How to Write Winning Op-eds on Jobs for People with Disabilities

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>> Good afternoon, and welcome to the Respectability webinar for Thursday, September 20th, 2018. My name is Philip Kahn‑Pauli. I am the policy and practices director for Respectability. I'm so glad to be here today. I never actually thought in my life growing up that I’d actually have the chance to share the stage, virtually, with Clarence Page and Eleanor Clift. As you can imagine from my profession I was a nerdy little kid and as a nerdy little kid I watched The McLaughlin Group pretty regularly back in the day, and Clarence and Eleanor were mainstays of that iconic Washington show, and they talked about the issues of the day on that show for decades and so I’m delighted to be here today because we're talking about our critically important issue of today which is jobs for people with disabilities. As the banner says, today's presentation is going to be talking about writing op eds on the issues of jobs for people with disabilities. As some of you may know, next month is national disability employment awareness month, and because it's a great news hook, we are actively encouraging folks who care about this issue to get out and to tell their story, tell their story to the local newspaper. And to do that, we're getting you some professional advice, writing coaching from two of Washington's iconic writers. Jennifer is not going to be joining us today because she's got to carry on her mission. But we have first up Eleanor Clift who is a member of RespectAbility’s board of directors and she is a renowned journalist who has written books on multiple different topics. She currently contributes to the Daily Beast. She covers politics, she covers culture, and she is, as I said, just an old Washington hand. And so I’m delighted to be here with you today, Eleanor.

>> Glad to be with you all, and I must say when, it comes to opinion writing, I defer to Clarence Page who is a Pulitzer Prize winner when it comes to opinion writing. I am basically a reporter, and I have had to teach myself how to become more opinionated when I write a column. I think there's some simple rules that I apply to myself, the lead for a news story, and I think it's probably also true for an op‑ed column, is that the lead is what you would tell your family over supper that evening. In other words, it's the ‑‑ it's probably ‑‑ it's the most important thing that pops to mind, and when you ‑‑ when you write an op‑ed column, an op‑ed stands for opposite the editorial page in a newspaper, so it's supposed to be opinion, it's supposed to be personal, it's supposed to be passionate, and powerful. And it's also supposed to be short. 800 words is kind of the upper limit. 750 preferred. And for anybody who wants to write an op‑ed, I would suggest initially reading some of the op eds in the newspaper and reading the writing of some of the people that you might admire.

My late husband, who was a journalist, would always tell me not to use overly complicated words. In other words, don't write a yellow elongated fruit when you want to say banana. And I've always kept that in mind. And you want to sort of screen out the very's and too many adverbs. You want kind of simple, punchy language. And I think that ‑‑ and the starting point, however, for anyone is you have to have an idea and when I have an idea, what I do is then brainstorm with myself and I will jot down the idea and I will jot down what comes to mind. And sometimes, not always, that evolves in to a outline. And I always have to be careful not to rely on what's called the passive voice too much. You want active verbs because they just get people's attention. And this specific topic of advocating for jobs for people with disabilities, if you have a personal story, you want to bring out, I mean, that's also very important. People who decide what's going to get printed are going to be moved by personal stories. So a personal story of success or personal story of being let down, why it mattered, how it made you feel, and then if you can bring some, you know, statistics or evidence‑based material, that's good, but you don't want to get too bogged down by that. You want to keep it simple. You're not going to solve the world's problems in 750, or 600 words. You want to get across one clear message. And what you want to happen in the workplace, what has happened to you, an idea that you think might make it better, figure out what direction you want to go and then keep everything along those lines. You can't get the ‑‑ you have to throw things out if they distract from the narrative that you're trying to get across. You can't put in everything. So you have to kind of be ruthless about what makes it into your op‑ed piece. And, again, personal, opinionated, passionate, those are three guidelines to keep in mind. And with that, I would turn it over to Clarence who is really the master here.

>> All right. Clarence, you're up.

>> Eleanor is much too flattering. Thank you very much. I really envy Eleanor and her wonderful capacity for ideas of reporting and digging up some very original angles on stories that everybody else is covering but somehow she'll find a point that they all missed or some person who gives special insight in to it and all of these skills are important when you're writing op‑ed pieces. She talks about reporting. I started out as a reporter. I always had the dream in the back of my head to be a columnist. And speaking of nerds, that was how I started back in high school on my high school newspaper because I didn't have much of a social life. I thought this would be a good way to meet girls. Which all comes back to me now during the controversies over Justice Kavanaugh or I should say Judge Kavanaugh. I think we are all inside, whatever we were in high school, and you discover this when you go to a high school reunions. But I do digress. I did get started as a writer on my high school paper and found that the ‑‑ well, when people ask me how I learned journalism, I will, at some point, mention that everything I know about reporting and writing really I learned on my high school newspaper because just putting out a newspaper every two weeks where we had to interview real people and write about real people, you learn, that things that might not mean much to you like somebody's middle name may mean everything to them. And you're always being held accountable every day for things like facts and accuracy. And this is something that, again, is it comes up through a lot of discussion these days. But while I was researching, while I was preparing for this webinar today, I learned something, and this is why it does pay to go out and do some research and reporting you may have heard of a woman named Haben Girma, she is an American Ethiopian with Eritrean or Somalian parents, as I recall, who were both refugees, they came to the U.S. as refugees, she is both blind and hearing‑impaired, a beautiful woman who was able to get through the school system, got through high school and college, graduated from Harvard law school, I think she was the first deaf and blind person to get through Harvard law school and quite a sensation, and I was reading a piece that she did about the removal of Helen Keller of the school curricula in Texas during their latest revisions of their curricula and she wrote a wonderful piece about why it's important to know about Helen Keller and her story. And it's a great example of what an op‑ed piece should do on many levels that Eleanor just mentioned, for example, the idea that you start with, in this case, the idea was pinned to the news which is also important, increasingly now, in this era of the internet where people get an idea, they turn around and they type it out right there and boom it's on the web. Everything moves much faster now than it did when I first started in newspapers. And newspapers themselves, in fact, are viewed now from a business point of view as really a they're the permanent version of what you get on the web, but the web is really viewed as the center of our news business model now. Because fewer and fewer people are getting their news and views on paper and more on the web. And so but that doesn't change anything for us as far as being newspaper ‑‑ news or opinion writers. What we do is basically the same, it's just being done more electronically, now more often digitally than on paper. But the principles that Eleanor just spelled out are the same. I start out with the idea, figure out, and this is very important, I learned this reading and reading George Will many years ago, the toughest part of the columnist is the lead. Like Eleanor just mentioned, he'll spend 60% of his time just figuring out what the lead is going to be, and once you've got that, the rest tends to fall in to place, the outline structure, etc. So there’s a lot of truth to that. I have more times than a few started off with a lead in mind that even I'm not fully satisfied with but I'll say to myself oh, by the time I get to the end, I'll figure out exactly what I want to say. And more often than not, it takes me twice as long to get to the end, to get to that first draft, because I didn't have a firm idea in my head of what the whole point of this piece was, so I can't stress enough the value of focussing as much as you can, 2008 think it up, rewriting, or fiddling around with it, just don't take forever, you've got a lead you're comfortable with and that inspires you to move on. The argument itself, they're op‑ed, because they're opposite the editorial page, and op stands also for opinion. We are opinion writes. And so it's not the question here of getting all the facts. It's the question of having some point of view and that helps people to get their own answers or come up with their own opinion, as I guess it was Ben [Last name unclear], the late media professor and guru who said that it's a ‑‑ I don't want to lose his slogan here, he said I cannot tell what you to think but I offer you something to think about. And that's the difference here. We can't tell people what to think and that shouldn't be our goal or our purpose, but we want to give people something to think about. And enough information and enough of an interpretation so they can come up with their own opinion that may or may not agree with ours. But we want to make the most powerful argument that we can for the position that we are presenting in the op‑ed essay. The structure the basic outline is important. But one thing I have learned over time is even more important than the outline is what is the story? People like to hear storytellers. Journalists are basically storytellers, whether we do it with paper and ink, or electronically, we are ‑‑ well, I always use the example of the Bible is a big book of stories, and we all know ‑‑ well, I know of very few people who can tell me what all ten commandments are. The ten commandments are something that most of us don't sit down and memorize, we don't really have to, but everybody I know can tell me what ‑‑ how Moses got the ten commandments, the story of how the ten commandments were written, how they went up the mountain and came down with these words from God. That story is what we remember and that story is the real guide to the power of the Bible, it's full of stories that tell us this and tell us that, give us something to think about and it's a ‑‑ well, there's also a wonderful quote from Maya Angelou that I oftentimes use that people will not remember what you said but they'll always remember how you made them feel. And that is so important. Now, in my years of covering politics and various figures and all, I've heard many speeches, and Eleanor is right that it's important to use simple words, simple sentences, make pointed and concise statements because those are the most memorable, they have the most impact and they are the type of statements and ideas that are most long remembered. But that aspect of how you made them feel can mean more than anything. I've covered politicians from this party and that party, some have tremendous ideas, were great thinkers, others didn't have half a brain, but very often the politician didn't have half a brain, if he or she was a good speaker, if they could tell the kind of story that had the audience listening to them and could motivate them to action, that was how they wound up getting elected because people didn't ‑‑ you hear this all the time but folks don't really trust politicians, blah, blah, blah. But there's always somebody that they love, there's somebody that they put their faith in. And why does that happen? Because that person made a connection with them through those speeches and media appearances. I'm not naming any names, but I'm sure we could all think of some examples of this phenomenon.

And so once you've got the idea, I think we're talking in the context of an organization that is concerned with people with disabilities. And that was really how I came across the piece by Haben Girma, I hope I'm pronouncing her name right, because this was important that was talking about how important it is to understand people like Helen Keller and how she succeeded as well as she did, the lessons that are learned to be from her, whether you have the disabilities or not, are very important. And it was a wonderful essay, and it was timely because it was written in response to that's breaking right now. And these days, as I say, more and more it's important to be able to peg your piece to some kind of topic that is in the news or people that people are talking about right now. And that is, say, a ‑‑ that can make a big difference on what your subject matter is. And it's up to you to come up with what the angle, what the argument is that you're going to make. But these days, now, being able to know where to pitch your idea and how to do it, can be more important than ever because of the speed with which ‑‑ I think particularly of the newspaper that really kicked off the term op‑ed and that was the New York Times back in, as I recall, it was 1969 when I was starting my career, that they came up with the idea of having an opinion page opposite the editorial page that would give alternative views and open up dialogue and over time it didn't take very long that other papers across the country started publishing and expanding their own op‑ed pages. So these days that still offers an opportunity to get your point of view out and I've seen more often than not editors who were really looking for somebody who had a good alternative view on some breaking development and they were frustrated because any didn't know where to go or somebody would suggest a idea but they couldn't put it together, write it in time, or focus on the topic well enough. Or the one mistake I've seen people make more often than anything else is writing too long. It's a sign of an amateur, you might say, that people who go beyond that 700‑word, more or less, size that Eleanor was talking about, people are getting more sophisticated about this now as more folks have more computer power at home and all, so I suppose the mistake ‑‑ that mistake isn't made as often because people just ‑‑ there aren't that many amateurs around anymore in terms of understanding media or at least let's say people are getting more informed. But I think that's something to think about, though, because, in other words, if you've got a good idea, don't sit around and ruminate on it too long. Immediately let somebody know, if possible. And newspapers tend to have now sometime of a box or notice somewhere in neighborhood of the opinion pages that invites you to submit your own opinion, whether it's a letter to the editor or at our newspaper we call it perspective, opt perspective page, the view for those who want to submit something. I was surprised over time talking with our editors now they get a lot of letters from the editor, don't get that many op‑ed pieces because a lot of folks just aren't thinking about that or don't know how it works or they submitted one a year ago and it wasn't accepted so they felt discouraged and just never tried again. All of these things happen. But about every op‑ed page editor I know will say yeah, we invite more opinions, we want people to write in, and diversity of the people who write in, the more woman, traditionally it's been a page for white guys, black guys with me helped to break that up somewhat, the other people of color, there's there still aren't as many women but I've been gratified to see in recent years more and more, female columnists getting more attention and more prominence and having more of an impact. So we're moving in the right direction anyway. But I think people, a lot of folks just aren't encouraged to even try and submit an opinion and I think they would be more encouraged if they knew or have had a chance to talk some of the editors I talked to and also understood that it's not a rocket science. Although I oftentimes have wished it was. I originally wanted to go in to rocket science, but my higher math and when I got in to calculus and physics I said, maybe journalism would be a more inviting career and so I wound up here. But I think what's his name, Tyson, the, Dr. Neil Tyson, he has the job I really wanted to have which is to not only be able to fiddle around with rockets in space but also to be able to write about it and tell the public about it in a way that any ordinary person would be able to understand and be as fascinated by it as I was. So I always try to get that spirit in my head when I'm working on a op‑ed piece, and I write you all to do the same. And I eagerly look forward to your questions and comments to ‑‑ so I hope I've made enough sense, but I'd be happy to try and make some more.

>> All right. Clarence Tyson is officially at the Chicago Tribune. I love it.

>> Thank you. Now I know the name.

>> So here's how the rest webinar is going to go, I'm going to talk through details and stats I can to get opinions and thoughts going so you have a solid basis of the critical ideas we want to see shared for national disability employment awareness month and then after I wrap that up, we're going to have a chance to go back to Clarence and Eleanor, to ask questions, I have some questions, to get a good dialogue going. So we've covered a lot of the big reasons why there's a need for op eds and why we want people out there in the world to put out an op‑ed for October, you know, the chance to raise the issue of disabilities, to raise the issue of jobs as a solution, and it gives you a chance to change public opinion, you know, somebody somewhere is going to click on that and say hey, I never thought of that before, they're going to think that, hey, maybe I can hire somebody with a disability at my job and that will be a great chance to change someone's life, change someone's perspective and start that slow, painful process of changing the world.

So I want to start with some statistics, just as an example of kind of thing you need as a foundation. Yes, it's about opinions, but facts are better ‑‑ opinions are better offered when armed with facts. And so this slide is an overview of our home state, Maryland, it has a picture of Larry Hogan who is up for re‑election currently and has some key statistics. We mention these statistics because they're important. They give perspective on where things stand. So these statistics show that Maryland has a 40% employment rate for people with disabilities. Put it another way, put it in more simple language, it means only 4 out of ten people have jobs, people with disabilities have jobs, that's the number people can wrap their heads around. You can start talking about more details like gaps in employment rates or differences in labor force participation rates but a really hard‑hitting number like 40% of people with disabilities in Maryland have jobs, meaning that 60% don't, that will get your point across, that will raise eyebrows. And you can see these statistics on our website, respectability.org. So something that's really important to engage with if you're going to write an op‑ed is you need to talk about some of the social dimensions of inclusion and some of the perceptions of how people perceive minority groups. There's been a lot of social science studies about how do people react in regard, you hear people talking about the phrase of unconscious bias. So this slide here has a plot of kind of the universal dimensions of social cognitions, and there's two universal dimensions. Warmth and competence. When you dig into bias, when you dig into the way the people look at others, the two most important factors are warmth and competence, as competence is obviously your ability to do a task, do a job, do something well, and warmth is personability, and that's the foundation of both dimensions in terms of people thinking people are not confident and they're warm but also inclusion. And so the critical finds from this research study showed that a lot of people who aren't in the disability community think of people with disabilities as being warm but they don't think about them as being competent. And so a well written op‑ed really needs to drive home the message that people with disabilities bring incredible talents to the workplace that with the right support and services, people with disabilities can achieve the American dream just like anybody else. So that's important to think about as you're trying to offer an opinion about what people can do.

You know, as Clarence and Eleanor said, you got to think about your audience. Is this, you're going to shoot for your biggest paper in the state, then you want to think about a state audience. If you've got a local paper, think about what can you talk about in your local area, how can you make this, maybe there's a local business that has a lot of employees with disabilities, and tell the story of that. You know, think about, you know, who is your audience, who you want to reach, how you want to reach it, will facts move their brains? Well, Clarence raises a good point that emotion is the most important sometimes. So maybe you don't have a happy story as a job seeker with a disability. Maybe you have - you know- really struggled to find that opportunity and maybe that's the story you want to tell, you know, don't have it be, you know, don't accept pity. Offer high expectations, talk about your persistence, talk about what you want to accomplish, talk about your dreams honestly and truly, and that's important. There's an essential principle when it comes to persuasive writing. There's three categories of people in this picture, this slide has a picture of different crowds and the red hash mark over a disability sign. First and foremost, there's the choir, you know, people talk about your base in politics, the choir is the amen choir. These are people who are just like you, think like you, vote just like and you know what, they're going to be there with you. They're not the people you need to talk to with an op‑ed. They're not the people you need to persuade. Likewise, there will always be people who disagree with you. There will always be people who don't, who are unpersuadable. It is the folks in the middle that you got to reach and that's what op-eds can do. You know, our focus when it comes to writing about these things is very much around youth with disabilities. Young folks with disabilities are out there, they're graduating high school, they're going in to apprenticeship programs, they're trying to go to college and it's a critically important kind of demographic to talk about, you know, there's about 1.2 million youth with disabilities in America today, about two‑thirds are going to graduate from high school but, you know what, hundreds of thousands of them aren't. And if it is a success or it's a struggle to be a success, that's a story which can be told, a story that can be powerful, and all of these kinds of information and statistics are, again, available from respectability.org.

You know, as Clarence and Eleanor said, you know, they are the professionals here, but you don't have to be a professional to get published. If you have a passionate opinion, if you have a great story, that can get out there. You know, you have to do some research, you have to find your paper, you have to figure out what you can write, what you want to write, and you have to be persistent in resending and re-editing until it is ready but you'll reach that point. And as Clarence said, do your research, be accurate, make sure you help people understand why your issue is important and, you know, one in five Americans have a disability. It means that disability issues connect with every aspect of American life. You know, again, something that's important is you’ve got to keep it simple. I say this as somebody who is very guilty of laying on a lot of facts and a lot of statistics and not a lot of heart in whatever I write. But, you know, avoid jargon, avoid technical terms. Yes, it's very easy to get caught up in IEPs and 504 plans, and CTE and CIE and all of these different pieces of jargon that are part and parcel of disability employment as a larger topic but none of that means anything to, you know, the store manager who you want to persuade to hire somebody who has a disability. So keep it simple. Personal experience is especially imporant. I say that time and again. Again, the facts need to be accurate. I was just reading a piece from a disability publication and they made a mistake in thinking well, this is not ‑‑ they didn't acknowledge that the study in question was a nongeneralizable sample, meaning that they were putting out claims that were radically unreflective of the document they were quoting, so you've got to be accurate. Now, when you're talking about disabilities, you've got to talk about the power of words, and we always talk about the importance of person-first language and I have a colleague glaring at me who is very much you know, very much in favor of the identity first language instead, but you know how you best talk about yourself and talk about disability issues. If anybody ‑‑ if that doesn't mean anything to anybody, please ignore me and keep going on and use person first language.

Structure is very important. Clarence talked about why it's important to have an outline. As you know, Eleanor said, you got to have your points, you got to get them across, you know, you can't bury the lead. You got to be straight up, straightforward, tell them what you're going to tell them. So your first paragraph has to really introduce your topic, you know, you got to say this is my story of job hunting, this is my story of success as an employee with disabilities, this is my story of my company which is inclusive of people with disabilities. You've got to have a solid topic, in this case we're challenging people to write about employment for national disability employment awareness month, and state your argument. We, you know, I was able to succeed because I had this help, I had this program, I went to my local job board, whatever that argument is, then you got to back it up with some facts. You can get some of these key facts from our website, key statistics that are really persuasive and important, things around where does your state rank compared to other states, how many working age people with disabilities are in your state, excuse me, I'm coming down with a cold. So anyway. Your employment rate as a state is also important. So all of those facts and figures come together in a well written op‑ed.

You know when, you first try writing you have to be your own harshest critic. You have to be critical of - is this important information, does it get my point across, that's important. As Clarence and Eleanor both said, length is very important and by length I mean shorter the better. As they said, 500 words. I've seen a lot of papers which request 200‑word op eds which is not a lot of word space to get a point across, because people with disabilities, three words, for example, but, you know, take your grind stone, go over it again and again, read it out loud, have your children read it, have your neighbors read it, you know, get as much perspective as you can and don't be afraid to edit and reedit before you submit. We are the opportunity agenda when it comes to employment for disabilities. RespectAbility is deeply committed to showcasing success, it is committed to really showing the fact of the matter that employment for people with disabilities works, it helps make the business better, it brings innovation and success, there as lot of great examples, role models such as Haben Girma of successful people with disabilities that are changing the wormed. So it is important to emphasize key facts like the fact that studies show most people with disabilities want to work and that they're striving to work.

And you can also point out to a lot of companies that, know, are being successful because they are being inclusive employers. So, for example, this slide has a bunch of different facts that are important. There's 56 million Americans with disabilities. That means one in five. That, is you know, our neighbors, our friends, our loved ones, ourselves. Interestingly 51% of voters have some kind of disability connection. 70% of working age people with disabilities may not be working now but they want to work. You know, disability is the largest minority group in the country. It is the only minority group that anyone can join at any time do you to accident, illness or injury. Those are all facts are that very important. You know, we talk on our website about, you know, the company benefits, the bottom line dollars of what inclusive employment means. And those are all important, you know, if you're talking, say, business to business, talk about turnover rates and if there's been a change in turnover rates or training costs. For the boss, those are all things that can be very persuasive, you know, having a diverse inclusive workforce that looks like your customers and reflects their diversity, means that means better business. There's a lot of other great examples of model employers out there that you can invoke. The Kessler Foundation has a lot of great examples, as does the Poses family foundation. Google them. Google case studies disability employment, you'll find millions of articles about tease things. You know, and it is important to acknowledge the challenges too about stereotypes, about bias, about stigma, but, again, positive messages are going to be more persuasive.

Something we bring up, you'll see this, if you actually go through a lot of RespectAbility’s work, you'll see this raised a lot, and that is JP Morgan Chase, Coca‑Cola, IBM, Starbucks and Walgreens are great examples of companies with successful disability inclusion programs. Big names like that really get people's attention. I mean, we've always bought stuff or opened accounts with or drank a soda for from those companies. Those are companies that are part and parcel of the American life and they are inclusive of people with disabilities and they're all successful and they showcase what people can do. You can go to places like the workplace initiative, find some case studies, you can find you the respectability's website respect the ability campaign, likewise the organization now known as disability in, BSLN, has a great index they put out every year of inclusive employers, check that out if you want some great examples. And so this is a big block of text which I'm going to dive in and into and they're really two messages that are really powerful, very persuasive, when it couples to employment for people with disabilities, and they're messages that we've time and again tested and we've seen can really reach diverse audiences. And first and foremost is the idea that our nation was founded on the idea that anyone who can get ahead in life deserves an equal opportunity. Let me pull up the exact language. Our nation was founded on the principle that anyone who works hard should be able to get ahead in life. People with disabilities deserve equal opportunities to earn an income and achieve independence just like anyone else. If you take anything away from this webinar, I want you to write that phrase down and the phrase I'm next going to read. People with disabilities bring unique talents and character to the workplace. They can work in hotels, web slight design, software, there are no limits to what they can do. We have been working on multiple different public opinion polls that really show that there are stories, those words that really change people's minds. So take it, live it, and make good use of it.

We talk about having a message triangle, the idea is, you know, what are the ‑‑ when you start outlining an op‑ed, think about what are the most important piece that is you want people to think about, what you want them to take away from it and you know, the idea of principle, of equality, opportunity, things like that. Because we, as an organization, do a lot of work with state leadership, we think it's always very important to mention governors. Governors like to hear their names in good news and don't like to hear their name in bad news, so say your state is on the bottom ten of the worst states with the ‑‑ the worst outcomes for people with disabilities and you know, an op‑ed runs in a big paper that says well, you know, governor X of state Y isn't doing enough to support jobs for people with disabilities, that might get their attention and if you get their attention, they might do something about it for the positive. So think about that.

Again, this slide has a lot of tiny little font but we have statistics for each and every state up on our website, if you want to know what Connecticut is compared to California, you want to know where New York ranks compared to Washington State, it is all there on our website at respectability.org.

I brought this up before but I'm going to reiterate it again, you know, employer heroes, companies are being inclusive, you've got to look at those. Something that I'd say is an issue of particular importance is section 503. A lot of business that is do, that have contracts with the federal government have a legal requirement to hire people with disabilities. One in five American businesses is a federal contractor and if you're a federal contractor over a certain size, are you supposed to be hiring people with disabilities in all job categories. So maybe are you interested in that particularly, so write about that, you know, and there's lots of great links on our website that can give you further information about that.

You know, want to talk more about where the ADA stands now in relation to employment. Well, that's great. The Department of Labor has a great ADA website that has information you can pull together when the history of disability rights and occupations. So I would say check out their website, search for the ADA section, it has great information. And then, you know, lastly when, it comes to kind of telling your story, you know, you got to figure out - are you going to go statewide, to your local paper. Do research on Google, figure out who you want to send this to, and send it out there. You need to know who you are sending it to - is it an editorial board, opinion editor. Do your research, find out who they are, get their e‑mail, get their phone number, prepare an e‑mail with your finalized op‑ed, copy and paste the final op ed with your name and phone number and your e‑mail in to the body of the e‑mail, that's usually rule of thumb. I will tell you some newspapers have on‑line forms that have you to submit, but as a rule of thumb, in all likelihood they have a designated e‑mail box for op eds, take that e‑mail, copy and paste your op‑ed in to the body. E‑mail, with your name, your phone number, your title, your organization, if you're writing in that capacity, and then hit send. Usually they don't take attachments so keep that in mind. You know, different publications have different guidelines. Again, check the rules, do your research, you know, Google and and maybe you want to start with the biggest paper in your state but maybe there's a second or third one that might take it instead. Be persistent. You have to submit something first and then if they don't publish it, there's nothing that you says you can't take that same thing and go to the next biggest paper.

Also, you know, it is not likely but, you know, maybe there's a reporter that has a special interest in disability issues. Respectability back on July 30th honored Joe Shapiro and Judy Woodruff because they are both amazing, talented, if a national journalists who have a great stake in disability issues and maybe there's local person that has a connection to disability and would be a great connection or maybe somebody to get a story published with.

Our website has lots of examples of different op-eds that we publish on a variety of different topics. We encourage you to look at them and be inspired by our hard work and by the hard work of others that we care about. And so I've been doing a lot of talking and I've coughed up a bit, so I am very happy to pivot to Q and A session, so Eleanor and Clarence I'm going to cue you up. On the bottom left you'll seat Q and A box, if have you a question you'd like to ask for Eleanor, Clarence or me, type it in there. I see a couple who are queued up. So can you tell us how phone attendees can ask a question, operator?

>> Participants who have dialed in for audio and would like to ask a question can press seven pound on their telephone keypad to indicate they'd like to speak. Again, that's 7 followed by the pound sign on your telephone keypad to indicate you would like to speak. All participants can click on the ask button to send it.

>> Thank you. So our first question, a long one, here we go. Major newspapers such as the New York Times and Washington Post use opinion at blank dot com e‑mail addresses for all submissions or they say they do a variety of high profile individuals who place op eds. The question is, I find it difficult to believe that the only way to submit it them is via general e‑mail addresses. Is there any secret to pitching stories in a way other than those general e‑mail addresses?

>> This is Eleanor. Yes, I think the Washington Post gets something like 400 submissions, it might be a day or else it's a week, you, yes, if you know someone on the editorial page, if you have a personal relationship, and can get them to submit it for you, that would be far better. You, you know, I don't think, you know, you don't necessarily need to start at the top but you got to get in to one of the major almost national newspapers. But if you really have something that other people besides yourself think really merits going to the top, then I certainly don't want to deter you from it. But I think the Washington Post is a very difficult op‑ed page to crack.

>> Well, I've tried. And it hasn't gotten me anywhere.

>>> I would certainly agree with all of that. At the same time, though, editors do read those, you know, letters, essays, op‑ed submissions that come in through the general e‑mailed number or address, rather, and I say this because I've been surprised by how many people are surprised to hear that I read my own e‑mails, that I really ‑‑ well, they'll say really on the ‑‑ after I've responded to them, they will say something like oh, you really do read these things, huh? Or gentlemen, I cannot know you actually read these e‑mails, and so for those people who just sending some country teak or critique or whatever, I've often found that what may be an angry attitude in the first e‑mail will be much mellower when they find out that somebody really does read them. But I have gotten op‑ed submissions myself from people who either know ‑‑ or know who I am and say could you put in a good word with the op‑ed editor for me because they don't believe they're going to get inside of the paper if they just send to the general address, and all I do is turn around and just give it to the op‑ed editor and say here's another one for you because basically she's going to look at them all from the standpoint of what's going to look good or what's going to work in the paper, if it's a piece that is expressing an opinion that is worth getting in the paper, in her view, or someone else is working with her, she will get back to them if she thinks there ought to be some kind of a change like it's too long or some other change that she thinks need to be made but that she really didn't want to run. That's the main motivation. We want to try to get a variety of pieces, I've ‑‑ I've seen times when we've gotten so many anti‑Trump submissions that she will deliberately look for somebody who, in some way, is supporting Trump's position so that we can have some semblance of balance. And this sort of thing happens about every day. So I only encourage people to go ahead and pitch it and see if they can get in the paper that way or on the website. If not, there's probably someplace that they can pitch it.

>> Yeah, that's a good point. The Washington Post has a website which also probably publishes more pieces than get in the print version. The other thing though is that if you pitch to the Washington Post and the New York Times, you can't also be sending it somewhere else. They're very particular about exclusivity. So if you want to include them, you can't pitch it to half a dozen places or even one other place. They, and it's frustrating, I know, for people. I know, you know, friends who are professionals and they don't get back to you right away and then sometimes the moment passes. So it is, it's a competitive, competitive world. But if you're playing off the news and you have a unique angle, you know, you have a leg up. But now if you're ‑‑ and you know, pitching pieces, which is what we're talking about, to take advantage of October, sort of highlighting employment for people with disabilities, I think the op‑ed pages will be looking for something that is either, again, positive or a story where somebody who clearly had a set back and is reacting and readers could have empathy with, I think that would be an angle that editors would be looking for.

>> Definitely. And that actually helps cover a question that we have in the chat box, that you know, what is the usual turn around on decisions about op‑ed pieces, I assume that simultaneous submissions are not allowed if subsequently submitted and rejected.

>> Well turnaround, you can see very often, just by looking at the, like the New York Times or the Washington Post op‑ed page and you see a piece that is responding to something that happened yesterday or the day before yesterday, in other words, you know, very shortly before publication. So you can see that every effort is made to try to be on top of the news and so turnaround times can be remarkably fast. Sometimes I wonder how the Times goes through the thousands of people they get every day, but they do it.

>> State papers, I would say, give them a week, if you don't hear anything, try somewhere else. It's not a hard and fast rule. If this is something you want to do, you'll get a sense of it pretty quickly. I know we have a couple of phone questions waiting for us. So operator. Phone questions, please and thank you.

>> We, we have a question from Carroll. One moment, please.

>> That's me?

>> Yes.

>> It's just such a pleasure to be talking to you guys, and I'm so impressed with both of you, Mr. Page, and Ms. Clift.

>> Thank you.

>> Let me say something quickly. I have submitted something to the Boston Globe, we have a bill in Massachusetts about accessibility for workplaces and the law, the state law in Massachusetts right now is not required that workplaces be accessible, so we have a law that's part of the building code and it is outrageous and we've been trying to get this passed for like I think 16 years, it just failed again and it failed because of the deep pockets in the state that don't want to have to make private, you know, office that is are not open to the public workplaces accessible, they don't want to put money in for that. So, anyway, I submitted a piece, it was rejected because four years ago, I submitted a piece that was accepted, it was in the on‑line, the podium part of the Boston Globe, and so they said it was too similar to what I put in four years ago. And I mean, I'm saying, yeah that's the point.

>> Right.

>> But anyway, she said you need something to move the ball forward. And we'll look at it if you submit it again. So I'm wondering if you have any ideas, I don't know if I explained enough to move the ball forward. I put in a lot of personal stories because I used to be on this board and about how many jobs we had to give away, because we couldn't make offices accessible. Anyway, so I didn't have a personal story, so that's one thing I thought about. But if you have any advice about how to move the ball forward.

>> Well, I would point out that this issue has been before the legislature for four years and I would point out ‑‑

>> 16.

>> How many?

>> 15 years.

>> Okay. All right. And I would say why? Because just what you said now, it's the special interest, I think you need to, and if you can ‑‑

>> See, I said that. And that was ‑‑ I did say that, and it was rejected. I mean, they said that wasn't enough. But I ‑‑ go ahead. I'm sorry. I won't interrupt you.

>> Well, wow, well, that, to point the finger at what the holdup is and then maybe point, find someone who was personally hurt by this, again, to bring in the personal story.

>> Yep. Mm‑hmm.

>> Yeah. Because you're writing at a time when there's, you know, great distrust of government and this is, maybe the, this is why government doesn't work or why this is voters have ‑‑ should be angry at government, you know, maybe just a slightly different angle.

>> One thing ‑‑

>> Would help.

>> First of all, welcome to our world, because, you know, reporters run into this all the time with their editors, well, we wrote about this five years ago. So well, it's still there, it's still a problem, and but you want to make it sound, well on the first hand, saying that yeah, this problem has been around awhile, the first thing to do is talk about what's happening now, in other words, you may have the same point to make now that you had to make ten years ago but something new has happened that has brought the same problem up again and then you can say, first of all, taking a position, this is not new, and here it comes again. And so it is like there's ‑‑ there are different ways of fresh think up an old issue. But that's a way to do it is to focus on what's happening now and what people can could do now, that I'm thinking now about even as we speak, because columnists never stop thinking about their next column. I've been ruminating over the issue of Supreme Court appointments and what's happened since Anita Hill and how much has changed and what hasn't. I've got all news that's going on which is the current controversy over Kavanaugh but we also saw the reemergence of Anita Hill this week. And so me ‑‑ I mean, the question came to my mind, what has happened since Anita Hill and she herself has wrote an op‑ed piece for the New York Times the other day which is about how ‑‑ well, she took the positive forward‑looking angle of “I hope Congress can get it right this time and here's how”, rather than refight the old argument, because that would, you know, I mean, well, I won't say nobody cares about that anymore, of course they care, but what happened back in, what was it, 192, with ‑‑

>> '91, right.

>> '91, even longer ago, yeah, with Hill and Thomas what happened then has been argued and reargued, that's not our issue now, the question now is how far have we come, how far do we have to go so trying to focus on that. And good luck.

>> All right, Carroll.

>> Thank you so much. I can't believe it.

>> You have your editorial orders from Clarence and Eleanor.

>> Great. I know. Thank you.

>> Okay. Well, we were just about out of time. Ladell Lockwood had a great point about how the Washington post, if you're in the DC metro area, does have regional sections for like NoVA and Maryland and that, you know, to work up, if you can get published in lower level things, maybe you can start swinging to the big leagues. So thank you for that Ladell. So Clarence, Eleanor, I want to thank you both so much for your time and your insights, and your clear personal passion for all of this. I am humbled to be here with you guys today. Thank you for your hard work. Thank you so much for your contributions, your insights. Thank you very much to the audience. Please be in touch with the staff here at Respecability if you feel the bug to go out and write something about jobs for people with disabilities. I'd say remember those two messages that we really talked about, the fact that, you know, again it's a call to the idea in what makes us Americans that our nation was founded on the principle that anyone who works hard in life should be able to get ahead. People with disabilities deserve equal opportunity to earn an income and achieve independence, just like anyone else. Think about that message, take it out there. Reach out with the message that people with disabilities bring unique characteristics and talents to the workplace, people with disabilities can work at hotels and hospitals, apply themselves in computer software, website design, there are no limits to what they can do. So we encourage you to take out those messages. If you have questions or comments or want to get involved, you can contact our amazing volunteer director coordinator outreach, I'm messing up her title, I apologize, Debbie Fink is her name, her e‑mail is DebbieF@ respectability.org, you can reach out to me, you can find us on our website, with all of the state's statistics you could ever use for any op eds that you write. So good luck, go out there and change the world. Thank you very much.

>> Here. Here.

>> Bye‑bye.