Steve Bartlett: I’m Steve Bartlett. It is my awesome honor to be Chairman of RespectAbility. RespectAbility is an organization I've watched and have been part of - growing up. And I have to tell you it's really an exciting organization. Exciting that you're here. We're glad that you're here.

This is going to be an awesome day. I will say if you look at the clock; this clock up here, proves the old adage that even a broken clock is right twice a day, so at 11:26 that clock will be right. But the two clocks over here are much better. I also want to say that there are cards - this is an overflow crowd. Thank you for coming. Everybody here has something to say and something to contribute. There will be lots of opportunity for interaction at your table. But the interaction with the panels will be, there’s some cards on the table.

So during the course of their presentation, if you see something that you want to ask or something you want to say, well write it out on a card and the fellows will be around during the course of the presentation to take those cards, bring them up, sort them out and collect them and answer them up here.

The name of this conference is “From Washington to Hollywood and Beyond: The Future of People with Disabilities." Our mission at RespectAbility is fighting stigmas and advancing opportunities.

So together, and I think everybody in this room is a part of that mission, we are striving for a better and a more equitable future fur the 56 million people in America who have a disability.

I want to first say thank you to our board members. I've been on a number of boards of directors in my life, I have to say this is the most awesome and amazing Board of Directors that I've ever been with. So I want - if everybody who's on the board, raise your hand and kind of wave around. Alright. Good good good. Those the ones if they're at your table, be sure to give them an ear full of what you have to say.

We also have RespectAbility’s staff, they're just amazing, they're organizing all of this. And of course the incredible National Leadership Fellows, they all made this today happen. And thank you for your dedicated hard work ensuring a fantastic future for all people.

Now to all the speakers today, thank you for sharing your lived experience, your expertise and your passion. You'll see a lot of expertise and a lot of passion up here. You are our guides and our partners in this journey to full inclusion, equity and success. Also to Congressman Brad Sherman and his staff, and congressmen Sherman will be here for lunch. He is our - every room in the Capitol is hosted by some member of Congress. It’s kind of one of Congress' little secrets. Every room is ‑‑ I use the word "controlled” - is actually controlled by somebody. So Brad Sherman controls this room for the day, he's invited us to be his guests here.

Next year we're going to - about this time - we’ll have the honor of celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Declaration of Independence, the civil rights legislation for persons with disabilities, and some legislation that I was involved in co‑authoring. It was a momentous bi‑partisan achievement. It was truly bi-partisan. Millions of people have better lives today because of that legislation.

I would note in the tenor of the times and I won't go too far on this, that bipartisanship in this town is probably a word that and a concept that we need a lot more of these days. But hope springs eternal. And with the help of people here, we'll get there.

People with disabilities deserve the opportunity to achieve independence; and success, including competitive integrated employment, just like everyone else. So that’s why I'm delighted that you have joined us today to hear from our distinguished speakers and to engage on so many key issues around education, employment, and independence.

Disability is a natural part of the human experience. Everyone in here knows that, not everyone in America has picked that up yet. But we're working on them. According to the census fully 1 in 5 people in our country currently have a disability. Others may acquire one later due to an accident, aging or illness. We know organizations and businesses and our country are stronger and more creative when diverse people, including people with disabilities, are at the table and given authority. Indeed the majority of the staff, the board and the national leadership Fellows of RespectAbility are in fact members of the disability community.

We're going to have a great day together. And I want to welcome you to the RespectAbility family! Thank you for coming. Now I'm going to turn it over to the musical geniuses here, Debbie Fink and Adam Fishbein as they lead us in the national anthem. I'll step away from the mic so you won't be able to hear my vocal - my musical ability. Thank you for coming.

[National Anthem]

Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi: Wow! Thank you, Adam and Debbie. Thank you so much. So Adam is one of our National Leadership Fellows. He is a talented young leader with disability who is doing a tremendous job for us. Debbie Fink, when she's not playing violin, heads our national work for our volunteer program.

So if you're ever interested in volunteering, or being part of our speakers bureau, Debbie is the person. She's the main person doing the logistics for this conference, so all of those logistic, Debbie's really a great leader on. Thank you to you both. And let me just say Good morning to everyone who is here.

I am so thrilled to have you here and I want to thank our fabulous Chairman, the Honorable Steve Bartlett for all all that he does. This is a primary author of the Americans with Disabilities Act, so many other pieces of legislation, former mayor of Dallas, and we feel so lucky in the disability movement to have your leadership, and I am personally so lucky to have you as a mentor and as a friend. So, thank you Steve very much.

He already mentioned it but I want to just say again if you're one of The National Leadership Fellows or you're one the board members or the staff, and if you can raise your hand, please do that, because we all want to meet everybody who's here. We all see each other as really a family. So thank you to our team. We recognize that we are a part of a large mosaic of fantastic leaders and organizations. And that there are many pieces to improving the lives of people with disabilities. We're only one part of that. You know, we have two different Ms. Wheelchair New Yorks here. And I'm just so proud to see the great New York contingent over here

We have our fabulous program in New York for women with disabilities. And so thanks to our New Yorkers who are here. We have people from the CCD, NDI, NDRN, NACCD, Jewish Federation of North America, EasterSeals, JFGH, Jewish Family Services, Starkloff from Missouri, the Independent living movement, Congress, Governor’s offices - so many places. Each of you is so important to moving a shared agenda forward. It takes all of us working together to create success. We know that leadership comes from the public and private sector, nonprofits, faith‑based groups, Hollywood and so many other places. And we're so grateful to be able to do our part in what is a team effort to create a better future.

As you know, our mission at RespectAbility and we're putting up the actual mission statement on the screen, is to fight stigmas and advance opportunities so that people with disabilities can fully participate in all aspects of community. So what does that mean to us at RespectAbility? And how do we live it everyday in our work? Our theory of change and take a look at the slide, it's here. And it's over there, and they're on our table - on your tables. Our theory of change has three pillars. Fighting stigmas, advancing opportunities through best practices, and a talent pipeline where diverse leaders with disabilities lead.

RespectAbility believes that all people - and that includes those with developmental, physical, sensory, mental health and other disabilities - deserve the opportunity to achieve their hopes and dreams, just like anyone else. Yet, despite this universal truth, as Steve said, too many people in our world still see people with disabilities through the lens of stigma, implicit bias, fear, and low expectations.

Geena Davis, the fabulous activist and actress who advocates for positive portrayals of women in Hollywood, says "when they see it, they can be it." And that is true also for people with disabilities as well. People need to see positive and accurate portrayals of people with disabilities and what we can do. And so, we address this with a first pillar fighting implicit bias, you see a screen on that as well.

By promoting positive and authentic portrayals of people with disabilities in Hollywood and the news media, and you will hear from many terrific speakers who are addressing those issues in Hollywood and beyond. That work is led by key board members as well as Lauren Appelbaum from our staff, Lauren if you can be recognized. She is amazing. She just got back from Hollywood where we just did an 11‑part series out there, you'll hear more about it. But she's always looking for more partners so you should connect with her.

As perceptions change, new opportunities must as advance, which brings us to the second pillar of our work, you'll see the second slide which is advocating for best practices in education and including people with disabilities in the workforce. So this is competitive, integrated employment - real jobs at real wages. So we can advance opportunities. You can see that slide and you can think about it because we want to work together on these issues. Today we're going the hear from tremendous speakers on education, employment, and advocacy today. And we also have tremendous, tremendous board members and staff working on these issues, and somewhere is Philip Kahn-Pauli. Where is Philip? Right there at the door. Philip leads our advocacy work with Governors. We have met with 46 of America's Governors, we're working with 11 different federal agencies, and he's also always looking for volunteers.

We also have the pleasure at RespectAbility that Philip is the co‑chair of the CCD task force on employment, which is 120 plus disability organizations. I know that Aaron Kauffman who's coming later is also a part of that task force, but this is 120 national disability groups working together. Everything we do is only successful when we can work with partners like you.

Progress will require that our entire community raise our collective voices with a message that people with disabilities bring characteristics and talents to workplaces that benefit employers and organizations alike.

Companies including J.P. Morgan Chase, Ernst & Young, Coca‑Cola, and we have just like the most talented guy from Coca‑Cola, I can't wait to hear Vincenzo speak later today - and Bank of America and others are living proof that employees with disabilities can be innovative, loyal and reliable and help them be more successful. Moreover the Ford Foundation, the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington, and other nonprofits are also leading the way. Matching the talents of people with disabilities with the right jobs can and does increase success. To truly reach our collective goals, we must work to address the critical inequities and barriers to opportunity that cross all of humanity.

Together we must face and fight ableism, racism, homophobia, sexism, anti‑Semitism, ageism, and other prejudice that limits the success of humanity overall. Each of us on the RespectAbility Team, myself included, is on a journey to learn and better practice the principles of intersectional equity that drive inclusion and allow all of us to thrive daily in life and work. We recognize that this is hard work filled with passion and emotions and it can bring risks. But there is no greater risk than to stay quiet in the face of prejudice of any kind.

I have high standards and I know that even I do not live up to my own standards at times. But the struggle is very important to me as I believe it is to every person in this room. And hence, I, like so many of you are pushing even harder, digging even deeper into this journey to equity for all of us. We recognize that this work is ongoing and may take generations of joint efforts to accomplish.

Success for people with disabilities cannot be created for us. Again, success cannot be created for us. Success for people with disabilities must be created with us, with us. People with disabilities need to be at the front. And that is why the third pillar of our work, and you can see it on the screen, is preparing a talent pipeline of people with disabilities. You can really hear later some tremendous self advocates about their work and what you can do. The majority of our speakers today have disabilities themselves. I'm very proud so they are so amazing and that we can learn so much from people who are the vanguard. Members of our team include people with a wide variety of people with disabilities. And we know that people with disabilities can achieve extraordinarily when given the opportunity to participate in all that life has to offer, just like everyone else.

Indeed as you heard from Steve, that the majority of members of our team are people with disabilities themselves. So for example, you can't see my disability, and in fact the majority of disabilities are invisible. But I myself have significant dyslexia and ADHD, I only started to read when I was 12 years old. I was already 5‑foot ten when I was 12 years old. So I was a very tall, illiterate person at 12 years old. And I remember being bullied for being stupid and for being lazy, and I know what it means to have that be the defining characteristics of how people see you. So it's very important to us as an organization that people with disabilities are at the forefront of this movement, and that we have allies without disabilities who themselves, due to accident, aging and illness, may acquire them later, but here at the moment are here as allies.

I just want to say a little bit more about our National Fellowship Program because this is a real crowning jewel of RespectAbility. So three times a year, we have cohorts of talented young leaders whose come here because they want to be the vanguard and the future for careers in public policy, or communications or nonprofit management. We have over 140 graduates. If you're ever hiring and want a rockstar, look to us to hire from this pool of really talented people. Can the fellows that are currently in the program right now please raise your hand if you can raise your hand. Let me just say these are incredible stars. And let me also say that Ben Spangenberg, who runs the program, Where is Ben - he's outside doing name tags and welcoming people. Ben is a rockstar. If you haven't met him yet, I hope you meet him because he does a tremendous job. We're so proud of him and every member of this program.

I also want to say that we do - as Congressmen Bartlett said, we recognize that we are living in very polarizing times. And that we must also be able to reach across the divides in the future because we have a long way to go to equity and opportunity for all people. We know that it takes partners and allies and are thrilled, thrilled, thrilled to have you here with us today.

Together we can create a welcoming, respectful and successful world for everyone. So I want to thank you all for being here and turn it over to our next part of our program. [Applause]