Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi: So honored to introduce Congressman Brad Sherman. So, first of all, when we started RespectAbility, the very first member of congress to be involved with our organization was Congressman Brad Sherman who is a complete and total champion for people with disabilities. We’re just so, so, thrilled to have him as an ally and I also want to say that he has a phenomenal staff and that their whole team is just terrific. They got us this room, they took care of a lot of things for the conference and they’ve done it every year for six years since we have started. The congressman gives us valuable insight, valuable advice. We haven’t put out the official press release yet but very soon, you all will be hearing in a more formal way that we are deeply, deeply proud that we are going to be opening an office in Los Angeles.

[Applause]

And that is not by coincidence. The congressman serves the good people of that area and we’ve been working with him in the LA area, the greater Los Angeles area. Where is Matan Koch? He’s right here. Matan Koch is going to be working for us in Los Angeles so I want to introduce him. He went to Yale undergrad, Harvard Law School, was an Obama political appointee on disability issues, is an attorney, is going to be doing terrific work for us in Los Angeles soon I just want to introduce the 12-time Paralympic medalist Candace Cable.

[Applause]

Candace Cable is leading our workforce efforts in the Los Angeles area. She and her colleague, Tatiana Lee, who is a tremendous staff person also but couldn’t be here because she’s a finalist in a modeling contest in Los Angeles right now. They are amazing and they are working out of the chamber of commerce in Los Angeles. We would not have the money to open that office if it was not for the support of Congressman Brad Sherman who went to the mats for us to help us raise the money in Los Angeles so that we can enable people in Los Angeles to have jobs, and to work in Hollywood and in other spaces in Los Angeles. I have the personal pleasure of being a long-time friend of the congressman and his wife Lisa and they have gorgeous children. He is a great champion of people with disabilities. So, I want to turn it over to the fabulous congressman, Brad Sherman.

[Applause]

Rep. Brad Sherman: Hello, I'm Brad Sherman from California's best named city, Sherman Oaks. I represented most of the San Fernando Valley over the last 22 years. With me here is Michelle and Grace, and I know that Johan was here just a minute ago.

[Applause]

I don't have to tell you that the disability community is both the largest and the most disadvantaged minority community in the United States. I am so pleased that you're opening up an office in Los Angeles. Los Angeles first is any big American city, and you can do there what you might choose to do in Chicago or Houston. In addition, we have some good donors in Los Angeles who know how important this work is. But finally, and I think most importantly, it is in Los Angeles where dreams are put on the screen, and where the world's culture is coming from. And that is a culture which has for all too long stigmatized those with disabilities, and one step at a time, that will change. I want to say a few things about RespectAbility. I've known Jennifer since this before this organization was formed. The organization has submitted testimony in all 50 states and met one on one with 46 of America's governors. There are very few organizations in Washington that can make that claim. They are, of course, fighting stigmas in Hollywood with their free tools, with their advocacy for inclusion and equality and, you're of course celebrating a sixth anniversary year after publishing 100 op-eds around this country.

On your Board is a man who has probably done as much as anyone I can think of to changing the world's image of those with disabilities. Jonathan Murray has created the multiple Emmy Award TV show "Born This Way." He has won three Emmys and he's been nominated for another three Emmys this September for categories of outstanding picture editing, outstanding unstructured reality program, and outstanding casting. That casting included for about a minute and a half, a bald congressmen. I have checked with the academy and they assure me he is still eligible to win the Emmy not withstanding that questionable decision. His production company, Bunim-Murray Productions, is based just one district over from mine in Glendale, used to be based in my district, hopefully we'll get him back someday. And of course, I had the opportunity to host with Jennifer and with Jonathan ending stigmas and bigotry, expanding employment for people with disabilities, focused on Hollywood in my district just two years ago. The series Born This Way is shot in significant degree in the 30th congressional district, something I'm proud of. Our district has more studios than any other district, though I don't technically have Hollywood, I'm claiming it. And of course, Jonathan Murray was inducted into the Television Academy Hall Of Fame in 2012. His production company also makes shows that don't primarily focus on people with disabilities, including Project Runway, Keeping Up with the Kardashians, Kourtney and Kim Take New York, and Khloe and Lamar, all of which are on E. So Jonathan, why don't you come on up.

[Applause]

Jonathan, one of the neat things I get to do as a member of Congress is to get a flag that's been flown over the Capitol of Washington, D.C. and give it to an individual who has been of outstanding service really to the entire world. Thank you for what you've done for the image of people with disabilities. I'd like to give you this flag.

[Applause]

Now, Jonathan, most people were clapping. But one or two in a room this size, there's always one or two skeptics. Some are wondering how you can be sure that flag actually flew over the United States Capitol. There are people here from Los Angeles who have seen me at Target -

[laughter]

they sell flags there. Well folks, if you can't trust a congressmen -

[Laughter]

then perhaps it's wise that I also brought for Jonathan a certificate of authenticity to restore faith to the skeptics and to assure you that this very flag did indeed fly over the nation’s Capital. Thank you, thank you so much.

[Applause]

Jonathan Murray: Like a lot of you, it's always a thrill when you come into Washington. The first time I came here was, I think when I was a high school senior. And at that time, I was campaigning for someone who ended up losing the presidency against Richard Nixon, but it was such a thrill to be here. I remember meeting Gerald Ford and Hubert Humphrey, and I was sure I was going to go into some kind of career as a political consultant, or campaign manager. Didn't end up going that way, ended up becoming a journalist and producer, I got lured to Hollywood with reality TV. But anyway, it does mean a lot to me to have this and to get it from Congressman Sherman It's a real thrill. So thank you.

[Applause]

Rep. Brad Sherman: And Jonathan, you may have a bigger impact on outcomes here in Washington, D.C. from Glendale and from Los Angeles than you would if you were getting summoned to vote on the floor on this or that bill every 15 minutes. I've been asked to talk a little bit about how to influence members of Congress. And I know you'll be meeting with members and especially their staff in the next few days. And so I'll give you a few ideas.

The first and in a way, sometimes the most difficult, is to create a coalition of support behind specific measures. Because ultimately, the people you're talking to want to know two things. Number one, what do you want me to do? And number two, who else wants me to do it? And, there is a natural tendency to want to go to a member of Congress and tell the story of your life and the people you know. And then ask the member of Congress to somehow solve the problems. There are a number of reasons this doesn't work.

First, your story is riveting, but the next story is riveting. After you leave, I’m talking to people who have juvenile pancreatic cancer. Before you got there, I'm talking to the relatives of those who have been wrongfully imprisoned in Vietnam. And later that evening, I'm talking to the victims of genocide in Myanmar Burma. The second reason is, I'm not smart enough to figure out what the solution is. You know your issue better than I. And you may say, well, Sherman, we've got a problem, you're paid by the government, you come up with the answer. Even if I tried, I might come up with the wrong answer. And third, if I go to my colleagues and I say, this is the Brad Sherman answer, they're going to say, well, Sherman, you spend your time talking to the Rohingya, you just talked to people about juvenile pancreatic cancer. You seem to be a generalist as we all are. What makes me think that you know the answer? And even if I had the perfect answer, how would I convince my colleagues that I had the expertise to come up with the perfect answer? Finally, they think that on page 22 of the perfect answer, I slipped in something great for the San Fernando Valley, which would make it a better bill but only in my opinion.

So, what we need instead is for me instead is to go to my colleagues and say here is something that leading organizations in the community have agreed upon. This is not an answer for my district or for me or put together by a few people in my office. This is something that national groups understand, have come up with, and have unified behind. So I have just shifted the most important and difficult work from me to you. Understanding the problem is important. But thinking of what solution makes sense and creating a coalition in support of something particular is difficult.

When you go to meet with members, meet with them both here in Washington, but also back in their districts. In the district you're actually more likely to meet with the member. Why is that? Well, first, you're bringing several constituents. I would be very surprised if there were more than four people from any one congressional district in this room, unless there are people from Bethesda or Alexandria, places just across the line here. So you may have one person here from the Illinois 12th district. But if you're doing a meeting in the Illinois 12th district, you can bring three or four people

Second, in the Washington office, the member has several legislative staffers, quite experienced at taking these meetings. When I go back to my Los Angeles office, I have a Constituent Service Program. I've got great staffers, but they don't focus on the legislative work. So, I need to do the meeting myself. On the other hand, there's a certain efficiency, especially the first time lobbying to come here to Washington. Because you can sit down with the staff, and they can tell you what to do, or give you suggestions, then you can go do the meeting, then you can get debriefed. But after this trip to Washington here, you are an experienced citizen lobbyist. And it's time to use that in your home communities. The one thing you will never understand unless you serve in Congress is just how broad the job is. I'm going to be using a few, what you would consider "obscure" references in this speech. Just so that you realize how many things that you think are obscure, I need to deal with. And then you'll realize why I don't have the expertise you have in this issue. And I'm concerned. I have a daughter on the Autism spectrum. Your issue is my issue. But I still can't have the kind of expertise that you have. So please, if you come to a member, try to avoid the acronyms. Please don't give offended in they haven't read the 42 page paper that you read before you got there. Now, they want to be helpful, but whatever you're proposing is not the no brainer that you think it is. If it was a complete no brainer, we would have already done it. What you're there to propose either costs money, or offends some business group, or forces some bureaucracy to do something differently, or runs afoul of ideologies that are popular in Washington. You may think it's a slam dunk, you may think it's a no brainer. Again, it probably isn’t.

So when you meet with members or staff, remember their job is two fold. I'm going to be ultra-cynical on this, say the most cynical office out there. The goal of the most cynical office is make you happy without doing anything. Why? We're politicians. Making you happy is not only the default position, but it comes with - if you're not instinctively desiring to make people happy, you're known as a "former congressmen." But at the same time, it means work, it means offending who's on the other side, it means not being sure. And so, a politician, perhaps overly cynical said to me long, long ago, Sherman, when somebody wants something, never put it in writing. Always say yes, if you can get away with that. But, don't say yes if you can only nod, and don't nod if you can only smile. And if you go into an office, you present your case, you run through your program, and they smile such a beautiful smile and send you on your way, the cynics will be happy. But you will not have achieved what you're trying to achieve. Instead, you need to go there with something specific that you want people to do. Do you want them to sign a letter to the Appropriations Committee in support of a particular appropriation? Do you want them to cosponsor a bill? Do you want them to agree to be opposed to a bill unless it is changed in this particular way? You want a commitment. The obvious thing is for somebody to say, look, I’ve got to study this. You're going to study it? Can we call that staffer in one week and find out your position? You cannot just leave it vague like, oh, you'll study it and you heard our story, you smiled, and you seem to be sympathetic, we must have accomplished something here. So you want to ask them by when they'll tell you whether they're with you on doing something specific.

Now, there are a number of ways you're more likely to get that result. First, to be there and say, this is a course of action supported by these organizations. Second, to have your position be bipartisan. Here's a list of several members who are already agreeing to do this. And you'll notice several of them are from your party. And frankly, I think you - and I hate to make myself less relevant - but I think you need to work harder on Republican members than you do on Democratic members. And if you're allocating your time, I would keep that in mind. Because you want to have support on both sides. So you're asking for some things. You will want to be able to present them with a petition of people in their district who support this. And the best petition has a name, a physical address, and an email address. Because what you want to start is what I call the "positive communication loop." If they agree to do what you are suggesting, then you want them to send an email out to everybody who signed the petition saying they agreed to do it. Then you want the people on that petition to send in an email saying, thank you. And even more spectacularly, if anyone of them happen to see the member in the grocery store, come up to them and say thank you. This creates a circumstance where the member thinks, well, gee, I sent something out to that list, and I got this positive reinforcement. How can I get those, what do they call that chemical when the brain when you're happy? endorphins, how can I get those political endorphins again? Well, call RespectAbility, and ask them, what's the second thing they want me to do? So you go to your staff and say, it's been three months since we've communicated with disability activists in our district. Why haven't we sent them something new? Well, because you haven't done anything new, congressmen? Well, call RespectAbility and find out what new thing we can do. Then you do it. Then you send out the email. Then people say thank you. You get the endorphins. You're able to go off the opioids because you're so happy. Your life expectancy increases. It’s just a positive thing all the way around.

You’ll want to go to town hall meetings and you'll want to call in advance for any special accommodations that are appropriate. And you'll want to bring up these issues. Your issues are popular but ignored by many of the people at the average town hall. So you’ll want to ask a question. Why aren't you cosponsoring this bill? When are you going to sign this appropriations letter? And so, a member of Congress always wants to say yes when they're in a private meeting with you. They really want to say yes when they've got 3 or 400 people in that room. And then, and again, this requires creating a coalition, but perhaps one organization can do it. And that is create a voting grade, and not just voting, but co-sponsorship, letter writing, a comprehensive grade to members of Congress. Because often they want to communicate to their constituents that they're doing a good job.

I've gone way over haven't I? Do I still have one more minute? Okay.

[Laughter]

So that's what I suggest. I know it's not easy. And I look forward to working with you on all of these issues. And I think I have gone over. So, thank you very much. I'm Brad Sherman.

[Applause]

Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi: Thank you so much, thank you so much!