Steve: I’m Steve Bartlett, and we’re going into the last and highly interactive last session which we’re going to talk reality of how to make this all come together where the rubber meets the road. What can you do in your organization, what can we do, can all of us do, all of our friends do the change the outcome in the areas that we've been talking about of disability inclusion? So, if you want to pull the doors to so we can so let me start by saying that we have two incredible people here who advance opportunities through education, employment, politics and grassroots and legislation every day of the year, Lauren Appelbaum you've heard from earlier the VP of communications for RespectAbility and, Philip Kahn-Pauli - I’m looking for his exact title- It's on here somewhere-Philip Kahn-Pauli who’s the director of policy and practices. So, if you want to know what the policy should be, Philip will tell you, also if you want to know how to get it implemented, Philip will tell you. If you want to know how to communicate to it the American public, then that's Lauren. So, let’s-now's the time. So, let's get real.

I'm going to start off with politics because that's been my specialty for a while. So everything that you would like to see different, changed or even the same for that matter in the area of disability inclusion, whether it's employment, or stigma, or discrimination, or healthcare, or everything that you can think of, everything that you can think of that is in need for improvement and improving inclusion for persons with disabilities, we can talk about it, we can give speeches about it. We can put out social media about it, we can have conferences about it, we can come up with the best ideas in the world. But here's the reality. Unless and until it becomes law, it just didn't happen. Sorry. But it will be - all the best ideas in the world, all the nice things that we talk about. Until it becomes law it doesn't happen.

I can tell you as one that's been there for a long, long time, it has been one of my joys of life to end up - sometimes a year, sometimes six months, sometimes ten years later sitting next to someone and they'll say, “hey, aren't you the guy that did…” and they’ll say “yeah, well it changed my life.” It's just earth shattering. I remember once the first time it happened to me I passed a bill to free up the FHA market so people would have much greater access to getting FHA mortgages, and it was a ferocious fight, It’s amazing how these good ideas take a lot of effort to get it passed.

And it was a ferocious fight but I got it passed, signed into law, and six months later I'm sitting at a dinner, the person sitting next to me was the wife of the Chairman and so I said, making small talk, I said, “so what's new with you?” She said “the most fabulous thing in the world, my husband and I and our two children just brought a house and got a FHA mortgage.” She told me all about the house, where the southern sun comes in, the yard and everything. I said “well that's great.” She said, “no, you don't understand. We tried to buy a house with an FHA mortgage two years ago it was awful. We got to closing and the mortgage was canceled because it was all messed up.” I said, “oh.” She said, “and so I thought we would never own a house. I thought we would never have a house and we’d always have to live in an apartment.” I said, “ok.” She said “but you know, it was the most amazing thing, somebody changed the law!”

[Laughter]

“And we just moved into the house last week.” So, somebody changed the law, and that somebody is you. Let's talk through that a little bit. The people who get elected are actually the ones that write and pass and change the law. And that goes as you saw with section 504. Then that goes into regulation. But you’re the ones and the people You’re grassroots - the people in your organizations, they decide who gets elected. It's not magic. It’s not something that just kind of happens. The people who live - Does that mean my time is up?

[Crosstalk]

Well, ok, But you in this room, you're the ones, you decide, the American people decide sort of, one at a time who's going to get elected in anyone's district.

Another story, when I was running for Congress the first well, when I was running for Congress the time I got elected after that it was just reelection which is relatively, relatively easy. So there was a school, a Jesuit high school in my district who had decided that their high school civics government class project was going to be to decide who would get elected to Congress that year because it was an open seat. So these guys figured out in high school that open seats matter a lot. And that it's much easier to elect somebody to Congress if it's an open seat than you're running against an incumbent. They also noticed usually those incumbents last about ten years, and so then they noticed from reading the newspaper there were 11 people running for Congress for that seat that year. And they called all 11 of us and said “would you come in” - this is a high school class - “would you come in for an interview?” As you might imagine four of those candidates said “I’m not going to come in for an interview with a bunch of high school kids.” So take them off the list. The others of us came in. They interviewed us from start to finish, from top to bottom, Everything that you could - it was the most rigorous interview I had ever had. And at the end, then they all sat down and thought about it, came up and decided to endorse me.

So five of them who led this effort in that class, they recruited 500 high school students who put up all of my yard signs. First, they first made all of my yard signs, Hammered them, then put them up. Then regrettably politics happens, one the other campaigns decided they would go tear them down. And these five students. I brought these five students in said we have bad news. “We know, we're going to tear down their yard signs”. I said “no you're not, no you're not.” Because we would find 5,000 people that would vote against me. I said “we'll get together on Saturday and build 5,000 more signs, and you’re going to put them back up. And they did. They also made half of the telephone calls that went into the election.

I went back later to sort of say - my campaign did - sort of say, “how did I get elected?” By the way I was a landslide winner. I got 17,000 votes, but that was 57% of the people that voted, 57%. I went back later and figured out those 500 high school students organized by those 5 was the difference in the campaign. And thus, led to the ADA. So, you see it wasn't about me getting elected it was about those 5 and 500 others and other volunteers that decided they were going to do something about politics in that district.

So this is an election year. But guess what? It's always an election year. There is no non-election year. This election year, of course we're all going to pay a lot of attention to all the debates, the presidential candidates and we’re doing that at RespectAbility too. And that's a good thing. But the real decisions are going to be made by the people who run for Congress, and the Senate, and the State Senate, State legislature, school board and City Council. Let me give you the easy way - the direct and the quick and dirty way to actually have an impact.

First, pick out somebody - a candidate or elected official- by the way this is not for you individually, but it is you, it's for you individually to then transmit to the people that you know. Pick out somebody that you like, that you think you like. You don’t have to know that you like them. You just kind of look through the materials, look on the website, say, “well that seems, like, pretty good.” Calvin does this for a living, you can ask him. If you think you like them, call them up say “When's your next public meeting? I would like to come.” If they don't have one, well then, take them off your list.

[Laughter]

Or if they don't invite you, take them off your list. Go to the next one, go to the public meeting Ask a couple of question, make it about disability issues or anything. If you still like them, you say, “put me on your list.” Go to another one. If you still like them, it really doesn't take much to offer an hour a week or two hours a week for the campaign, to go to the headquarters, to go to put up the name tags, to put up the yard sign, there are all kinds of things you do on a campaign. That candidate will never forget you, ever. I was debating trying to decide what the law that be came IDEA, which is the extension of 94-142 which guarantees that young people, that the students have a right to a free and least restrictive education, right. Mainstream, I'm sort of trying to figure out how to tell the story, how important this was and such as that.

I got a little letter from one of the students, one of the young people and her mother that helped me in my campaign, she has Down Syndrome. The mother sent me a photo, and said this is-it turned out her name was Jennifer, “This is Jennifer, who had come to my headquarters. She has Downs, and this is her class photo.” I said, “well isn't that interesting, thanks!” She said “no, you don't understand. that is the first time that Jennifer, because of this law, this is the first time that Jennifer had ever been allowed in her class photo.” So, it matters. And the fact that Jennifer and her mom Darlene came to my campaign and helped in the campaign, that's what got my attention to notice this particular fact. So all of these things get connected and it then really matters who you get elected and how you communicate.

One last thing. And that is just maintain the communications with whoever you develop a relationship with. You do it with one person, with one official, or two, or three, or four. But do it kind of systematically. Then when they get elected they'll come back and also have public meetings. Show up at the meetings, ask a question, ask a question about disability inclusion. By the way, you're not looking for them to say yes to your question. You're looking for them to hear you and to understand this is important to you, and since you helped to get them elected, it becomes important to them. And you will change the direction of the world by that approach. It really works. Democracy works. But it only works for people who work at it. Sorry, it's kind of it might make you sad. But that's the rule. The only people whose votes get counted are the ones who vote. The only people that help decide how people are going to vote are the ones that get somehow active - you don't have to do a lot. You don't have to make a life of it. But it's just part of citizenship. So we're going to do that at RespectAbility. We have- already we've started, we encourage you in your organization to set out and make a difference.

Now, with that long winded story, sorry about that, but I get passionate about politics and about making a difference in the outcome. Because it's really not about politics. It’s really about using politics to change the laws to accomplish the goal. Richard Nixon up here in 1973 when he signed Section 504. If we didn't have 504 we wouldn't have had anything. Also, by the way, It took the grassroots after that to get the regulations signed, true. Then it took the grassroots and the activists, the grassroots and the activists in the sit-in in the building would never have happened, had not someone in Congress not decided that Section 504 was a law worth passing, and then convincing Richard Nixon to sign it. I think he was on his way to the helicopter at the time. Took it to go back to California. But that's okay.

[Laughter]

 We'll take it! A signature is a signature. So with that, Philip, I'm going to start with you. So those things or others and in view from where you sit at RespectAbility. Wait a minute-before I do this, After we do our panel, I'll turn it back to you so you can be thinking, write it down, take a pen and kind of write down We want to know - and we’re going to write these ideas on this board - We want to know what you think RespectAbility should do over the course of the next year, what our priorities should be, what kinds of issues should we tackle, and how should we do it? So get ready for that, I'll giving you fair warning. So Philip? So in your view, what can the people in this room and - there must be ten thousand people represented in this room through your grassroots organizations. So what are the most important things that they can do to advance opportunities for education and employment?

Philip: Thank you so much. Wow. I have several different ideas and several different strains of thought that I really want to bring to it. I want to go to the point where we are in terms of one of the big laws we talked about today which was the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, WIOA, it's a term you’re gonna hear a lot if you read any of RespectAbility's emails or read any of our reports, or read any of our op-eds. The reason why is it's a law which has been on the books for four years. And there's a lot of issues with implementation. But the important thing about it, and where there's a chance to get involved, it really is where the rubber meets the road. So for example, at the national level, WIOA represents $17 billion in federal funding for workforce programs, $17 billion. Now, the crucial decision point where - how that money gets spent and how that money gets distributed are at state and local Workforce Development Boards. These boards have the responsibility to set priorities, to set policies, to figure out what work, what doesn't. And really meet that intersection of policy and practice which is captured in my title. One of the great things is, by law, these meetings have to be public. There's a State Board in every state, and there are local boards throughout each state. And I think it can make a tremendous difference in terms of jobs for people with disabilities. So for example, Iowa, not exactly a state you would think would be really good on disability issues has consistently been among the top ten states with the highest employment rates for people with disabilities. One the factors I attribute to that success is the fact that there's a disability advocate serving on every local workforce board in Iowa. Every board.

Steve: That didn't just happen.

Philip: It did not.

Steve: That took activists, political skill and political leverage to cause that to happen.

Philip: It did. Because you had a commitment from the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation to offer leadership opportunities to its client list, which - you know - that's not in the law. It's an idea which was implemented because the person who's heading VR in Iowa believed that the best way to achieve the law was to say, all means "all." I think another thing - and there's not just workforce boards you get involved with, there's boards, There’s commissions, there’s agencies…Actually Governor Gavin Newsom, when he just got elected in California, put out a call to constituent groups which had been very involved in his campaign to say: here is a list of a thousand different state boards and commissions, and we want candidates from across the diversity of California to apply to work for these jobs And I can tell you that we did our part to distribute that information to disability organizations across the great state of California.

And likewise, I think something else people can do is getting the message out there. You’ll hear that we repeat our messages a lot. We talk about fighting stigmas. We talk about advancing opportunities. And one of the ways that you can personally do that is by for example is by, for example, writing an Op-ed. Now, why that’s important is because it gets the message out there, it repeats the message again and again that people with disabilities have the same dreams as everyone else, that disability is part of the human experience and that people with disabilities have skills to contribute to the workforce. Writing an op-ed is pretty easy, it takes time to get good at it, but, there's a lot of state and local newspapers that are always eager for hearing a personal compelling story backed up with data. If you need the data, go to our website. If you need an idea or an example of what a good Op-ed looks like, go to our website.

Steve: You can go to one of these council meetings, they're public, You can go and you can sit, and at some point someone’s gonna say, “Do you have anything to say?” So ask them a question. And if you're polite and respectful but you also have something to say, some knowledge, It's amazing how you'll get recruited to come in and be a part of it, it's a matter - the hardest thing to do is to start. That's the very hardest thing to do.

I remember a guy, one night when I was running for City Council, the knock on my kitchen door at 6:00 on Sunday night. Back door. There’s a guy named Jim Richards, he knocks on the door and says, “Steve I'm really sorry. We met along the way, I like what you're doing on the campaign, I can't really help much, but I was on the way home, I saw you out, so I thought I’d come by and see what I can do to help.” I said, “well.” He said, “but I work, I carry two jobs…” I said, “well, what would you like to do?” He said “well, I’ll just do anything.” I said well are you free on Sunday nights? He said yeah. I said “okay. Why don’t you come by next Sunday and you can be the Sunday night shift supervisor.” And then he became in charge of something else, And something else, and when I got elected to City Council I made him chairman of the Martin Luther King Jr. [cough] Board of Directors, And then he went on to be the on the Chairman of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission for the City of Dallas then he went onto run for my seat and won and was there for three terms.

[Laughter]

And it was just because he driving by, feeling guilty. Because he had to stop to ask for - offered my help. The hardest thing is to just start and your impact will be immeasurable.

Lauren, on fighting stigmas, so what can we do as grassroots in that area?

Lauren: That's a very broad, broad question. So I will talk about two different areas of our work. One is in terms of the political work and one is in terms of our Hollywood inclusion work. So when it come to the political work, piggybacking on what Philip does in the policy and practices, we are looking at specifically candidates. We look at candidates for President, candidates for Governor, candidates for Senate, the reason we don't drill down much more than that is just because of staff time and capacity. However we have had individuals come to us and say I'm really interested in doing a candidate questionnaire for my local race. And that's something where we're able to give our national candidate questionnaire and say, hey, here are some questions, and you can adapt them for your race. So everything that we do at the national level can be adapted to the local level, to school board, whatever it might be that anyone is involved with.

I got my background in journalism. I started at NBC News in the Political Journalism Unit. During the 2006 midterm and 2008 Presidential cycle and Obama transition years. Since then I've had the opportunity to try and figure out how to get different issues covered. And last cycle when I asked my friends who were still over at NBC and other places, I said, “how can I get you to cover disability issues?” And their response was, “we will cover it if the candidates talk about it. And the candidates will talk about it if they're asked to talk about it.”

So last cycle we actually organized a group of Fellows spearheaded by Ben Spangenberg who helped you check in here, he's outside at registration. And literally, going to Iowa and New Hampshire and going to the town halls not as press, but as individuals, folks with visible disabilities as well as non-visible disabilities, asking questions, and the other person just holding up their iPhone and recording the answer so we could share It. What I have seen this cycle already is utterly amazing because, last cycle we were trying to get people to go out and do it, and it wasn't happening on a mass level. This year, already, folks in New Hampshire have done their own candidate questionnaire, getting a majority of candidate to send back videos and responses. It is being done by people all over, which makes me feel really great seeing all this work being done by everyone.

We're going to still continue our outreach to presidential candidates. One of my favorite days was about last week, I had we've done calls with nine different Democratic campaigns, and obviously it's open to all parties to kind of talk to us and learn about how they can be more accessible. One day last week I had a call with one of the leading Democratic presidential campaigns on how they can make their website more accessible, who they can get to help them with that. Just a bunch of different questions that they were asking me on how they can do. Then in the afternoon, I was over at Sundance Institute, working with people on how to ensure better representation on TV. It's fun to do both areas.

In terms of representation in Hollywood, it's something that we really work to educate the studios and networks on not only the why, but the how of including people with disabilities. People, there is a similarity between Hollywood and politics. and, people listen to what is demanded. People want to win awards, shows like Born this Way being nominated year after year for Emmys show that inclusion is not just the right thing to do, but it really can draw in, and the disability market is worth 1 trillion dollars, so oftentimes using that can be a very good talking point. Because Hollywood runs on money. Being able to say that it is effective in both ways.

And so, tweeting can be very important, because people do pay attention to what is out there in the Twitterverse in terms of calling for and demanding for more representation of characters with disabilities on your favorite TV shows. And then writing about that, the same way of writing Op-eds on something that may be a law, writing about pieces- we just published a piece on New Amsterdam, on the representation of multiple types of disabilities, and how it's become almost like an accidental best practice. The writers, the folks at NBC circulated that. And then the writers room, they started tweeting it out of how they realize that their work is being recognized. And when people's work on disability inclusion is being recognized, whether it's a political candidate or whether it’s your favorite TV show, they're going to - just like Congress Sherman said before if they're getting those accolades from people, whether it’s through written pieces, through social media, or any other means, they’re gonna be much more likely to continue to want to do that.

Steve: Awesome. So let me turn it over to you, I gave you ample time to think of some ideas for what you think we should be - "we" collectively “we” not just RespectAbility, what the disability community can do to expand grassroots and inclusion. Yes sir? What did you expect me to get it?

Debbie Fink: Have to get my steps in.

Steve: Got to do everything around here?

Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi: Wait a minute, Larry has a job opening! You're hiring?

Larry: I am hiring since we're talking. Yes, I'm hiring. It's the EasterSeals Disability Staffing Network which is a social venture, innovative new way to really scale disability employment. And we have a opening for its program director. So if you're interested, we really want to hire a good we would love you, Steve.

So my question is, is there any federal effort, or could there be, to break the link between earnings and Medicaid? And support services through the state DDA? That that is one of the biggest things?

Steve: I think it's the largest single barrier to employment today in my opinion. So I tackled that in the 80s I got a couple of changes, three changes actually that I got, one of them didn't get passed until two years ago. The first one was to make permanent section 1619, section 1619 says that if you have access to Medicare through SSDI and you get a job, that's great. But you lose your Medicare, but if you then lose your job, meaning it doesn't work out, the difficulty is everyone in the disability community knows the difficulty is it takes two years on a good day to get reinstated during that time so you're at risk. The same with Medicaid. And so, in Medicaid we got a provision of the law passed that says, by the way it's not very well implemented but it actually says, that if you're eligible for SSI and Medicaid and you get a job and you get earnings, you can buy into Medicaid up to a certain level. So you don't lose the Medicaid automatically, it depends on your earnings. As you know HHS doesn't do a particularly good job of implementing that.

I actually spent six months trying to get a friend of mine reinstated on Medicaid after - she didn’t get a job, she inherited a life insurance policy, same disability but you know the story. The third is the new one that I was really impressed with. I introduced this in the 80s, when I was in Congress- didn't get it passed. And then came back in the 2000s a guy name Ander Crenshaw took it up, it became what's now known as the ABLE Act it allows a relative, usually a grandma or uncle or somebody to set aside a trust fund money to provide for a small amount of income for that person and have it not count against Medicaid. So those are the three. The last one that I'm particularly passionate about just because I think it's so stupid and contrary to just decency, that's the asset cap on SSI and on Medicaid that- We tell people we want you to be successful, but if you have one dollar more than $2,000 in your bank account, then you're out of luck, you lose all your benefits until you get them reinstated.

So my wife and I are sponsoring an SSI person who's totally disabled. But she manages it herself, she regulates it by the simple deal. If she sees her bank account sort of approach $2,000 she takes it out of the bank account puts it her sock drawer that I don’t know about. and puts it under-I’m from Texas, so pardon me - she puts it right under her little ladies revolver 32 special. But that's a Texas thing. The asset cap is horrible and I have to tell you, if we had some grassroots movements of people that would go to Town Halls and say, “Congressman, why do you tell people who are disabled you can't have 2,001 dollars? Why do you do that?” Because no one can answer it. And at least we get it raised.

Audience Member: Hello, in regards to talking about work incentives and barriers, can you do something about the fact that the SGA limit is higher for people who are blind and lower for those who aren't. Even though they say expedited reinstatement is easier, I applied for expedited reinstatement back like March/February, and I still haven't gotten anything. And the thing is, I make enough to go off, but not enough to be self sufficient. And also, is there a way we can like figure out to make it to allow Uber, Lyt to be deducted because paratransit stinks.

[Laughter]

Steve: It does. Absolutely. So those are the kinds of issues that you introduce to a congressmen or congressional candidates, and say, what can you do? They say I'm going to look into it. And then you follow up with an email and letter, and then six months later you call back to their staff and follow up one more time. So those the kinds of issues that, if you can plant in the minds of members of Congress or other grassroots, you can actually get changes made. But they're difficult.

And by the way, on the SGA with the blind, don't - my advice is never try to use a take it away tool, meaning you don't want to go and say take that eligibility away from blind people. You want to say, we think other disabilities should have the same eligibilities as blind people, so raise up, don't take away. Yes, Over here? Yep, turn it on. There we go.

Audience Member: Hi again. I was just going to say I do think another opportunity for both politicians and different organizations to get involved with is the fact that the Disability Act will be signed for 30 years next year. So it is definitely to me an opportunity that I think a lot of people should be able to capitalize on with this whole conversation of visibility and things like that. I wanted to know what the panelists - what are some things that you all are even thinking about. It's going to be a big year, it's 30 years. And so what are some things that we could be able to even talk to politicians, talk to people to be able to get that visibility for an opportunity, bigger and wider.

Steve: Philip?

Debbie: It will be a big year with much thanks to honorary Bartlett.

Steve: There were a lot of people involved but thank you.

Philip: All right. So, next year's going to be a big year as you said. It's the 30th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act and I think that's going to be a lot of retrospectives , I think there’s going to be a great hunger for interesting stories of what its been like for people with disabilities to grow up in the legacy of that. 30 years is a long time. And there's a whole conversation different it started five years ago, four years ago at the 25th anniversary about the ADA generation- a generation of people with and without disabilities who grew up together in integrated schools and saw the same opportunities, ideally. Obviously 2020 is going to be the most fractious, most expensive, biggest, long dust of a fight up for the presidency ever. But I think its important to look to that. I know that RespectAbility is already thinking about what we're going to do for the 30th anniversary, this is going to be a much bigger event next year. We hope you'll be back, ready to sign up for doing op-eds, or going out there and telling your story about how the ADA has changed your life.

I would also quickly flip back to say let's not neglect what we can accomplish this year. You know, we’ve got a week. Later this week is the 29th anniversary of the ADA and there’s still a chance to put together a short compelling Op-ed and get it submitted to your local paper. Also this year, Everybody is focused on the 2020 races, but there's competitive Governors races in three state this year: Kentucky, Louisiana and Mississippi. Kentucky and Louisiana, both the Democrats and Republicans really want to flip those seats, and that’s a race where a conversation about how the most vulnerable in society are being treated in those states could make a major difference. And Mississippi’s gonna be- there's going to be a lot of infighting around that particular election. So let's not forget what we can do now. As we think about it, I think look forward to how we can tell our stories and how we can leverage the tools of digital media. Which will segue to Lauren. What do you think we can do for this year and next year?

Lauren: Well, any journalist is always looking for a news hook. Submitting an op-ed at a random time may not get picked up. But that's why Philip was talking about how this week is the 29th anniversary where it's the time where you might get someone to pick something up. When it's a bigger anniversary year like 30 years, that can be a news hook of why someone may be interested in reporting on something. And I think it's important, the fact that people are looking for personal stories. And a comparison also of growing up with the ADA versus not growing up with the ADA because you have a lot of people who talk about the difference of what happened to them when the ADA was signed into law. And then its also a time to look at what the ADA was intended to do, and still needs to do. You know, the employment rate isn't much higher than it was when the ADA was signed into law. So in terms of being able to point out that just the fact that a law was signed does not mean that everything it intended to do has been done, and what type of work can still be done in order to ensure that all people with disabilities are getting the access that we want.

Steve: So, I've got several things to say about that, to build on that. First of all hang on just one second. I'm going to respond to it also, then we'll come back. First of all don't be afraid of the Republican and Democrat thing. I'm a Republican, lifetime Republican, I’m also a never Trump Republican.

[Applause]

Yeah, thanks. And there are a lot more of them than there are of them, but nevertheless they've got the microphone. But it takes both parties or it takes all parties. So wherever you sort of find yourself attracted to in a political party go there and be proud of it, and then change your party. I can tell you that, a pro disability inclusion Republican in Congress right now is far more valuable than 15 pro-disability Democratic congressmen not because they're not worth it- it's just we got a lot of those! But we don't have that many Republicans right now that will speak up. So number one, don't be afraid of R and D.

The other thing is don't be afraid of local races, of City Councils, and State Senates and legislatures, those - the school boards, they make a huge difference so that’s one thing. Second, I'm going to have a somewhat of a different advocacy I think than is typical that you start with about the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the ADA. That is, if we celebrated and stop then we've done nothing. The ADA is not self implementing. There's still 63% of - persons with disabilities in this country are still unemployed Only - 63% are unemployed. Now that's better than 73%, 30 years ago when we passed ADA. But that's still 63%. We still have 3,000, I’m sorry, 5,000 people on the waiting list for school to work transition for supported employment in the state of Maryland alone! Okay. Of young people ages 17 to 22 who want to work and who need a small amount of assistance that's in the law called school coaches, okay. Or called work coaches, but they are on a 5,000 waiting list. The 40% of all inmates have disabilities and a large number of those are inmates in prison because of their disabilities. So we have a long way to go with disability inclusion. So we should celebrate the ADA in the context of what more needs to happen and layout some of those issues that need to happen. Over here?

Nelle: So, hi, again, my name is Nelle Richardson-

Steve: you were over there, now I see you're over there. You're sneaking up on me. Bless you.

Audience Member: We need two of you.

 Nelle Richardson: Thank you. So my name is Nelle Richardson, so I have a question for Congress. For the people who become disabled over 50, its such an incredible I'm putting myself in this place. It's a incredible difficult place to be, where you have worked 20 plus years, lets say for example and then you become disabled. They are basing your qualifications, lets say for example, SSDI, on your education and work experience. And you're not able to work anymore now because you're over 50, you're disabled, people don't want to hire you. And yet you don't qualify for SSDI for example. So what can Congress do in an event like that to make this, us, over 50 - more inclusive? Where we can have an income and be able to live a quality of life that we deserve?

Steve: So good question. In fact I had too long a conversation with the RSA commissioner when she left here, the chairman of the 7 agencies, Mary was that her name? So I'll give you my answer. I don't know of a law that could be passed that's going to be a fix for that. There may well be some things in the law that can be adjusted. I think the right approach, the approach that's best is to figure out ways that people over 50 can be encouraged, motivated, freed up, made independent so they can get back to work. Because that's what they want to do. And there are a lot of steps to that.

The biggest step many, many disabilities for over 50 occur on the job. Some kind of workers comp. The most important thing for that is to get the insurance company Aflac or Unim to get to that person like immediately so that they can get their mind right, that you can work, and we're going to have to make some adjustments in your work style, some adjustments in your workplace so that you can work. But you can work and you can be more healthy. That's not everybody. As I said my wife and I are sponsoring a 60 year old woman who cannot work. It's not possible. But I think if we focus on what you can do, I think we're better. And I think if we use the insurance companies and some of the Department of Labor to encourage that too. Too often we end up telling people who are injured on the job, you're never going to go back to work, just give up and apply for SSDI. I think SSDI should be the last resort not the first. That’s my opinion.

Philip: I’ll jump in on that. All right. There we go. Its not much of an answer but, Bartlett did highlight one area where the Office of Disability Policy was on the panel earlier and talked about this issue. They are in the process of looking at return to work and stay at work initiatives, grant programs to really test what are the best practice to help that aging individual who acquires a disability to stay in the workplace. And I think - don't look for a federal solution when a state solution can be done instead. So for example, I'm going to bring it up again, again because it's the caucus state, but the Iowa. Actually Iowa's vocational rehabilitation program also has a program for aging workers who age into disability. It's called Rehoming, so their vocational rehabilitation counselors contract with one of the biggest healthcare providers in the state to help their aging workforce realign instead of doing physically demanding jobs such as being an ER nurse, being a care coordinator, Finding another job that leverages that person's skillset and experience to the keep them in the workforce until they can retire. I think there's maybe not a federal law that can be passed to solve that problem, but I think there's a lot of lower level solutions that we can fight for and we can see implemented to help that particular segment of the continuity and spectrum of disability.

Audience Member: Thank you.

Steve: One more question.

Debbie: Who has not asked a question? Have you not asked?

Steve: Not yet. Go ahead.

Debbie: Oh! We have a new hand back there. How many steps do we do today?

Audience Member: So I'm an executive director over at the independent living resources of Salano in Contra Costa County, that’s in the Bay Area in California. One of the things that I am finding and you are right, seniors are hard to place to go back to work after the age of 50. We keep doing appeals until we get them on social security. So an Independent Living Center is a good place to start to fight that denial. But we're finding that when people do go back to work on the Ticket to Work they have a 9 month trial work period on SSDI, but I have not been very successful lately on those overpayments that come into my office. You know, we have a lot of people that - they can't work full time, they work part time to supplement their income. And that's how I do get people to go back to work, because they can't afford to live in the Bay Area but even when they're over $100 on that, maybe that month they got paid three times, right, A third pay period, it really - that's really hard to fight. That's a component that we need to get before we get people to go back to work that they have a clear understanding of what the rules are for social security before they go back to work using the Ticket to Work.

Steve: Yeah, the rules of social security - both social security, SSI, SSDI, are way too restrictive and sort of harsh. And it's the harshness that and the complexity of it that ties people up. There's nothing to be proud of. This is by the way, this is not- this is from Republicans and Democrats, it's been that way since the 1970s that I can recall. The rules are too harsh, and too harshly enforced.

On that somber note unless someone has a really wonderful question to say let me show you the promised land is the mountaintop. Let me say this to you. Each of you are extraordinary and you're very special in your work area. You have devoted either all of our your life or most of your life to this issue of disability inclusion and you're making a huge difference. And I want you to know that your participation here made a big difference to us. At RespectAbility we look forward to staying in touch with you and to continue this community, if you will. So thank you for what you do.

One last - this is - I’m a politician, so this one is the inspirational story, the story of a Chinese philosopher, once professor who had a smart alecky - a professor of philosophy a smart alecky student in his class who decided to trick the professor and give him a question that was unanswerable a conundrum, as they say. So he went up to the professor afterwards and he said professor: I have, in my hands I have a delicate, white bird, a dove. And in my hand. Your question that I want to ask you is, this bird - is this bird dead or alive? The professor immediately recognized the trick, the conundrum, because if he said the bird is alive, the student would crush it proving him wrong. If he said it was dead he would release it proving him wrong. So the professor gave him the right answer this, is the answer for you as you go forth in these areas The answer, friends, is in your hands.

[Applause]