, our prizes reflect the latest technology. We have a Microsoft Surface 2 tablet, and the new camera, and a pocket projector perfect for doing presentations on, which I know is the meat and potatoes of the work that we do. Remember that the holders of the raffle ticket must be present to win. We hope that this will go by quickly. And to assure a fair, bipartisan,n and transparent process, Liz is going to do the actual drawing of the numbers, and I get to present the prizes so that you have that good feel being your new President.

[ Laughter ]

First is the projector. And the winner is number 3‑0‑3‑9‑3‑3.

[ Cheering ]

>> OLIVIA RAYNOR: Come on down!

[ Applause ]

Okay. The second is the Go Pro Video Camera.

Thank you, Liz. And that is 3‑0‑4‑1‑6‑4.

[ Cheers and applause ]

The next is the Microsoft surface 2 tablet.

And it's 3‑0‑4‑0‑4‑5.

Woo‑hoo! Sandy!

[ Applause ]

Congratulations to all of the winners. And I'm going to quickly turn the microphone over to Andy Imparato who will introduce Taryn Williams.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: Thank you, Olivia, and thank you all for getting here early because we're in for a real treat and I'm glad that you are all here to hear what Taryn has to say.

Taryn Williams is on detail at the White House and the Office of Public Engagement, which was a new name for the Office of Public Liaison that Valerie Jarrett, who is the leader of that office, selected because there is a difference between being a liaison and actually engaging with a constituency. And given that our theme for our conference is "The Power of Engagement," I think it's important that we have someone from the Office of Public Engagement at the White House to talk to us about what the White House is doing to engage with the disability community around the President's agenda. She comes to this position with a really extraordinary background. She did a 9‑month detail with Senator Harkin on the HELP committee while at the Office of Disability and Employment Policy at the Department of Labor on the youth team. She is passionate about youth with disabilities and getting better outcomes and competitive integrated employment and a quality education for youth while they're still in school. She is from Sacramento originally. She went to Brown University undergrad, got her master's in education from Harvard. She is an underachiever.

[ Laughter ]

And she is doing a phenomenal job at the White House. Please join me in welcoming her!

[ Applause ]

>> TARYN WILLIAMS: I'm impressed that he did all of that from memory. So thank you for that introduction, Andy! Good morning to all of you. And thank you for being here bright and early. I have that unenviable spot of going before Senator Harkin. So I promise to be brief, but I really want to spend time sharing with you what we're excited about at the White House. So this is my first time stepping foot in the hotel since the conference started. But I feel like I've gotten a window into your time here through social media, or the Twitter feed. Technology is a great tool that's helped me to come to know your network over the past few months. It's also why when I look at you I don't really feel that I'm looking at a room full of strangers, but a group of people who are part of the broad, diverse disability community in this country. I kind of think a good analogy would be like you're neighbors that I just don't know the names of yet.

What I've learned from Andy and the AUCD staff is that you all are a caring, dynamic group of professionals, of advocates who are committed to making the world a better place for people with disabilities. And if I leave you with no other message today, it would be that the President is part of our community too.

Like all of you, he comes to this role with a fierce conviction that the world and American society needs to be a better place for people with disabilities. He believes in, and is fighting for, a world where every one has equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and pathways to the middle‑class. On the eve of the 25th anniversary, the President has charged us to continue our efforts to realize that vision. To work with colleagues both inside and outside the government to make the American dream a reality.

One clear priority that we have is employment. We know that even as our country has physically transformed for people with disabilities, that employment rates have remained the same. People with disabilities unemployed, underemployed, or not even in the workforce. I will say that again. I know you know it. They're unemployed, underemployed, or they're not even in the American workforce.

That has not changed even as our economy has recovered from the recession. Early in his first term, the President took action in this area. He issued an executive order to make the Federal Government a model employer of persons with disabilities. That orders requires agencies to create hiring plans and to be accountable for their hiring practices. Most importantly is they've adopted a goal of hiring 100,000 persons with disabilities into the federal workforce. Several years later, we're proud to say that data from our Office of Personnel Management, also known as OPM, shows that we're making progress. People with disabilities are being hired at higher percentages than at any point in the past 32 years. That number is inclusive of people with targeted disabilities, or significant disabilities. This success has not only boosted our hiring rates, but it's also increased the overall percentage of people with disabilities in the federal workforce.

Early on in the administration, the President also started a rulemaking process to transform the federal contractor and sub‑contractor workforce. It’s sometimes asked why sub‑contractors or contractors? And that's because they represent one in five of American jobs, and the rules which were finalized earlier this year set a 7% utilization rate for employers. We know that setting the standards will create change. We're not simply interested in enforcing new rules, but we're working very hard to provide businesses with the resources and technical assistance that they need to hire qualified people with disabilities. And our approach is not one‑sided. We know that creating a demand for employees puts pressures on schools and our workforce development system to bolster the pipeline of talent ready to fill new careers.

Before he signed it into law, the President had already charged Vice President Joe Biden with reviewing our job training system. That review and the partnership that it spurred formed the backdrop in which we've embarked on developing regulations for the new law. I don't have to tell you, because I know you that know, that this new law is a game changer. It took years of hard work, but through the leadership of Senator Harkin, his staff, and I specifically look at Andy, Michael (who I don't think is in the room), and Lee, and many others, we observed a rare moment of bipartisan success this summer. The signing of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act marked an important moment for people with disabilities and for this country. It advances a standard and expectation for the transformation of the workforce. Critically, it sets competitive, integrated employment as a goal, and we are working very hard. The White House, the Departments of Education and Labor and Health and Human Services are working to ensure that we engage the community in the development of regulations. These next few months are a time of action in the administration, and we want your input in the process. Your advocacy helped get WIOA passed, and it will help to get it done right. So I implore you to be our eyes and ears across the country helping us Washingtonians to understand what needs to happen to put more people with disabilities on pathway to employment.

I mentioned Department of Education. You heard from Andy that my background is in youth and young adults. I really want to take a moment to acknowledge the priority that the administration places on young people. We know that youth need academic preparation, workspace learning experiences, caring parents and adults who actively serve as mentors, and a whole set of support and systems that allow them to be successful in the most integrated classrooms. Just last week I had an opportunity to sit down with Secretary Swenson and RSA administrator Janet LaBreck. They acknowledge what we know: that we have work to do bringing our secondary classrooms and transition services to capacity to ensure that youth are getting what they need to enter into competitive work environments. But they have prioritized that change. With the leadership of Secretary Duncan and the full support of the White House, I assure you that academic preparation and transition of youth with disabilities is and will continue to be a priority.

I want to mention two additional things before I open it up for perhaps a few questions. The first is another priority of the President best seen in an anniversary that took place earlier this year.

On the eve of the 15th anniversary for Olmstead, we saw much more than a reaffirmation of its principles. In 2010, when President Obama launched the year of community living, he did so because he knows too many people face a difficult choice. Moving into a nursing home and facing safety and quality of care problems, or risking injury or death by staying in the community without adequate services to address their personal needs.

It was his charge to federal agencies to find ways to improve access to housing, community supports, and independent living arrangements. He knew that interagency collaboration was critical to allowing more persons with disabilities to lead productive, independent lives in their communities. And in the past four years, the agencies have charged forward. We've seen a creation of the Administration for Community Living which embodies the ideal for our community and a commitment to full inclusion for all people with disabilities. Their very existence, and the goals that they advance for the community have been a critical part of the overall effort to improve lives.

We've seen the Civil Rights Division at DoJ launch an aggressive effort to reform Olmstead, making sure that states eliminate unnecessary segregation of persons with disabilities, and to ensure that persons with disabilities receive services in the most integrated settings.

On the eve of the 15th anniversary of Olmstead, that work culminated in a landmark agreement in Rhode Island, one that will resolve ADA violations for approximately 3,200 Rhode Islanders with intellectual and developmental disabilities. As a result of that settlement, 2,000 Rhode Islanders currently being served by segregated programs will have opportunity to work in real jobs at competitive wages.

Additionally, over the next 10 years, 1,250 students will receive services to help transition into the workforce. That leaves me with my final message you to. The White House views the 25th anniversary as an opportunity similar to the one presented by Olmstead. It's an opportunity to close the door on an era that has seen great change and progress in the lives of people with disabilities in order to usher in an even better future. We know that change will bring fear. It will bring doubt. It might even bring some upheaval. But I hope that you will continue to stand with the administration as it fights to improve lives for people with disabilities. Thank you, and I would love if I have time to answer some questions.

[ Laughter ]

>> ANDY IMPARATO: Thank you for those remarks. I think everybody here sees that we're in good hands at the White House, and it's really been a pleasure working with you in this role. And I'm seeing you blossom as a spokesperson for the President of the United States.

I just wanted folks to know that Senator Harkin is in the house. So hopefully he will be appearing at that door shortly. So I think that we'll have time for a couple of questions, and I'm happy to just throw it out to the audience. We have folks with mics, but I'm also happy to repeat the question if somebody can't get to it fast enough with a mic. Any questions for our speaker? It looks like there is one over here, or am I just seeing movement over here? So there are no questions over here. People are just moving around. Okay.

[ Laughter ]

So I'm going to ask a question because I'm not seeing questions. So my question is: some people are concerned that Section 503 implementation around the 7% goal for employment, and the initiative around 100,000 federal workers have the potential to leave out folks with intellectual disabilities. I'm just wondering if you could talk about the administration's commitment to make sure that people with intellectual disabilities are part of some of these larger employment hiring initiatives.

>> TARYN WILLIAMS: I want to bring this a little bit lower again. I absolutely appreciate that concern. I can say without doubt that it is the priority of the administration. It's a conversation I had, in fact, last week with my colleague over at ACL, Sharon Lewis, to ensure that people with intellectual disabilities are included in your efforts to build the workforce development system, to help employers meet those new rules set both by the Section 503 regulation and also by the executive order. We know that it's simply not enough to say to employers "Go out and just hire," that we need to make sure that we're being very clear about who we need and what services and supports need to be provided in employment settings to ensure that it's done right.

So we do know that's a priority. It's a focus not only of the White House and ACL, but also there are folks in an interagency collaborative effort that in shorthand is called the Curb Cuts initiative that are paying particular attention to how we can ensure that people with intellectual disabilities are included in the pipeline.

[ Applause ]

>> ANDY IMPARATO: And quickly, I think that the Curb Cuts initiative is something that this audience maybe has not heard about. I think the full name is Curb Cuts to the Middle Class. Do you want to talk more about what that means and what it is?

>> TARYN WILLIAMS: So Curb Cuts to the Middle Class is a great name because it articulates what its goal is for this initiative, which is similar to the physical barriers broken down by curb‑cuts, breaking down barriers within the Federal Government to individuals with disabilities and trained into the workforce, and particularly on to pathways to the middle‑class. So that is an interagency collaborative effort. It involves a number of our federal agencies, the Departments of Labor, Education, Health and Human Services, Office of Personnel Management, Social Security Administration, the EEOC, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and the Department of Justice. So all of the agencies within the Federal Government who have a role and responsibility as it relates to getting people with disabilities services and the supports that they need. They've been collaborating over the last six months and will continue to do so leading up to the anniversary of the ADA, ensuring that we have a real platform and outcomes related to the employment of people with disabilities. So we already had a Champions of Change event that took place last year ‑‑ I'm sorry, last month. It's funny how time flies. It seemed like a year ago! It took place last month in the White House recognizing the hard work that employers are doing, and we're moving forward and planning for a summit that will also focus on employment issues, using those agencies really as the experts in the room.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: Great. Other questions in the audience? So I will keep going if you are okay with that.

>> TARYN WILLIAMS: Sure!

>> ANDY IMPARATO: Folks are literally from around the United States but also territories. So you have a lot of time zones represented in the room here. I'm wondering if in American Samoa, or somewhere far from Washington, D.C., how can you keep in touch with what the White House is doing and engage on some of the issues that you are talking about?

>> TARYN WILLIAMS: That is a great question. And I particularly appreciate it given the focus of the conference on engagement because I think that that's so important. We use a variety of tools, many I think will be familiar you to. We have monthly disability calls that we hold with the community. If you are not already signed up for those disability calls, I really encourage you to hop on those if you had an opportunity. They typically take place in the third or fourth week of the month at a time zone that is favorable for the East Coast. But still it can work for people who on the West Coast. We usually have it around 2:00 or 3:00 in the afternoon. We also have a biweekly newsletter that we put out that enables us to share you with some updates from the administration and from the agencies. So you can get a sense of where the administration is putting its action related to its priorities for people with disabilities.

And also you should, and I can see Senator Harkin to the side, so I will wrap that up. I would say that if you want to be in contact with networks, you can go on to whitehouse.gov. You will see under the "issues" folder there is a section called "disabilities" and there is a link off to the right where you can sign up to reach ‑‑ to receive newsletters and updates from us. That will give you a very clear, concrete way to hear from us and for you to reach out to us and to share. We have a disability inbox that we regularly respond to. So folks from all across the country write in to tell us about issues that they're concerned about, and we are very responsive to that as well. So please use all of those means to reach us.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: So if people go to whitehouse.gov they can sign up for the lists, and it's easy to navigate?

>> TARYN WILLIAMS: Absolutely! And if they have trouble encountering that they can go right down to the bottom where it says “contact us,” and they can send a note saying “this is not working for me, how do I get this?” And make sure that I am getting your newsletter. There is redundancy just in case.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: Please join me in thanking her!

>> TARYN WILLIAMS: Thank you!

[ Applause ]

>> ANDY IMPARATO: If you could stay on the stage, we're going to do a photo op with Senator Harkin and everybody who has been a staffer or a Kennedy fellow or an intern or a detailee or in some way referred to themselves as a Harkinista in their career. And while we have you here, one thing that, you know, we've heard throughout this conference I think is, and it really fits with the theme, is that sometimes we in the disability community spend too much time talking to ourselves and not enough time engaging with the public at large. And I'm wondering if you have thoughts about how the White House might be able to help us engage with a broader audience?

>> TARYN WILLIAMS: I think that is important point, Andy, and one that we've actually spent quite a bit of time discussing within our office, within the Office of Public Engagement. I think reaching out to the broader community is one of the most important things that the disability community needs to do as we move into the new era, 25 years after the passage of the ADA. We know that because of the congressional environment, because of the tough stakes that we have, that everything that is going to get done will be done within coalitions that not only reach across the different disability groups which can take quite a bit of effort in itself, but also that reaches across the different sectors. We model that in the Office of Public Engagement. We're frequently working with each other so that we have liaisons to a whole host of communities, the LGBT community, the African‑American community, the Jewish community. I'm going over there in about an hour, the women's community. We make a real point to talk to one another, to educate each other about our issues, to identify where we have some agreements, but also where we have differences, because we know that if we can work through those that we'll have a stronger coalition at the end. And I think a great model for that is what happened earlier this year with the disability community and Labor as it related to minimum wage. And I would love to see as a network more of those partnerships taking place. And on a whole host of issues, particularly in education.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: You mention what you want to see from our network, and I guess that's a good segue. I think that one of the things that our network has access to is evidence about what works. I know that this is something that you are committed to when you were at ODEP, you know, studying what was happening with youth, kind of what’s evidence‑based, what do we know about what needs to happen in a classroom? What do we know about what should be happening, you know, during transition? And I'm just wondering, do you feel like you have access to the expertise of this network in your role at the White House, in your role as ODEP? Are there things that we can be doing to kind of connect better with you with evidence that you are looking for?

>> TARYN WILLIAMS: So I would say that in my role at the White House that I do feel like I have a network, and I was quite serious when I started at the outset of my remarks sharing that I feel like I know you all through the platforms that are really available to us. It is through Facebook. It is through Twitter. We cannot understate the importance of those platforms for getting the awareness of disability and your network out to the broader national disability community. As someone who works within the White House, I definitely have access to it. I think that there is still work to be done within the federal agencies, and I don't say that that work needs to come directly from you. I think that it needs to go both ways. I think sometimes the federal agencies, we get very focused in on where our money is flowing, and entities that represent the technical assistance centers, for example that we fund. And we don't look more broadly to see where there is a breadth and depth of content expertise on other issues. So I would say that for your individual centers across the nation, continue to model what I've really seen Andy do over the last year which is raise the visibility of what you do, how you do it, who you are, because it helps to build the relationships. Even though it's online it helps to build the relationships that will allow you to be seen as experts for folks who are here in Washington, and very quickly looking for evidence that they need yesterday.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: And thank you. I just want people to know what Senator Harkin is getting an education on the PROMISE initiative and other AUCD activities outside, which is important. So I don't want people to feel like he should be in here, and I know that he will come in soon. And I know that we need to let you go soon.

But did you want to ask a question, Liz? Let's get Liz a mic if there is somebody with a mic. Just one second, Liz.

>> LIZ WEINTRAUB: My question is, are the White House newsletters, briefings, whatever you want to call them, are they in accessible language for people to access?

>> TARYN WILLIAMS: I would say that they are not as good as they could be. Just being quite candid. Looking at the language that we use, we have some restrictions in the White House where we're only able to link to other dot gov websites. So when we're pulling from those websites, the language can be quite policy heavy, and there's a lot of emphasis on our jargon, and I think that's something that we need to do a better job of. And as for some of the other piece, we're not as good as we should be. And I take that as a recommendation of something that we should be looking at.

>> LIZ WEINTRAUB: Well, thank you very much.

>> TARYN WILIAMS: Thank you.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: And one thing, you may not be aware of this, but Liz is actually going to start a weekly Washington update by video on kind of what's happening in Washington, so she is going to be using our legislative briefs that come out on Monday nights as a jumping‑off point, but she can also use the White House's newsletters and, you know, talk about what's in them and how self‑advocates can engage around them. So don't be shy about using us to help with the translation.

>> TARYN WILLIAMS: Yeah, no I'm writing a note to myself that that's something that we can do. It's not something that we can just do individually, but a real priority that I have. And the work, as Andy mentioned, the position currently is being filled by detail. And I think that it's very important that the knowledge that we gain as individuals in this position, particularly for my predecessor Claudia Gordon as well, that that gets transformed into knowledge that can stay within the institution. So I would love to not only talk you to, but to figure out a way that we can help other folks understand how to make things accessible. The White House has come a long way, particularly through Claudia's leadership and becoming a more accessible institution overall. But this is I think a real opportunity to do more. So we should talk.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: Claudia Gordon who spoke at our conference last year who preceded the detailee, and is the chief of staff at Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs at the U.S. Department of Labor which enforces affirmative action across the board for federal contractors. Tia, did you have a question or comment? Just tap on it there you go.

>> TIA NELIS: How can people with disabilities help the White House, you know, make some of these things happen that you are working on to help benefit us?

>> TARYN WILLIAMS: So one of the most important aspects of my role is to ensure that people within our building, so not only moving up to my senior leadership, Valerie Jarrett, but moving across to the different offices, the Office of Management and Budget, the Domestic Policy Council, National Economic Council, making sure that they are aware of the issues that are confronting the community today. And the best way to do that is really by evidence. And the evidence can come in any number of forms. It can come in the very savvy policy brief that has a real difference in advocacy. It can also come in the form of the individual stories that people have to share about how our decisions, our roles, our laws are impacting their lives. Both have, I would say, very important value for all of the folks who work in those different agencies within the White House. And we need to be able to share both.

So when I said "being the eyes and ears across the country," that means sharing your story. Sharing your evidence, but also sharing the individual stories. We were in a meeting just on Monday with the Secretary of Labor, and I note that a colleague of ours, Bruce Darling, presented Secretary Perez with a letter. That letter had power. It was simply one letter, and it was a as a result of a company sent as a result of some regulations. But being able to see in concrete form that this is what happens when you do something in Washington, that means something. So just don't ever underestimate the power of your individual voice but your individual voices have a collective impact.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: So thank you! Let's hear it again for Taryn Williams!

[ Applause ]

So if you can stay on the stage, and if Andy Bacon can come up here, and anybody else who has been a fellow, detailee, or employee of Tom Harkin’s in the last 40 years ‑‑

[ Laughter ]

‑‑ we're going to do a quick photo op. That means you, too, Lee, and Michael. We're going to do a quick Harkinista photo op and then introduce the Senator. But please come up on stage and all of the Harkinistas.

[ Laughter ]

[ Applause ]

>> ANDY IMPARATO: Senator, if you want to have a seat for a second, I want to do a proper introduction and it may take me a second.

So I know that Senator Tom Harkin is well‑known to this audience, so I just want to say some personal things about Senator Harkin. He has been in Congress for 40 years, 10 years in the House, 30 years in the Senate. He had a great partnership with a man named Bobby Silverstein who a lot of you know who was the chief of staff for the Senate Sub‑Committee for Disability Policy and did yeoman's staff work on the Americans With Disabilities Act, the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, the Developmental Disabilities Deliberation Assistance Act, the Technology Related Assistance Act, and lots of other Acts. And Bobby Silverstein hired me for some reason in 1993 to work for him on the Disability Policy Sub‑committee. So Bobby and Senator Harkin were my first bosses in Washington. What I learned from Bobby was the importance of prioritizing your family. Bobby has two sons, and it was really important for him to get home to his family every night. And that's not always something that gets prioritized in Washington. And Senator Harkin has lots of moms on his staff, and you will be happy to know that we have lots of moms on the staff at AUCD as well.

He set an example for me of having a flexible work environment even when you have a crazy schedule. Senator Harkin always closes the office early when he can get away with it. He always passes on any extra money in the form of bonuses to all of his staff. He walks the walk, and models what an inclusive employer would look like. I remember that we had a hearing, we had 13 hearings on disability topics during the 2.5 years that I had the honor of being a disability policy director. One of them we were really looking at what was happening for people with disabilities in the workforce. And at the end of the hearing he turned to me and said, "Andy, are we doing enough to hire people with disabilities in our office?" And that's his approach as a Senator. He wants to make sure that he is not just telling other people what to do, but he is leading by example. And the last thing I would say is that I think Senator Harkin's closest relationship in the Senate that I witnessed was his relationship with Paul Wellstone. And I think that they both had a lot in common. One thing they had in common is that they were liberals who cared about real people, but approached lifting them up in a way that was not arrogant or in any way divisive. The approach that both of them took to getting laws like the Americans With Disabilities Act, the Family Medical Leave Act, some legislative accomplishments, was to say that this is about America's core value this is what we stand for as a country, and every American can get behind it and if you look at Senator Harkin's accomplishments, all of them have been bipartisan. He has had great Republican partners for 40 years, including most recently Senator Alexander who will be moving into a leadership role on the Senate Health Committee who worked closely with Senator Harkin on the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. I think that's a huge legislative achievement in a climate where almost no other legislative achievements were happening. But, again, it's a testament to the Senator's ‑‑

[ Applause ]

So Senator Harkin and Bobby Silverstein hired me knowing that I had bipolar disorder. They put up with a lot of ideas from me which the members of the Board of AUCD is getting used to. I have to say when I went back to work for him in 2010, I never went to him with any idea in disability policy about which he was not at least as excited as I was. Often he said why haven't we already done it? So this is a man with urgency who is coming out of the Senate and into the community to continue this work. Please join me in welcoming Tom Harkin.

[ Laughter ]

>> HON. TOM HARKIN: Good morning! My goodness. Wow! Good morning, everybody! Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! Thank you all very much! Andy, thank you for that very kind and overly generous introduction.

As Mark Twain once said, you will go to heaven for your generosity, when he was introduced with a lot of effusive praise. Or unless you go elsewhere for the exaggeration. That's the other part of it.

[ Laughter ]

Well this is great to see all of you this morning. I must say that this is the best morning I have had since the election.

[ Laughter ]

Being with you here!

[ Applause ]

So it is an honor to be here. Thank you for the invite. It was great to see and be here with some of the team. Some of them aren't here, of course, but to see those that are still actively engaged, Andy Bacon, Michael Gamel‑McCormick, Lee, and, of course, Andy Imparato, just all very, very close friends. And people really get the work done. I get a lot of praise for getting all of these things done.

It reminds me there is an old saying out our way in the Midwest that if you are driving down a country road and you see a turtle sitting on top of a fence post, you can be sure of one thing. It didn't get there by itself.

[ Laughter ]

So I feel kind of like that turtle on that fence post. People look and say, oh, that's amazing. But I didn't get there by myself. I got there because of people like Andy and Michael, Lee, Bobby, all of them, Andy, all of the people that have worked with me in the past who have really pushed hard to make sure that we get the legislation through and have the proper hearings. So I just want to say that I'm appreciative of all you, and especially those that have been associated with me for the last 40 years.

It's hard to believe that after 40 years I am now retiring. I'm retiring from the Senate. But I'm not retiring from this fight.

[ Applause ]

The fight to expand opportunities for people with disabilities. As I move into the next phase I hope to work with you all in one form or another to continue our association. Because I think of you not only just as friends, but I see Bob Bacon and Tammy here, they're not just friends but almost family. It's sort of like my extended family here because we care about the same things, and we work hard for the kind of justice and inclusion that we want for all people. So 8 weeks from now, I will be out of the Senate. As they tell me, this is ‑‑ a lot of odd things around here. That I get a half‑day's pay on January 5th.

[ Laughter ]

And then it's out the door, Harkin!

[ Laughter ]

So anyway, we've accomplished a lot together. Which I think about, and Andy just riffed through so many of the things that we worked together on from IDEA to the DD Act to, of course, the ADA. One thing that wasn't mentioned, though, however, Andy, and I was looking at the screen and watching the realtime captioning was my bill to ‑‑ well, it was the Realtime ‑‑ let's see, TV, the TV decoder and captioning act that was actually passed before the ADA.

That mandated that every television set sold in America was a size 13" screen or bigger had to have the chip in it to automatically decode that line. And so that's why we have all of that decoding today!

[ Cheers and applause ]

And then later on we passed the Realtime Decoding Act. And that was in the late '90s to provide for realtime captioning, which is what you see right now. So bit by bit, piece by piece, we've tried to make it a more inclusive society.

Next year will be the 25th anniversary of the ADA. We're already planning on not just celebrations of an event passed, but sort of looking at where we go from here, and how we can keep expanding this concept of civil rights for people with disabilities. Next year is also the 40th anniversary of the IDEA, and Lord knows we still have a ways to go there, too, in terms of our educational structure in America, and being more inclusive.

One of the things that still bedevils me, and I'm sure a lot of you, is just the lack of real inclusion in our classrooms, in our educational structure. I just have two observations. A couple of observations on that one, we always think about inclusion of young people with developmental or intellectual disabilities or physical disabilities or a combination of either in school. We think about them being included in the classroom, right?

What about the inclusion of people with disabilities teaching in the classrooms? How about that?

[ Applause ]

It seems to me that we need to, again, reach out to more young people with disabilities to think about getting them on the pathway of being educators in elementary and secondary schools across our country. Boy, wouldn't that be something to see? So that's why I say the next kind of steps that we ought to be thinking about are expanding this concept of full inclusion.

Now, the second thought, of course, I think about when I think about education. And that's the ongoing struggle, although we're getting closer, but we're not there yet, to get rid of restraints and seclusions in our schools.

[ Applause ]

And we know, we know you don't need restraints and seclusions. We know examples of centennial school up in Pennsylvania. And the story, every once in awhile we see a story in the newspaper. We had one in Iowa about a young girl locked up in a dark room for all day long. It was just a terrible kind of thing. So these things keep coming around. And so we have to get ‑‑ we have to really bear down on that, too.

Now, the other thing that I want to just kind of focus on my remarks this morning, and Andy mentioned, is the passage of the Workforce Investment Opportunity Act. Took us five years to get that thing done, got held up for a number of reasons. But the one part that we got at that Michael worked on. Where is Michael? And Andy before he left worked on was to put a part in there that really would focus on transitioning young people that have IEPs, and making sure that they could transition either into the workforce or into higher education. A lot of times we think of transitions into the workforce. But it's also higher education, too and making sure that's accessible to young people with disabilities. So we got that through. And that's a big part of that bill, the Workforce Investment Opportunity Act.

Someone said why is it called that? I said, I don't know, but somehow my staff wanted to get the letters IOWA in it somehow!

[ Laughter ]

That's how it kind of came out. But there is a lot in there. Now, some of it you've already been doing. Someone outside, Bob and others, were telling me about the PROMISE program, and the money being used there in certain selected states. It's sort of doing similar kinds of things to what we envisioned, or what we've put into the Workforce Investment Act. And the idea is to get ahold of kids early on, just when they're right getting into high school and start working with them and their families first and foremost, first and foremost, to increase their expectations of what they can do and what they should be.

Well, what should they do? Well, in other words, start thinking about themselves, their family and thinking about their independence, their work ability, exploring different ways, what their interests are, what they would like to do to see if that meshes with their abilities. I mean, when I was young I wanted to do something, certain things, and I realized that I didn't ‑‑ that was not me. I couldn't do those things. Now, that's true of every young person. You have to give them the experiential avenues to explore what they want to do. So we really have to start focusing on that. I know it's tough. It's tough. And we've come a long way since the Americans With Disabilities Act, and all kinds of things in our society. But the one thing that we haven't come that far on, some, but not as far as I would like, and that's again we've got to keep breaking down these barriers. That is in the whole area of this idea of patronizing attitudes, that somehow we have to take care of you forever and ever and ever, and within that comes this idea of sheltered work, hmmm? Or the idea of that somehow you can't do anything except get a sub‑minimum wage in a sheltered workplace. And it's low expectations. Because you have a disability, we just don't expect a hell of a lot out of you. Well, why not? Why not raise those expectations? But in order to do that, you've got to work with the families. Parents obviously are fearful. What happens if we don't have SSI coverage, and we don't have all of this stuff for them, and the kids grow up, and we're getting older, you know, and I understand. I get that. I understand that. So you have to work with families to overcome their fear of the future. And get them involved in building a society in our country where you have the support mechanisms so young people with disabilities can aspire to higher levels, where they can go on to do different and better thing.

[ Applause ]

So, to me, this is just critically important work that we have to be about with this Workforce Investment Opportunity Act. And we need your help in this. Andy has heard me say this a number of times. When I first started on this, people said, oh, "Harkin, you don't understand. You are setting these kids up for failure."

Setting them up for failure. I said, "I don't get that. What do you mean?"

"Well, they won't be able to accomplish what they want."

But that's true of a lot of young people, disabled or not.

[ Laughter ]

They're not going to accomplish what they want to do. I want to be a rocket scientist, but you don't have the intellectual capability for it Harkin. Okay, I got that. I will do something else!

[ Laughter ]

But isn't that part of life to try something and maybe not make it? Try something else? That's part of life. That's what life is about!

[ Applause ]

So kids with disabilities are like kids everywhere. Sometimes they just need a good swift kick in the pants, you know?

[ Laughter ]

Get them going. So it's that whole idea. We do need to get out of the idea that the only work they can do is shelter, the only work they can do is sub‑minimum wage. We've got low expectations. No. We've got to raise the bar. We have to get to these kids early so that when they transition from their IEP they're either on a track for higher education, maybe skilled community college or skilled‑type occupations, or more liberal arts, or in the workforce. A whole broad variety of things like that. And there is one other. Having just gone through Veteran's Day yesterday, and being an old Veteran myself, I have been trying for a long time to get the military to breakdown their bias against having people with disabilities in the military.

[ Applause ]

That's ongoing. So I guess I wanted to go on for that for some length of time because I'm leaving the Senate. I hope that you will find others there, and in the House, that will continue to monitor the Workforce Investment Opportunity Act, and to make sure that it fulfills all of the promises, and the things that we put in it when we worked on it to get it through. So I want to go over that.

The other thing I wanted to say was that basically you saw the elections last week. How you could miss it? But keep in mind that disability policy has always been a bipartisan policy. It really has. From the very beginning, we've worked across aisles, and I don't know that there is any one Democratic or Republican champion. I think of the Republicans like Lowell Weicker, and Bob Dole, and so many others, Boyden Gray, George W. Bush, they really got it. They got what we were trying to do. And there are more out there. We're going through a little period of time right now where we have those who basically say, "Look, we've done everything that we need to do and we don't need to do anything else. "Well, yes, no, there are other things that we need to do."

And so competitive integrative employment, what I just talked about is something that needs to expand. We need to expand that. And as you know, we set aside ‑‑ I'm looking at my notes, we set aside 15% of Voc Rehab funds for just this purpose in the states. So we want to make sure that they're using that money for that will. For these preemployment transition services and counseling, job experiences and things like that. So I want to count on of all you to really kind of focus on that as we move ahead.

To make sure that they have all of the services there.

The other thing I wanted to say in terms of bipartisanship is that, look, the one thing that I had hoped that we would get done before I left the Senate was the ratification of the Convention of the Rights of People with Disabilities.

[ Applause ]

As you know, two years ago we brought it up. We thought that we had the votes. And it failed. It failed by six votes. The Constitution says that you have to have 2/3rds of those present and voting, by the way. It's not 2/3rds of the Senate, but it's 2/3rds of those present and voting. Well, anyway, we tried to bring it up again, and we were stymied. I tried before the break to get a unanimous consent to move to it, but it was objected to by Senator Lee from Utah. We're so close. We're so close.

But we're not there. But we can't give up. We've got to keep this as a Lone Star, something that is shameful, that the United States Senate would not join with the rest of the world in signing on to the Convention. That's what I said when it failed two years ago. I said it's a shameful, shameful day in the United States Senate. Oh, we heard all of this talk about, oh, we're going to lose our sovereignty. Yeah, we're talking about a new trade deal. I just saw that the WTO, the World Trade Organization is imposing sanctions on the United States because of another violation of trade. You talk about losing sovereignty? You've got the WTO fining the United States. This CRPD had no enforcement. They just had advisory functions to sort of highlight, focus, and give guidance to countries on what they should do to expand inclusion and opportunities to accessibility, education. And, you know, what really is bedeviing this is not that we don't have a lot of support for it. I mean, get this. Get this. The Chamber of Commerce supports it, hmmm? The business roundtable supports it. The high‑tech industry council supports it. Every Veteran's group supports it. All of the Veteran's groups support it. Three former Republican leaders of the Senate ‑‑ three former Republican leaders of Senate, Dole, Lott, and Frist support it. Every President from Carter, Bush 1, Bush 2, to Barack Obama all support it. You wonder, where is the opposition? With all of that support for it from the business community, church group, Veterans, you would think that this would be a slam dunk. Well, there are a few in the Senate, the tea‑party type crowd, that just believe that anything that we do at the U.N. is bad. They would like to get rid of the U.N., get us out of the U.N., and all of that kind of stuff. Well we can't let just a few like that thwart us. We have to keep on it. I would say probably the odds against us passing it before we leave here this year are probably great. The chance is pretty slim. But we have to keep at it. Once the President of the United States signs on, it is now before the Congress. And we have had times in the past where we've had different things like this that sat there for year after year after year after year, and finally it coalesces, you get a critical mass, and it passes.

I think the reason we need to keep that out there is to let the American people know that ‑‑ and I think the world’s community at large know ‑‑ that we do support the Convention broadly in this country. Broadly support it. But there are only a few, because of our constitutional system that are keeping it from being enacted. And because it's so broadly supported, we want to keep it out there. Again, as kind of a guiding light, as something that we believe strongly ought to be the normative for the world community. Not something that is ever attainable that you strive for, but something that we know we've done in this country and other countries are pretty darn good and accessibility for people with disabilities. All we need to do is make this the normative for the global community. So that's why I hope that you, all of you here, will continue to push for the CRPD this year. Don't let up. Just keep pushing on it. Just keep pushing. Don't ever give up on it.

[ Applause ]

I'm going to try. I've got a couple more tricks up my sleeve.

[ Laughter ]

I'm going to try. I'm just telling you that the odds are great that we won't be able to get it done. And I have to face that reality. So I will just close by saying this. I want to thank all of you. So many of you have fought and struggled for so many years to break down barriers, to build inclusive societies on the local level, and in your states. And we're not there yet. But we've made great progress. Wouldn't you think about just our own lives since the last 40‑50 years, how much things have changed. I mean, to just go to a ballgame and see families there with kids and stuff that are disabled and they're there together. To see people with disabilities actually entering the workforce. Not as much as we would like, but breaking it down. When I went to Walgreen's, their distribution center about a year and a half ago, near Hartford, Connecticut, the CEO of Walgreen's was there and he said that 40% of the people that work there are disabled. 40%. It's now 60%. He had all of the other CEOs around there from, oh, Best Buy, FedEx, Proctor & Gamble, a lot of private jets came flying in there that day. Not me. I travel commercially.

[ Laughter ]

But anyway, but to see them go around and look at just the small minor things that they had to do to make sure that the workplace was accessible. And as Doug, the CEO Walgreen's said, I do this not out of the goodness of my heart, but this is my most productive distribution center. Some minor changes that they made, the people there as he said, they show up on time, they never leave early. They're never sick. And they make fewer mistakes than anybody else, once they're trained. He has now made a commitment that 10% of all of their employees in of all the Walgreen's drugstores will be people with disabilities. We need more businesses doing that, setting goals. Well, actually Walmart has been good. But think about the other big ones, the other stores, the Safeways, the Whole Foods, Harris Teeter®? I had never heard of them before, but they're around. It's a grocery store. Think if all of the businesses had a goal of 10% of our employees, 10% will be people with disabilities, either intellectual, developmental, or physical, or a combination thereof, what a transformation that would make in our society? That would then give life and support to what I talked about earlier in terms of these transitions, and getting kids these work experiences and job coaching and summer jobs and internships and things like that.

So we've come a long way! But we've got ‑‑ we can't back down on our commitment to enlarging the civil rights of people with disabilities. You might think, gosh, we've passed all of these laws, aren't we there? I just heard there is a case before the Supreme Court on the Voting Rights Act. You think you get there, and then all of a state gerrymanders their district, and now the Supreme Court has to take a look at that and see if it's race‑based, or political‑based, so this effort goes on and on.

And as long as we have people who want to extol the virtues of greed and accumulation of wealth at the expense of everything else in society, of our environment, at the expense of our human capital, at the expense of our socialization, the concept of society being a family of humans that we're more alike than we're different; as long as you've got people that don't have that concept and think that only accumulating wealth and accumulating it at the expense of everything else is the sort of goal that we have to seek, as long as we have that, our job is always there. To fight for social and economic justice for all people but mainly, mainly for people with ‑‑ mainly for people who have been left behind for so long, and they're still left behind today. I sometimes say that our commitment and my commitment has always been to what I call the least, the lost, and the left behind. We have to continue this battle. We can never give up. Step by step, bit by bit, your life, my life. Over our time, we'll make our society better. We'll reach this concept of what humaneness really means, that it's not patronizing, but it's one of making sure that people, all people with disabilities, have the supports and the services that they need to live independently, to be fully included in our society, to have economic self‑sufficiency. Let's continue with those goals. Thank you!

[ Applause ]

>> ANDY IMPARATO: Thank you, Senator Harkin. This has been a real highlight for us to hear that. And good luck for CRPD. We're going to be going up to the Hill today and reinforce your message.

So we're going to shift now to Olivia just for a few minutes, and then we'll move to our next panel which is a former Harkin appropriations staffer and a former Republican appropriations staffer talking about the impact of last week's election on some of the budgets that we care about.

But, first, I will turn it over to Olivia.

>> OLIVIA RAYNOR: While we have everybody's attention, I just wanted to make a couple of reminders about a little bit of housekeeping, but also some important things.

We can tell just by your presence here this morning -- we're so glad that you are all here and engaged in this final plenary which I know that we're all eagerly awaiting for. It's really important as we shape future conferences -- I can't tell you how much as the conference chair I have benefited from of all the comments, recommendations, suggestions, on how we can have the most ‑‑ the best and the most meaningful conference for of all you. So I just want to put out an important plea that either through the conference app, or if you need hard copy, let us know, but we want your feedback. Please complete the evaluation for the conference.

We also want to think about this possibility for forging our policy discussion. And that's the 2015 disability policy seminar. That will be held right here at the Renaissance ‑‑ excuse me. Sorry. On April 7th through the 9th. This is a great chance to get in‑depth policy information from a federal perspective that are crucial to the lives of individuals with disabilities, and also engage with other disability organizations, special guests, and hundreds of other advocates that will be in attendance. So it's definitely an event that you don't want to miss. Please get it on your calendars right away so that it becomes a very real event and possibility in 2015.

And then next year's conference, November 15th‑18th will be here right back at the Renaissance, and we hope that you will, again, be joining us. Importantly, we look forward to your submissions to be presenters, and conveners of meetings here at the conference next year.

So now I will turn it back over to Andy who will introduce our plenary speakers. Thank you.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: Thank you, Olivia. And Erik and Laura, if you all want to use the podium when you speak that's great. We thought it would be helpful one week after the election for of all you to hear from two very sophisticated watchers and participators in Washington. We're very lucky to have two folks from Cornerstone Government Affairs, which is a firm that's been very important to our network as we've grown our appropriations, and as we've built relationships under the leadership of Kim with the Appropriations Committee and other key legislators and committees.

So the first presenter ‑‑ I will introduce both of you ‑‑ but the first presenter is Erik Fatemi, who I got to know back in 2010. He was what they call the clerk for the Appropriations Sub‑committee that's called the Labor H‑subcommittee, and it's the sub‑committee that funds the Department of Education, Department of Labor, Department of Health and Human Services, the discretionary part of the Social Security Administration, and a few other odds and ends. And Erik was very focused on Senator Harkin's priorities across the board, but he knew how important the disability community was to the Senator. So in all of those budgets, he was there fighting the fight to protect budgets that mattered to people with disabilities including the budgets for the University Centers for Excellence. The LEND and neurodevelopmental related disabilities, and the IDDRC budget. And Erik has such a good relationship with NIH which is one of his personal responsibilities on the sub‑committee that the head of NIH, Francis Collins, gave Erik an award, the director's award, and that was the first time in the history of NIH that that award went to somebody who was not a NIH employee. So it gives you a sense of how effective and important he was to directors at NIH including Francis Collins. Erik's colleague, Laura Bozell, brings over a decade of legislative and healthcare policy experience in the U.S. House of Representatives to her position at Cornerstone. For the last 5.5 years, she served as professional staff, and I got it wrong. It wasn't Appropriation, it's on the Ways and Means Committee Health Sub‑committee. And for people that don't know the Ways and Means Committee, it's a very important committee in the House that deals with tax policy and includes Medicare program and Social Security Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income. So a lot of programs that matter a lot for folks with disabilities.

In her capacity on the sub‑committee, she was responsible for the Medicare Part "A" portfolio providing policy direction for committee advising chairman Dave Camp and other committee members on issues affecting the nation's 6,000 hospitals, home health providers, skilled nursing facilities, and all of the other post‑acute care providers. She also worked on health information technology which is something that our network has been engaged on, and high‑deductible health plan and health savings accounts, flexible spending arrangements, Medicare secondary payer issues, and the health coverage tax credit given to unemployed workers through the trade adjustment assistance program. So, bottom line is that we have two very important folks who understand how to make things happen in a bipartisan way, and they understand kind of how to interpret the results of last year's elections, but not over-interpret those results. So without further ado, please join me in welcoming Erik.

[ Laughter ]

>> ERIK FATEMI: Hi, everyone. I'm proud to say at 38 I’ve worked with Senator Harkin for 12 years, my entire career with the Senate with a group like this, that's all the introduction that I need.

[ Laughter ]

Except for a few of the years I got to work with Andy Imparato. That was a pleasure!

Andy is right. I work on drafting the appropriations bill. I'm telling you, you don't want to bring a bill to show Senator Harkin that didn't do well via disabilities. That was a given. You took care of that priority for him.

I would like to spend a few minutes talking about the election. You might have heard Republicans won. Congress, governor's races, state legislatures, classroom monitor, dog catcher, if there was an election, they probably won it.

[ Laughter ]

And people waited about five minutes until the election was over, and then they started asking about what will happen in the 2016 presidential election. Yes, it has started already. Other than the fact that the Republicans did so well, here are some things that you may or may not know about the election. The 2014 mid‑term elections were the most expensive mid‑terms ever, and yet voter turn out was the lowest in 72 years. For the first time ever, more than 100 women will be serving our Congress.

[ Applause ]

Yeah, that's good!

[ Applause ]

Republicans gained control of both chambers of Congress for the first time since 2007. And they had their largest majority in the House since 1928. So everyone is wondering, of course, what will Republicans do with this new majority? And there are two really competing impulses, one represented by the Tea Party wing is to go big on conservative priorities like repealing Obamacare. The President will veto those bills. They probably won't become law, but that's okay. Conservatives, many conservatives, feel like they have a mandate from voters. And so they're going to try to do the things that they campaigned on.

The other impulse represented by the leadership in both Houses is to pass bills that the President might sign into the law. Approving the Keystone oil pipeline, making selected improvements to Obamacare, et cetera. These Republicans want to show that they can govern. Again, all in the lead up to the 2016 election.

No one knows which of these impulses will prevail. Some predict two more years of gridlock. Others say that we have a real opportunity for compromise. Maybe a Republican‑led Congress and a Democratic President with just two years left in his administration is exactly what we need to finally break through the gridlock.

I admit that I am skeptical. Ultimately it is not in either party’s self‑interest to pass a lot of bills during the next two years. Think about it. Republicans won Congress, which is nice for them, but what they really want is Congress and the White House. Let's say that we have a very productive next two years. Voters might think, oh, look, Democratic President and a Republican Congress, they work so well together. Why don't we keep Republicans in Congress and elect Hillary? Democrats have a similar motivation. If they let Republicans enact a bunch of big bills, they look terrible in comparison. So Senate Democrats are ‑‑ you know, may very well be inclined to use some of the obstruction powers that they have as the minority that the Republican minority used against them. I know that sounds cynical, and it is, and I would love to be wrong. I think that the next few weeks will actually give us a preview of what may happen in the next couple of years.

A couple of things for you all to be watching as you go back home: First, Congress still has to wrap up appropriations for fiscal year 2015. I would be happy to talk about that a little bit more during the Q&A if people are interested. If that process goes well, that bodes well for cooperation in the next Congress.

The issue that worries me in terms of relationships between the two parties is immigration. The President has said that he will issue an executive order on immigration reform and the day after the election, the Republicans drew a line in the sand and said “if you do that, you are playing with fire.”

And this is probably not going to turn out very well. But let's now focus in on the programs that we care about here. I'm not going to sugarcoat it. It's good you are here today because when it comes to funding, the next couple of years could be really tough.

You are losing one of your strongest champions in Senator Harkin, and funding for non‑defense programs in general is going to be really tight.

And just to step back for a second, Andy alluded to this in the introduction. There are basically two kinds of money. One is discretionary. That's the money that gets negotiated every year in appropriations bills. The other kind of money is what they call mandatory money, entitlements, and Laura will talk about that in a minute. So discretionary spending, which is about a trillion dollars, is divided among 12 appropriations bills. The biggest one is defense and that’s about half of the trillion.

The next largest bill is the one that we care about most in this room, Labor HHS. This is, as Andy said, the bill that covers the Labor Department, Health and Human Services department, the Education department, and it's about 1/6th of the trillion, about 160 billion give or take. So UCEDDs, the LEND programs, and IDDRCs are all funded within the Labor HHS bill. So the fate of those programs is tied in very tightly to what happens to the Labor HHS bill as a whole. And as things stand at the moment, the outlook for the Labor HHS bill is not promising. You are probably aware that the Federal Government is operating under budget caps for the next several years. It's called the Budget Control Act, which sets limits on the specific amount of money that can be spent on defense and non‑defense for each fiscal year through 2021. That's why 16, which is what Congress will be dealing with next year. And non‑defense spending is basically flat. Overall, it's basically a freeze. There might be a billion dollars difference out of almost 500 ‑‑ a million dollars difference. I'm sorry, a billion.

So think of all of the programs that the government funds in non‑defense, such as education, medical research, agriculture, transportation. If something goes up in any one of those programs, you've got to find an off‑set someplace else. And that's going to be hardest especially considering that the easy cuts have already been done. The total non‑defense spending is below what it was a few years ago. That easy stuff is taken care of. Now to make cuts is really going to be tough.

And let's be honest, it will be hard for programs like yours which are extremely important but do not rise to the top 3 for a lot of members. And that's why it's important for you to be here to make programs in the top‑tier list for members that you are meeting with. I know that sound bleak so far today.

But do I have hope! And it's from a surprising source perhaps, because the defense community is freaking out about the budget caps just as much as we are. We are really worried. They look at the flat funding that's ahead for them, and the very small increase, and they say we're looking at total disaster. So there's going to be lots of pressure to raise the caps on defense.

Many Republicans are already talking about it. And what I hope, and I'm not alone in this, is that any final deal that raises caps for defense will also raise caps for non‑defense. That, I think, is the only way something like gets through, especially with the Democratic White House. And that gives me hope that we can get some breathing room in the Labor HHS bill going forward to help take care of our priorities here.

So I will stop there and turn things over to Laura who will talk about the mandatory side of things, and also offer tips as you go in to meet with congressional offices today.

[ Applause ]

>> LAURA BOZELL: Great! Thank you so much! So as Erik said, I came from the Ways and Means Committee, which has jurisdiction over a large percentage of the entitlement spending program, and the Congress. So when we talk about mandatory spending on entitlement programs, we're talking about Medicare, we're talking about Medicaid, we're talking about Social Security. Those are the three biggest parts of our entitlement spending world. And as Andy said, I worked for the Republican staff. Republicans will say they have always been concerned about the state of our fiscal house. So there have been sort of two rallying cries I would say in the elections, including in the mid‑term elections that we just saw, and then previously in the 2012 elections, and in the 2010 elections, and, yes, a lot of it focused on Obamacare, or ACA, the Affordable Care Act. I will be the polite one and use it ‑‑ its given title, and I will let Erik use the nickname. But obviously a lot of Republicans were really angry about the ACA. They didn't like that people were being mandated to buy insurance products, and then being penalized for it if they didn't have it. But a lot of Republicans are also very concerned about their rate of government spending. And they see that the country is on an unsustainable path. Medicare is a great example of this. Right now, the estimates are that Medicare will run out of money by 2024. So, a lot of Republicans would be very interested in finding ways to reform a lot of these entitlement programs. They've tried several times with Social Security and when George W. Bush was in the White House, he led a little bit of an exercise trying to talk about privatizing Social Security. That really scared people, so they backed away from any plans to reform Social Security.

But now we are hearing more and more from a rising star in the Republican party, Congressman Paul Ryan from Wisconsin, and he was Mitt Romney's vice presidential nominee in 2012. He is currently the House Budget Committee chairman. He will most likely be the chairman of the Ways and Means Committee when Congress adjourns in January to begin their 114th Congress. I mention this because in his role as Budget Committee chairman, Paul Ryan has put out a lot of really bold ideas about how Congress should reform our entitlement program. He started with a bold vision for reforming Medicare where you would keep the existing Medicare program for current beneficiaries, but then you would give new beneficiaries options of taking a lump sum of money and buying their own insurance plan, or staying in the Medicare plan. That was very divisive. Some people embraced it. Some people derided it. He most recently released another white paper study where he looked at some of the other safety net programs. He advocates consolidating a lot of programs that he thinks are ineffective. He looks at making changes to the earned income tax credit to make sure that the benefit is greater and reaching more people. He looks at changes that are in the job training programs to give states more control over how they would set the job training programs. But Kim and I had an opportunity to talk before this panel started, and one of the things that I said is that a lot of people are really scared about kind of these big bold ideas and what might actually happen. But one of the things that I think you guys can be really important in, in terms of helping to shape the agenda, is research‑proven effective results, which is one of the things that Paul Ryan called for. He has talked in his white papers about how he wants states to be actively involved with groups who have proven experience in helping those people that are most in need. That's where you guys are going to play such an important role.

I think that it's a great transition for me to talk a little bit about what I think you guys can do to be most effective when you are on the Hill. One of the things that I tell people is that y'all have the most important role, I think, in government. And every one of us has an issue that's important to us. We have the opportunity to go every single day up to Capitol Hill to tell the members that we elected what's important to us, and what they can do to help make the world a better place for our specific either population or the issue that we're concerned about. And they listen to you. I mean, I think that's something that I'm surprised by when people tell me, “oh, I can't go talk to my member of Congress. They're not going to care about what I have to say.” And I really don't think that's true. And I hope that you don't think that's true, because they are relying on people like you who have experience, who have knowledge in these issue areas. On any given day they have to be able to talk about immigration, farm subsidy programs, nuclear energy, Indian casinos, I mean, anything. There is just a whole array of issues. So it's really difficult for them to be knowledgeable, or very knowledgeable I would say, in all of these different issues. And that's why I think that they really do listen to what you have to say. I hope that you will go in and tell a strong story, something that's relatable. Make them understand how what you are doing is making an impact for the people in their districts.

I will say for Republicans, they like a lot of quantifiable data. They do like research and data‑driven examples, so to the extent that you are all able to talk specifically about what the dollars you’re spending are doing, and what the results are from the dollars in research that you are doing, that's very helpful not only to the members, but then also to committee staff. It's really important for committee staff to be able to have that sort of research and data that they can dig their fingers into. So I just think that you guys have a really unique opportunity to go today and to talk specifically to members of Congress about what y'all are doing in the community. Make them understand why it's important. They get it. I mean, they really do I know that it's not always like a popular ‑‑ as popular an issue for Republicans as it might be for Democrats, but they care deeply. I mean, my former boss was very involved in Act One, and a lot of those issues are near and dear to Republican members, so don't shy away. I know that some of you guys are going to see Republicans today and Democrats. I think that your message will have broad appeal, so don't be afraid to share it.

And with that, I guess we're ready for Q&A.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: Great! Let's hear it for Laura and Erik.

[ Applause]

If you guys want, for the Q&A, you are welcome to stay at the table or go up to the podium, however you would like.

So I think that we have roving mics, but, Tammy, did you have a question? Just wait for a second for mics. If you want to, stand up so whoever has the mic can bring them to you.

Actually, go ahead and say the question. Lane, repeat it. And just introduce yourself, Tammy.

(Question off mic).

>> ANDY IMPARATO: So, how can we better make the argument that if you make the right investment in people with disabilities, you are going to get a return on those investments, and actually can save money and be scored in a way that saves money in the long run?

>> ERIK FATEMI: I don't know if there have been studies that have been done on this, then you should be able to cite those kinds of things. And then, you know, if the data is out there, then it's just a matter of communicating it. And I think that one of the things that you can try to argue when you are meeting with members is what is the role of government? And is this something that the government should be spending money on? And I think that you can make a very good case that if you don't do your work, nobody else is going to do it. It's not like the private sector will probably pick up your work. And so I think that's one thing you that can argue.

And then give them the data. Show them this is an investment. This actually will save money. That does resonate, as Laura said, very much with the Republicans and Democrats, too. One piece of advice that I give people is that you want to argue ‑‑ you want to try to reach them with their head and their heart. You can often tell an anecdote or a personal story that brings it to a level that I can relate to so that I can see what you are talking about. Or you may have somebody with you who can explain the benefit.

And that gets them in the heart. And then you've got to say, all right, well, that feels good, but really show me the evidence. And that's where the data really comes in handy.

>> LAURA BOZELL: I agree wholeheartedly. On our health team within Cornerstone, I'm the lone Republican and I joke all the time that stories are nice, but Republicans are cold‑hearted, which really is not true.

[ Laughter ]

But he is right that stories are great, and that will get to people. But they want to see the research‑driven results. They want to see the data that is showing how "X" is causing "Y." And then I will say, too, to the work issue, that the Welfare Reform Act was negotiated between a Democratic President and Republican Congress that sort of first put emphasis on work within federal entitlement programs. And that's something that really is still very important to Republicans. They want to do whatever they can to help people be self‑sufficient. And part of that, they think, is requiring work. If you are going to receive help in the adjustment assistance program, you need to be working and showing that you are actively working for a job while you receive ‑‑ this is an issue. I can remember when I first started on the Hill 13 years ago meeting with, I think it was actually with the Louisiana Blind Association, and just talking about this contradictory message. People want to work, but then if they do, they don't get SSI, and they still need the SSI. These are issues that have been around a really long time. And I think that it's time ‑‑ I think it's still an issue that Republicans will be very interested in hearing about from you all if you have good solutions that you can offer and can point to changes in the law that could be made that would allow people to be self‑sufficient and live independently.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: Laura, one thing I want to mention, and I didn't mention as Laura's background, is that she worked for Congressman McCrery from Louisiana earlier in her career. But Congressman McCrery in his retired role is the co‑chair of a bipartisan group working for the committee for responsible federal budget on the Social Security Disability Insurance, and looking at ways to reform that program and deal with the fact that the trust fund is scheduled to run out of money in 2016. And AUCD is represented on that committee. So we're having an opportunity to get to work with him. He is doing that with former Congressman Pomeroy on the Democratic side.

So other questions? Yeah, right here.

>> Audience member: I am from the U.S. Virgin Islands. Laura mentioned two important ‑‑ three important things, but I am concerned about two: SSI and Medicaid. The Virgin Islands and the other territories are treated like a step‑child when it comes to SSI and Medicaid. We don't receive any SSI, and it hurts me to see families moving from one America city, in this case, an island, to another to get SSI. Additionally, when we talk about Medicaid, the ratio for the matching is very high when it comes to the U.S. Virgin Islands, and to the territories in general. And also there is a cap. We've been fighting this for almost 20 years to no avail. What you would say? Shall we just put our tails between our legs and just give up?

>> LAURA BOZELL: No.

>> Audience member: What would you advise us to do?

>> LAURA BOZELL: This is another issue I've worked on for a very long time. It's not just SSI and Medicaid, but there is a Medicare part too. I worked on that in the Ways and Means Committee. A lot of our formulas rely on data from SSI and Medicaid to figure out how much money goes to the state or territory, and by virtue of not having these programs, the territories are disadvantaged because they get assigned sort of a de facto funding level. I think in the case ‑‑ in this case, it is about finding the right champion. So my former boss, Mr. McCrery, was working very ‑‑ he worked a lot on this issue when he was still in Congress. There are members who do take a keen interest in this. It's hard because ‑‑ I'm trying to think of how to say this without sounding rude. It's a very important issue to the territories. It's hard to get it to be important on the large scale to a wide range of members, if that makes sense.

I think that you want to find some champions who can fight for you, and then I wouldn't shy away from talking to the committees of jurisdiction, too, and making sure that they know about it. So in this case, SSI would be Ways and Means, and Medicaid is Energy and Commerce in the House, and then the Finance Committee in the Senate for both issues.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: Erik, did you want to say anything on that? Laura, do you see a role for whoever is representing the territories in Congress? Can they help bring this issue to their colleagues?

>> LAURA BOZELL: Yes, they do. We met on a number of occasions not only with Dr. Christianson, but with the representatives from Puerto Rico and American Samoa, and they're all engaged in the issue.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: Okay. Other questions? Why don't we go here, and then we'll go to the back. Liz, please don't run.

[ Laughter ]

>> Audience member: I'm Andy Roach from the Center for Leadership in Disability at Georgia State University. And listening to the way that you kind of framed the election results, it sounds like our best possible scenario is to play defense and try to protect what we have. And I'm wondering if there is any way, any issues or ways that you see we can bring our work that would allow us places where we could experience what we're doing for at least the next two years, or if that is not realistic option at all.

>> ERIK FATEMI: They say the best defense is a good offense. And I think that you have to try as hard as you have tried in the past to make this a priority. You just have to make it work even harder. Maybe the best‑case scenario level is funding. But you shouldn't be satisfied with that. You should be asking for increases. You can make a good case for increases. Ask for them. Don't settle for just status quo. It might be you ended up, I don't know what level funding, but you are definitely not going to get more than what you ask for. So you might as well ask for a reasonable increase.

Don't ask for something that's going to get you laughed out of the room. You have to be realistic. You have to acknowledge that there are fiscal pressures. But, look, you have needs. What you are doing is something important. Ask for it. Make the request.

>> LAURA BOZELL: It's so important to speak up. I can't tell you how many times I've had the experience when a group would come and say, "Oh, why did you cut us? Or why did you blah, blah, blah?" And they didn't have an active voice in the process at all, which, I mean, we ‑‑ well, the past we, but the congressional staff, the members of Congress, they need to know that you are out there, and that these are important programs that need to be shored up, protected, however you want to frame it. You definitely can't afford to be silent on the sideline.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: Just a quick follow up. One thing that's come up in the public policy committee discussions is, from a strategy standpoint, are we better off kind of focusing on appropriations and kind of making the case that everything we do is critically important, and there are needs in the community, and we really need our appropriations as kind of our core priority? Or are we better off talking about some of the problems that exist in the lives of people with disabilities and make the case for solutions to those problems, some of which relate to our appropriations, but some of which doesn't. I mean, how laser‑focused should we be on our appropriations?

>> ERIK FATEMI: That's a tough question to answer without knowing about the other priorities.

Just a few general pieces of advice.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: And quickly, you know, when I say other priorities, like federal funding for IDEA, there are things that you have worked on. All of the stuff that you worked on around disability, we care about all of that stuff.

>> ERIK FATEMI: Right. One piece of advice that I give to groups like yours that have ‑‑ are interested in a lot of programs in the Federal Government is think about which programs, if you don't ask for them nobody else will. That's something to think about. Now, IDEA is important, but a lot of people will be asking for IDEA funding, and you should be one of those. But perhaps no one else but you will ask for UCEDDs. So you can't necessarily expect that the big IDEA coalitions are going to be looking out for your individual priority.

So if not you, if the answer is no one, then you have to be that group. And one thing, though, that has happened to me a lot ‑‑ and you are not alone in this ‑‑ is if there are 10 programs that you care about and you go in and have a meeting and we say, well, these are the 10 things that we care about, I would walk out and go: I don't know what to do about that. Which one do you really care about? Or which two or three? So that's a balance. And I think that that's something to think about as you go forward. Yes, reflective broadening of the group, but you do have to prioritize in order to be effective. Otherwise, the people who are receiving that message will just not know how to process it.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: Laura, did you want to say anything on that?

>> LAURA BOZELL: Well, I will say that it's important to come with a solution and not just a problem. I think that's really helpful for our means and staff to see that there is a way out, that you recognize there is a problem, and that you have done the work and the research to show what the solution is, and here is what it is.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: Great.

>> ERIK FATEMI: Now, if you are asked what you would cut to get your increase, you do not have to answer that question.

[ Laughter ]

You do not! And I run into this where members will say, oh, you didn't tell me what to cut. Well, look, I'm here on behalf of this, and that kind of response is a cop out. It's obnoxious actually. Because it's not like you guys are the expert. Oh, yeah, we've looked and there are a couple of million dollars that we can cut from mine safety. That's not your job.

[ Laughter ]

You don't need to get caught into that. That's their job. Everyone who comes in to meet these folks has a priority. That's why they're elected to make those choices. Don't you feel like you have to get sucked in there.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: Thank you.

>> Audience member: My counterpart just mentioned about some of the barriers that we face in the territories. We don't get SSI. Medicaid has a cap as well. And he touched on very important parts that we move to get better resources. But yet we also have a right to live with our families and the people around us that make us comfortable and accept who we are. But yet Congress tends to look away when we request, you know, about Medicaid. But yet the poverty level is 62%. But we have the highest number of people joining ‑‑ but yet also the highest casualties as well. And there is no consideration with that. But yet our people are moving to other states, and yet the other states are now inheriting what we couldn't provide for our kids and our children. (off mic) ‑‑ but now it becomes a concern for them that they have to go get it somewhere else within their own backyard and their own neighborhood?

[ Applause ]

>> LAURA BOZELL: I guess I would say what I would say earlier. I couldn't assume that they know all of the details that you do. And I think that it's important to find champions. I will use Puerto Rico as an example because I think that they've been effective in building a coalition of congressional supporters because they've identified those places in the U.S. where their population is going. They're leaving and they're coming to the U.S. to get the services that they need, then they're working the New York delegation to make sure that New York is also cognizant of the needs of Puerto Rico. So I would encourage you not only to look at your delegate but to look at where there are big populations in the mainland, people from America, U.S. Virgin Islands, and also talk to those members and make sure that they understand that what's going on impacts their state, too. And so I think that's where I would advise you to start, I guess, in sharing.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: Other questions? I'm sorry, I'm hearing two people. I'm calling on the person in the blue. Who is the other person talking so I can just see where you are? Right there? Okay. So let's start there, and then we'll come over here.

>> Audience member: Thank you. Good morning. Margot from Ohio State University. Thank you for your effort on passing WIOA. It's nice to see the Employment First Initiatives scale up on a national level. At Ohio State, we have a Think College program which provides college experiences for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. And we are sunsetting in our 5th year, and the progress that we have seen has been tremendous. We see self‑confidence rise up as students walk with a very fast pace to keep up with their peers without disabilities to get to classes. We see students working on work experiences and gaining skills that will lead to a career, and not just an entry‑level job. We see peers without disabilities raising their expectations of students with significant disabilities. And these peers will be the future co‑workers and natural supports once they transition to their work sites.

Five years isn't enough to really know what models work, how long a program should be, and I feel like with all of the issues that are coming up with Social Security and defense I almost feel like, wow, should I really be advocating for more demonstration projects to pilot and expand this initiative? Yet I believe it may be one of the keys to increasing employment outcomes in the future. So, what strategy do you have to advocate for increases in postsecondary education opportunities for an underserved population?

>> LAURA BOZELL: Well, first of all, you should definitely advocate for it. I think five years is enough time to be able to go to the Hill and say, "We've seen so much success so far. We need to be able to keep going so that we can find real solutions and have a better sense of what is happening."

I think that this is a good example, and Erik, you can correct me if I'm wrong, of an issue that can be bipartisan. It's not controversial. These are the sorts of things that I think members, especially at the committee level, love to work on together. So I would definitely say that you should advocate for it. I know that just on the Ways and Means Committee, Congressman is a huge champion of Ohio State. You can barely make it through the meeting with members where he doesn't bring up Ohio State in some capacity. So ‑‑

>> ANDY IMPARATO: You mean THE Ohio State?

>> LAURA BOZELL: Oh, yes, I'm sorry. THE Ohio State. I know all about your medical center, your cancer center. But you have these great champions. He is perfectly positioned on a committee of jurisdiction for you guys to be able to work with him and his staff. And then there is great staff at the Ways and Means Committee that work on these issues. And I guess that we should say that there will be transition on the Senate side, and the staff who have been in the majority will be in the minority. Some of them may not be there. The majority will be staffing up, and then likewise on the House side. Even though control isn't changing hands, with the new chairman coming in at Ways and Means, it's at his discretion who he retains to be the committee staff. So there could be some changes, but hopefully not the people that work on the workforce issues, because they are so top‑notch I would hope that they would stay on. But don't be afraid to reach out to committee staff. I find that a lot of people kind of shy away from that and they assume, “oh, I will be lucky if I can meet with my member of Congress. I would never dream of meeting with Appropriations staff, or Ways and Means staff, or Energy and Commerce staff.” And you would be really surprised. There is a lot of willingness to hear from folks like you. There is a very strong desire to hear from the folks on the ground that have the day‑to‑day experience running these programs, because staffers don't.

>> ERIK FATEMI: I will just add that your most productive means are most to likely going to be with the member, or the Senator that represents where you live and work, and then the committee staff.

The members love to know that great things are happening in their districts. They love to be proud of their districts. And you want to make them proud that your work is happening there. They like to be able to say and use that. They can say “this is a great thing happening in my district.” And that's one way that you develop a champion.

>> LAURA BOZELL: Invite them to come and see it. That makes a huge impact when they can actually come and see the work that you are doing in their district and that will stick with them for a long time.

>> ERIK FATEMI: And then the other great potential, as Laura said, is committee staff. And committee staff is not as focused on individual states and districts. I mean, they certainly always keep that in mind with the chairman or ranking member. They're always, you know, giving preference to things happening in that district. But they also are looking for the great successes that happen in a country that can be applied nationwide. And so those I think are really your two chances.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: So I know that our next panel members are here, and I think that one of them has to get back to the House. She works for Cathy McMorris‑Rodgers, and they're voting later today, and I'm sure there is a lot of activity. So we're going to go to Shannon as the first question on the next panel. And I apologize, Shannon, but please join me in thanking Erik and Laura for their insights.

[ Applause ]

So if Kim and Towner can join me on the stage? Thank you both for coming over today. Where is Kim? There she is. So, Kim, I'm just going to go straight into the next panel. Kim has a quick message for you for the Hill, but we'll do that after the next panel.

So I don't have the bio for the next two presenters because they're both good friends who I have known for a long time. So I won't worry about whether I get their titles right. Kim I think is one of the most important Republican staffers, or really one of the most important staffers on the Hill for people with disabilities. Her leadership ‑‑ I'm sorry? I'm starting with Kim. I will talk about Towner, too. But Kim's leadership on disability issues, for me, goes back to when she worked on the ADA Amendments Act. I remember getting a call from her in the New Hampshire airport the night before the last day of the Congress in 2006, and she said, "Chairman wants to introduce a bill tomorrow to restore protections in the ADA for people with disabilities who have been excluded because of the Supreme Court decisions, so I'm going to need you to take a quick look at this."

And we all did some quick work, and the bill was introduced, and it was called the ADA Restoration Act, and two years later, again with a lot of hard work from Kim, we got the ADA Amendments Act. It was signed by George W. Bush, and it was the only bill that he signed where his father George H.W. Bush was there for the signing ceremony. And he did it in the middle of lots of economic crises that were going on while that bill was being signed. Kim knows how to do things in a bipartisan and smart way. Now she is working for Cathy McMorris‑Rodgers who has a 6‑year‑old ‑‑ is he still 6? 7. 7‑year‑old son with Down syndrome named Cole, and Cathy has high expectations for her son. Some of you heard Cathy's response to the State of the Union where she talked about Cole and some of the messages that she got when Cole was born, and how she wasn't going to accept low expectations for her son. He is doing really well in an inclusive environment. So, Cathy has really been working on the ABLE Act. She has been working on a number of issues that are important to folks in this audience. She is from Washington State, in case anybody doesn't know. Spokane, I think, is part of her district. I think you that know we have a University Center for Excellence at the University of Washington. Towner French works for Congressman Pete Sessions. Pete is the chair of the House Rules Committee. Some of you may not know the committee, and I won't pretend to be an expert on this, but the rule committee is basically the committee that every bill has to go through in order to become law. So I remember when we were working on the ADA Amendments Act, we had a meeting with the rules committee. So it's a good place to have a disability champion because Pete Sessions and Towner and the staff there can have their fingerprints on bills as they become laws. And they're at the table and part of the process. Pete Sessions also has a kid with Down syndrome. His son is about 22. So we have two members who have very important positions in the House, who now have a bigger majority in the House. So we invited them to come, their staff to come talk to you because there may be an opportunity in this Congress to do some big things for people with disabilities, and there may and opportunity in the lame duck to get the Able Act done because it has a lot of bipartisan momentum. We'll take them one at a time, but please join me in welcoming Kim.

[ Laughter ]

>> KIMBERLY BETZ: If you don't mind, I'm going to sit. It's easier and less formal. I want to thank Andy, who I consider to be a dear friend and really a mentor in this area. I would also like to thank all of you. Without your dedication and ongoing efforts, these issues would not be where they are today, and at the forefront of many members' minds.

As Andy mentioned, I think that my history sort of in the disability issue goes back to Chairman Sensenbrenner. And they were very inspirational, and actually under her chairmanship and leadership, we held the first ADA oversight hearing in September of 2006. That was the first time that I think that Congress had really taken a hard look at how the ADA was working and not working, and really set the stage for the ADA Amendments Act. You know, come forward several years later, and I am now working for Chair Cathy McMorris-Rodgers who is chair of the Republican house and the fourth highest ranking Republican woman in leadership. And we feel we've been given a rare opportunity to highlight these issues among leadership and the rest of our conference. We are really excited by last Tuesday and working with our Senate counterparts on continuing to push these issues to the forefront. And I would say on her behalf, I know that she wishes that she were here today, we are in there organizing conferences all week long, trying to get ready for the 114th Congress. So the schedule is chaotic. But our priority for the lame duck is ‑‑ and I know that Towner will mention this as well ‑‑ is to pass the ABLE Act.

[ Applause ]

So I know for all of you it's been a decade, maybe even longer in the works for us, between Chairman Sessions and the rest of leadership, Speaker Boehner wants to get it done. He gave his mandate a couple of weeks ago to those back in Cincinnati. He wants to get it done. So on the house front we're up and ready to go today before the end of the lame duck. I also wanted to add that I think as the previous panel sort of the alluded to, it's really with your efforts that these issues are brought to members' minds, but for us there are two in particular. One is IDEA, and we know that funding has been an issue. But, "B," the way that it works. I know that the education and the workforce committee will take a hard look at re‑authorization for Congress, so there is a real opportunity there. I know that Cathy really wants to look outside of the box in terms of how we can make IDEA stronger and what innovative techniques can we pull really into that bill so that we can make it work better? Competitive opportunities. We saw with Senator Harkin some great language in terms of moving competitive opportunities forward. We want to build on that. I feel like we have a great opportunity. And then third, I would say SSDI. That's going to be on everybody's radar, particularly with the trustee's report in terms of 2016. I know that the soon‑to‑be members of Ways and Means, whoever that might be, will really take a close look at that. So that will be at the forefront as well, and then other issues, such as Medicaid, are obviously important. But we really want to hear from you. We need to hear from you. Without your efforts these issues would not be at the forefront of our minds, so I just want to say thank you.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: Thank you, Kim. Towner?

>> TOWNER FRENCH: Thanks for having us today. It is interesting. I did want to note that first you had the Senator, then the lobbyist, and then the staff. I don't know what kind of order that denotes.

[ Laughter ]

>> ANDY IMPARATO: That's because the staff were busy, and this is when you were available.

[ Laughter ]

>> TOWNER FRENCH: I was a little worried about that. But anyway, the two individuals that you had up here from Cornerstone are, you know, the real true die‑hard experts in a lot of these fields. But, first of all, I just echo pretty much everything that Kim said. I think that from a forward‑looking standpoint, I would throw in there that elementary, secondary, and higher education would be the other two that I think had a chance of going. Obviously SSDI will probably be the largest public fight because we have an actual critical funding problem there. And I don't think there is any doubt that the incoming Senate and the House are going to try to tackle some of these larger budget issues as we get into March, April, May. So that's going to be an interesting thing to look at from how we shore up SSDI and to a certain degree, make changes. You know, my boss is very known to say that he has two sons. One is Bill, who is 24 years old. He is in the top 2% academically. He is in med school down at Texas A&M. The other is Alex. He has Down syndrome, 22 years old, seen probably in the bottom 2%. As Pete would say, the thing that's critical for Pete is making sure that resources are there for those who desperately need them. And so it's not a situation where we want to remove resources. We just want to target those resources at critical needs. And I think that lines up frankly with what individuals in this room are looking at as far as the critical resources that they see their constituents leaning to. So we're going to look at a lot of the larger budget issues. I will say a little bit about the ABLE Act because that's obviously a passion of Kim and I's as far as ‑‑ I'll say this. I have been on the Hill for almost 15 years now, and I've never cared about personally getting a bill through so much as the ABLE Act. I think that Kim and I share that passion to a certain degree.

I find myself ‑‑

>> ANDY IMPARATO: Just in case there is somebody in the room that's not an expert in that, just in a nutshell, what would it do?

>> TOWNER FRENCH: It basically provides a 529‑like savings account for individuals with disabilities to be able to put away some resources, some funding, that would not breach the cap of Medicaid and SSI. So, in essence, we are carving out a little section of an account called an ABLE Account that would allow folks to make money. You know, we were up at Walgreen's distribution facility with Andy actually. Andy put it on when he was with the committee and Senator Harkin, and myself and my boss went up there and I found myself talking to an individual at the Walgreen’s distribution facility. 55% disabled individuals were working in this distribution facility up in Connecticut for Walgreen's. It was unbelievable. And, by the way, it was their highest functioning distribution facility nationwide. So just a little, you know, nugget about why we should be finding employment opportunities and helping those with disabilities find employment. But I ended up talking to a young man who was 26 at the time, and, you know, he left school at 21. And I asked him if he had just started his job. He was so excited be there. I said, “what have you been doing for the last five years?” He told me, “I have been watching TV.” And I said, well, that really hit home for me. That's a shame. As we know in this room, it costs families probably more than the income the individual with the disability makes at a job to employ that individual. The time the parents, for example, or loved one are taking off of work, the times that they're investing in getting their son or daughter, in most cases, prepared for that job. We found out that most of the time that individual needs from the company less than $20 worth of changes to make basically just about any job able to be filled by a person with disabilities. And so it's a shame that we are -- Kim and Andy have dedicated their lives to improving the ADA and moving that forward. But I think that Senator Harkin may have even pointed out this morning that the unemployment rate for people with disabilities remains at 70%. It's the same percentage as when the ADA passed.

And so, you know, there is a step two. That step two is making sure that the individuals can enter the marketplace, can find employment, and, you know, we see so many times ‑‑ we have individuals that intern in our office with disabilities, and they're stringing together five different unpaid internships because they can't make money, because they need to stay off Medicaid benefit or SSI that they need to cover their medical bills. And so their parents in this situation are fortunate enough that they can bring them to an internship. But we're talking about, you know, a different internship every day, five days a week. They're in essence holding down a full‑time position. They just can't get paid for it, because if they get paid for it they lose their Medicaid. And that's just wrong. I'm not saying that we need to, you know, blow up the Medicaid cap. I think that we need to make significant changes to it but I don't think that we have the momentum to do it, so carving out the ABLE Act and this account where they can save money in is the next best solution. Go! I have been rambling on and on.

>> KIMBERLY BETZ: No, no, no I would add to that -- everything that Towner says sort of boils down to ‑‑ because I think that many people after last Tuesday are thinking that Republicans are in the House and the Senate in Washington, so what does this mean for disability policy? And what does this mean for our programs? And I think that Towner hit the nail on the head. I think that from our boss' standpoint, our parties stand for empowerment. And we want to empower people. And we feel like creating opportunities, competitive opportunities, strengthening the programs that really help assist and support individuals. Towner pointed out the unemployment rate. The number of disabled Americans who are living in poverty is unacceptable. It's unacceptable for our bosses. And so every opportunity that we have, we will be about empowering people, creating the opportunities, strengthening the programs for those who need it, providing the support systems for those who can go out and have the skills for employment. And I think that was, you know, a posh element to add.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: I really appreciate both of you being here. Again, I can't say enough that this is a very busy day in the House of Representatives. You have a new majority ‑‑ a bigger majority I'm sure bustling with ideas. I'm sure that these guys are getting texted and any other number of things, and they came here to talk to all of you, in part, because they know that their bosses really care about what we do everyday, you know, at the UCEDDs and the LENDs, and the IDDRCs.

>> TOWNER FRENCH: It's a fun day. You have all of these new members of Congress that are walking around, and they have no idea where they're going!

[ Laughter ]

The Capitol police are frustrated because they're trying to maneuver back and forth to the Capitol. It's terribly amusing, but it's also very work‑intensive. Imagine you are the guidance counselor on the first day of school and all you have are freshman that day.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: I know that Shannon wanted to ask a question of the last panel and we punted it over to this panel. Shannon, if you have a microphone, please go ahead.

>> Audience member: I'm Shannon, and I am a self‑advocate. I wanted to take a moment to raise awareness about the advocates of COCA, and they've been working on a universal identification process and transportation, the fair transportation program, and we think that this would be a great way to save Medicaid some money, and also get us better access to public transportation. We're asking for Congress' help to eliminate some of the bureaucracy, and sort of help us about this change. It wouldn't cost a lot of money to get us help for better access to transportation when we come to Washington, and when we come to different places. Now the way things are if we have to go through the approval process, each time we go through a different transportation provider. And so it would cut down on the cost of money to charge for application process. It would help us to be able to use this public transportation service when we come to Washington, or when we go to a different place for, say, a few days. And so I'm asking you, I guess, what would be the best approach? Or do you have ideas on how we can help you help us to bring about this change?

>> TOWNER FRENCH: I think there are probably three things that I would mention.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: Towner, before your answer starts, I want to make sure that you guys understand kind of the nature of this issue that is here. The concern is that if you have a significant disability where you would be eligible for paratransit or you would be eligible for a disability‑related discount on any transportation system -- like we had an internship program at AAPD where everybody had to like go through the application process in D.C., and that works if you are here for the whole summer but it doesn't work if you are here for a conference. So is there a way that people can have a universal ID when they have a significant disability that would cross jurisdictions and enable them to access whatever transportation is available for people with disabilities?

>> TOWNER FRENCH: Absolutely. There are a couple of different things that I would mention on that. The first is I think that we would absolutely love to work on that issue. I think that neither one of us are entirely aware of that issue. So we would absolutely want to work on that.

I do know a couple of different things. Some of the transportation companies that work under Medicaid are doing some large bundling initiatives right now. And maybe multi‑cities. So I don't know how that affects your necessity for putting in that application each time if you are using the same transportation company. So we'll look into that as well. In addition to that, we did add transportation expenses to the ABLE Act as well. That's one thing that I did want to point out, that you can, in essence, pay for transportation out of ABLE. But we want to make sure that that goes hand in hand with you getting that discount and reimbursement on the Medicaid side that you would want to have. So we would love to talk you to afterwards and gain more information.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: Kim, did you want to add anything?

>> KIMBERLY BETZ: I was asking Andy if it is also something right for state compacts, and looking how states can work together in that as well. But as Towner said, I think that bringing this type of issue to our attention and knowing that the Committee on Energy and Commerce has jurisdiction over Medicaid, we'll be looking obviously at it and the sustainability. This is a good issue to bring to our attention as well.

>> TOWNER FRENCH: This is why we love having you guys in D.C. There are things that we don't know.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: I also want to point out that because of where Towner and Kim are, they can interact with committees of jurisdiction across the entire House. If you are the House Republican Congress, that's every Republican. And if you are the rules committee, so any issue that we raise, they have some capacity to bring it up with the jurisdiction. Yes? We'll go here and then over here. I'm sorry, I saw her first.

>> Audience member: I'm from Georgetown University, District of Columbia. We need statehood because we have no representation with a vote in Congress. So I'm going to put my parent on today.

[ Laughter ]

As a parent of a son who is 32 years old with Autism and mental illness, I have been heavy lifting, as many families have done for many years, starting from when he was being suspended in elementary school. Towner, you mentioned about the point of the important role parents play in helping to support their adult sons and daughters maybe be ready for employment. You mentioned a piece about parents having to take off from work. And so I want to alert you to, if we look at employment that's important for the economy of our country and having people with disabilities taking part in that, we cannot expect parents to be taking off from work. Maybe parents in my situation with flexible working environments at Georgetown can. One spouse is retired. But when you think about at 22 when our young men and women are leaving high school and going into the workforce, we're talking about parents in their 40s. We're talking about parents in the prime, perhaps, of their economic opportunities to start funding those ABLE Accounts, thank you very much, that we're getting close to passage for that. So we really need to start thinking about Medicaid not just as medical insurance, but again, it is our way of funding those supports, and those essential supports. So I agree with you that we have to really look at where the equitable distribution is, and who is getting what kind of services. I know that's not very popular because it kind of puts those who have services and those of us who are on the waiting list for services in a really bad light. But we really have to put our head on straight so that if we're talking about employment it's not just a nice thing, and we have to put, yes, some expectations on families, but reasonable expectations. Thank you for listening to me.

>> TOWNER FRENCH: Unfortunately as you pointed out, the vast majority of expectations is on the family member right now. There aren't a lot of easy answers under our current dynamic as far as individuals seeking employment, and they need to rely frankly on their family members. I totally agree with you. And, you know, like you pointed out, that was one of the driving factors of the ABLE Act, of letting folks earn that money. The folks can go back into the cost‑effective needs. But you are correct to point out when somebody is employed, we don't want their employment to be the be-all end-all to pay for every way for them to get to a job and to accommodate that job. That's not the goal. They're earning money the same way that anybody else would earn money. All of us who are employed factor in some minor transportation costs, sometimes major depending on how high the gas prices are, but we factor in some of those costs that are associated with it. But there is no reason why Medicaid shouldn't be there to help out on this front.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: So right here. Yes?

>> Audience member: Arnold, Albert Einstein College of Medicine. The last election a week ago showed the Republicans with a huge landslide except for one area where Republicans haven't supported, and that is the raising of the minimum wage in about five states. I think that almost all of them were red states.

>> TOWNER FRENCH: All of them were.

>> Audience member: They all were red states, which goes to say something about the level of the minimum wage in those states. But what's the possibility of raising the federal minimum wage? It’s an issue that the President had brought up a number of times.

>> KIMBERLY BETZ: I think raising the minimum wage is forefront on all of our members' minds. I think that if you ask each member you will get a different answer. But I think that there is agreement that we need to sort of unlock wage growth in this country, and there are various ways to do that. I can tell you that raising the federal minimum wage was discussed among members. I'm not saying that it's going to happen, but, you know, it's a viable, viable issue right now. So it's in play.

>> TOWNER FRENCH: I think I would add a couple of things to that. It's definitely in play. There is no doubt about it. Of the five red states that passed the Constitutional amendment and referendum for raising the minimum wage, they varied between $8.50 an hour and $10.10 an hour. The President has been at the forefront, along with Senator Harkin I would note, of pushing $10.10. I'm not sure that Republicans are going to be able to get there. But if you use the lowest number of $8.50 that passed on election day as sort of a threshold number, all of a sudden, you know, you have candidates, frankly Republican candidates, across the country. The Senator who beat Senator Pryor in Arkansas came out in support of that raised minimum wage. So I would say minimum wage is going to be maybe just after budget, as far as issues talked about in the beginning of this year. Frankly, I will put my political hat on because Kim and I both deal with the political arena as well as the policy arena. And we're not in the government building right now. So we can talk politics a little bit. But I put my political hat on and say I think personally Democrats got away from that issue as election day neared, and it was an issue that was a very strong issue for Democrats. And it helped Republicans dramatically. But I think that Republicans are very aware of the fact that that is an issue that needs to be addressed. Unfortunately, I would say that some Republicans don't think about the minimum wage with regard to how it helps people with disabilities. They think about it as: you have a son or daughter without a disability, and you don't want them working for the minimum wage. They don't want to work for the minimum wage. You know, you have an ideal of a life that is so much better than yours. You want your son or daughter to out-earn you by the time that they're in their mid‑20s if at all possible. I think that a lot of our members think of minimum wage in that context, and they don't think about it in the context of folks that are entering the workplace that have barriers in front of them that are probably going to be near minimum wage jobs.

>> KIMBERLY BETZ: I guess I would just add to that that a lot of the issues that you see come or rise to the federal level are really of them percolating at the state level. So, given the past election and what these red states did, where the Governors are, I mean, that makes it ripe for rising to the federal level which, you know, maybe not be in the next go‑around, but the issue is out there.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: And, Kim, I know that your boss kind of is concerned about section 14‑C of the Fair Labor Standards Act, and sub‑minimum wage. I think that both of your bosses have some concern about it. I am wondering, do you see any opportunity in the context of a minimum wage bill to do something that might reinforce what Senator Harkin tried to do in WIOA, in terms of making it harder for people to move into sub‑minimum wage jobs particularly as they're entering the labor force?

>> KIMBERLY BETZ: I do. I think that we have a willing partner in soon-to-be chairman Alexander. I think that he is very aware. I played an instrumental role in the skills act negotiation. He was part of all of those discussions. So I think, again, it's up to you all to help educate members on these issues. so as we're having these discussions, it is top of mind for members.

>> TOWNER FRENCH: An important point, if you are walking around this afternoon and somebody brings up the skills act, is that it had the name of WIOA when it passed in the House.

>> KIMBELRY BETZ: I'm sorry.

>> TOWNER FRENCH: So a lot of folks in Congress will call it the skills act even though it's WIOA. But we just called it a different thing as it was going through the House process. We came up with a very fancy nickname.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: We understand. I'm going to go here, and then to Amy over here. Go ahead, Steve.

>> Audience member: Steve, University of Rochester. We've been hearing about the importance of employment and education, early and postsecondary, independence, self‑direction. One thing that has not come up in the discussion this morning is health. It underlies a lot of this. And if Alex Sessions wants to be healthy enough to be working, he needs a doctor who knows some of his special needs. How do you think that your members would respond to a suggestion to make a regulatory request to HRSA to designate people with intellectual and mental disabilities as a medically served population?

[ Applause ]

>> TOWNER FRENCH: First, I think that both of us have heard of it. But on its face, obviously, you know, it exists. They are an underserved population. I don't think that you are going to have any argument from Kim or I up here to address that.

It's interesting. Have we ever had a designated medically underserved population that would be not based on other factors like sex, race, things like that, but instead based on disability? I'm not sure that we ever have before. But it makes a heck of a lot of sense.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: So Kim and I have a lot of follow‑up items from this discussion. I was talking about my Kim, but also this Kim.

[ Laughter ]

So Amy?

>> Audience member: Hi, I'm actually formerly of the Illinois UCEDD, and I am with The ARC U.S. I have a question that piggybacked off what Shannon was talking about and the larger discussion about employment, and that is the amount of mobility that we all have as a society, moving around for education and for jobs. Those two things can be very challenging for people with disabilities who rely on Medicaid services to get them out of the house and into that job everyday. And so my question really is related to Medicaid portability across the states. And what are some things that you can suggest? What are your thoughts on that in general?

>> TOWNER FRENCH: I will let Kim address most of that because she is more the Medicaid expert than I am. But I would say to preface that, this is why we saw a large rise in sheltered workplaces, you know, because you are basically living near where you work in certain circumstances. And so the ability to change that dynamic to allow more mobility actually leads to, in my opinion, better jobs, rising wages, along those lines. And that's where a place the government can certainly step in.

>> KIMBERLY BETZ: I would add too, that I think from all of our boss' perspectives, states and Medicaid, states are the incubator of innovation. And look at some of the waivers that are in place in the Medicaid program. I mean, they would allow a lot of opportunity to test different programs, if you will. And I think that also states are coming together. I think that you are going to see a lot more state compacts in terms of what states are doing to really group together and cut down on costs. I mean, not to sort of deviate from your question, but I think what we can't discount when we talk about Medicaid is the impact that the expansion will have on the sustainability of the program itself and the finances of it. And really, what does that mean for the core individuals which Medicaid was intended to cover and the services available. And I know that that's something our bosses will be looking at. But I think that states are really ‑‑ I mean, let's be honest. I mean, we're tapped out at the federal level in terms of funding. I mean, we're running in a budget deficit even though they're narrowing. We go back into a sequester mode at the expiration of the bipartisan budget agreement with FY 2015. I mean, there are a lot of financial issues, or physical issues, that are going to be top of mind, and how do we make these programs sustainable? There is not money for states. I know that we have obligation on the expansion, but it's going to be a real challenge for the Federal Government to meet its obligation. With that being said, I think that from a state perspective, looking at the innovative way states can operate or implement Medicaid, the way that they group together, is going to be critical. So I think your point is, how are we looking at different innovative methods and operations in order, to "A," cut down on costs, but bring more efficiencies to the program?

>> ANDY IMPARATO: So what I'm hearing in that message if you think about it in the perspective of our University Centers, both the interdisciplinary training program and the Centers for Excellence, they might want to have a regional strategy around Medicaid reform working with a group of governors, and bring that strategy to Washington, at least for the Republicans in the House. This might be a better starting point than just assuming a federal solution?

>> KIMBERLY BETZ: Yes.

>> TOWNER FRENCH: The previous panel said “don't get caught up in the ‘where would you cut?’ scenario,” but at the same point in time, where would you reform within the program? Where are you seeing that you're spending money that shouldn't be spent, for example?

>> KIMBERLY BETZ: Or it's not as efficient as it could be.

>> TOWNER FRENCH: Exactly! I would like to point out, and you have a couple of Republicans up here. And we're party people to a certain degree. But I feel like we're on the far end of open‑minded Republicans.

[ Laughter ]

And I imagine that we don't have a ton of Republicans sitting out in the audience. Just speculating.

[ Laughter ]

>> ANDY IMPARATO: Don't assume!

>> TOWNER FRENCH: Well, you have university folks with disability advocates, and we just don't find a lot of Republicans in that mix very often.

[ Laughter ]

But that's a good thing! A lot of the questions that we've talked about, for us and for the previous panel that we heard have been about expanding benefits. Some of them have been about reforming. And the tough thing for us as we enter into this budget season, especially in the spring, is we don't have a lot more money. There isn't much more money. So if we're going to add services, we've got to figure out a way to reform the money that we're spending out there, and that's part of why I addressed in my opening statement that we want to see those benefits targeted to those who need it the most. And we've expanded some of these programs a little bit. With the ACA, and Obamacare, whatever you want to call it, we have added to the Medicaid roles dramatically in this country. And not for individuals with disabilities, necessarily. It's not a bad thing. Healthcare is a good thing for people to have. That is a necessity. But we are bringing people on to programs that individuals with disabilities rely on every day, every hour of every day. And so we just need to be conscious of that moving forward, that there is a max to the program.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: Thank you. And I just want to point out that I asked Kim how late she could stay, and she said 11:40. It's 11:39. So, Towner, I think he can stay longer. But, Kim, just a quick question before you leave, and this will be quick. Your boss, I think, has been a leader in all of Congress, certainly, and in the House on using social media to engage with the public. And the theme of our conference is “unleashing the power of engagement."

She is only the member I have gotten a direct Facebook message from. But can you talk about why she does that and why she believes in it?

>> KIM: Thank you for asking that question. I think our perspective is that social media is a key form of communication, particularly to the younger generation. And, I mean, I think if you look at who is using, how many people are using social media to communicate, the number rises everyday. And for us it is an important vehicle. It's something that we've tried to instill in our members the importance of communicating not just in traditional methods, but in emerging methods as well. I mean, every day there is a new sort of trend, whether it's Tumblr, or Vine, or whatever you have. For my boss it is a priority. We want all members to be using it. And so you all, as you look at different ways to communicate with members of Congress, I would encourage you to look at Facebook, Twitter, Instagram. I think those are new emerging ways that members are communicating with their constituents as well.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: So, Kim, I want to honor my commitment and thank you for joining us on a very busy day.

[ Applause ]

Thank you. And I think we have time for a couple more questions, because I think that we have to be out of this room in five minutes. So, Bob Bacon?

>> BOB BACON: I will talk feel fast. My name is Bob Bacon, and I am one of the co-chairs of the Public Policy Committee at AUCD. I direct the Iowa UCEDD. I just want to thank you on behalf of the Public Policy Committee. I had a chance when I was a Kennedy Fellow back in 1997 to work with Senator Harkin. I was placed with the Republicans on the committee of the educational workforce because you all had taken over Congress then. I learned some of the most important lessons of my life that year. And how we need to operate on the assumption that when people have good information, they make good decisions. I'm going to the Hill today, as I hope that of all you will. Notice I'm wearing blue and red.

[ Laughter ]

And, I guess, this is also a pitch ‑‑ the Public Policy Committee earlier this week talked about how AUCD can be a research‑based bipartisan resource to Congress. Well, I'm making a pitch to all of you. If your state is not represented on our public policy committee, please get on board. We will be stronger as a network being able to be that kind of resource if we're all in it together. So, again, you have to go. But, again, I just wanted to thank you on behalf of the committee.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: Thank you!

[ Applause ]

Is there a last question before we close? Nobody has the microphone? Okay.

Kim ‑‑ oh, wait, hold on. There is a last question. The treasurer for AUCD Board, and the head of the Kentucky UCEDD.

>> Audience member: (Question/comment off mic) ‑‑ and there were several congressional people who sent a letter to CMS about the use of iPads® and tablets as communication devices.

[ Laughter ]

[ Applause ]

And I think that it also may affect RSA, Rehabilitation Services Administrations. But it's a fact that those can be a fraction of the costs of some of the other communication systems, and they serve the purpose very, very well. And there is no reason to disable the other functions to justify them. I mean, that's ridiculous! So it's cost savings, it improves people's lives, and that's one thing.

>> TOWNER FRENCH: No doubt about it. I totally agree with you. It's interesting, one of my bosses -- and over the last five years, my boss, for those who know him, gets fired up on a lot of different issues. And probably the two that I point out that I've seen him very, very involved in, obviously the ABLE Act is number one, and the second one is that Amazon was going to put out their Kindle Fire or whatever it is, the top iPad®‑type device, and it wasn't going to have built‑in functions for blind individuals, first of all, and general functions for individuals with disabilities. And so I watched my boss actually pick up the phone and call the head of Amazon and literally put a hold on the entire line coming out until they could figure out that function there for those Kindle Fires. I've never seen him so mad in his life once we found out that was the case. But anyway, that was a side note. But I totally agree with you. I can't agree with you more on that front. Your negotiation is interesting. I live on Capitol Hill, and that's in the neighborhood where students from Gallaudet will come hangout. And, you know, you can't tell who is a Gallaudet student in some of the bars there and who is Capitol Hill personnel because everybody is on their iPhone® or what have you. But it's very interesting to see.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: And Towner I just want to make sure you that understand that the issue he is raising a Medicaid issue where Medicaid will pay for an expensive thing, but they won't pay for the iPad® even though the iPad® is cheaper and has better functionality, because they're somehow afraid that people will want to get an iPad® for other reasons. And there should be solution. Medicare. Medicare. So, Kim, do you want to come up? Towner, do you mind just waiting for a second? Go ahead, Kim.

>> KIM MUSHENO: I don't think that I have much to add to the great presentations that came before. I just wanted to reiterate your charge today, and that is just to talk about what you all know about. And that is what you are doing in your centers, bringing your ‑‑ if you are doing research, bringing the research to your policy‑makers, as is mandated in the Developmental Disabilities Act.

[ Laughter ]

And if you are a trainee or a LEND director, just to talk about the great training that you are doing with health professionals. I just want to make sure that you could see me and who I am so that if you need any help with directions on getting to Capitol Hill, just come find me here and I will help you get to where you are going. We e‑mailed out talking points for you. Those were just to stimulate your thinking. But, again, the main purpose is for you, as one of our speakers said today, only you can talk about what your UCEDD is doing, and your LEND, and your IDDRC. They want to hear about it from you and what's going on in their states and their districts, and how your center is helping your district, your state, and the country nationwide, because we work as a network. And you all can do it so much better than me and these paid lobbyists can. So it helps me to be able to do the work that I need to do to help support you. That's all!

>> ANDY IMPARATO: And thank you, Kim. I just want to commend Kim and Rachel and our entire policy team for the good work that you are doing.

[ Applause ]

So Kim, if you and Rachel can meet in the hallway, they're trying to flip the room and we need to get out of the room. Thank you, Towner French, for being here!

[ Applause ]