>> Steve Bartlett: Well, we're ready to kick it off. Welcome to RespectAbility ADA30 - celebration of the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. This is our opening panel, this is going to go on all week, but we're starting off today. My name is Steve Bartlett, I'm the chair of RespectAbility's Board of Directors. I was also honored to be one of the co-authors of the Americans with Disabilities Act, along with Tony Coelho and Tom Harkin, who are on the panel with us today, and a number of others and Lex Frieden, who was sort of the power behind the scenes, and one of the drafters behind the scenes. I'm delighted to both have been involved in the disability movement all these decades, and to serve as your host for this week's online events. On behalf of RespectAbility, which is a non-profit that fights stigmas and advances opportunities so people with disabilities can fully participate in all aspects of our community, we are pleased that you have joined us. Led by diverse people with disabilities and allies, RespectAbility knows that people with disabilities and their families have the same hopes, and dreams, and aspirations as everyone else. We accomplish our mission with a three-part strategy. One: Fighting Stigmas by promoting diverse, authentic and accurate portrayals of people with disabilities. Two: Advancing Opportunities by identifying and promoting best practices in education, employment, civic engagement, and access. And three: Leadership Development to strengthen a talent pipeline of people with disabilities to offer that crucial leadership in this nation. I'm sure you'll see our strategy for positive change with amazing speakers and information during the next five days. We do know that there are thousands of people watching today from all over the world on this broadcast. Together, we can make the world a better place. I am going to start by thanking our sponsors, and I'll read the names slowly, because they're very important. Comcast NBCUniversal, Sony Pictures Entertainment, The Walt Disney Company, and Murray/Reese Foundation, and our artistic partner, The Phillips Collection, which have all helped make these events possible. We're exciting to bring this week, beginning today, amazing speakers and performers who will share innovative ideas, best practices, and moving moments for us to learn together. Fully 75 presenters will share their time and talent this week, over five events to enhance your experience with us and move progress forward. We recognize that these are very challenging times, and we hope that you're doing as well as possible. Our goal during these sessions is to bring you specific, actionable, and positive ideas and practices that will make things better. More than 55 million people in America, that's 1-in-5, had at least one disability prior to COVID-19. This includes people with physical, sensory, learning, cognitive, and other barriers to everyday living. COVID-19, unfortunately, is rapidly expanding this number, especially among those experiencing mental health conditions. We will begin with our grand opening, Zoom side chat with a group of us who worked together, along with many others, to create the Americans with Disabilities Act. And that will be followed by our first accessible art gallery tour, and then we'll focus on education and skills for a better future. So with no further ado, let's travel back in time to Zoom forward in progress. Our grand opening Zoom-side chat will be moderated by the one and only, drum roll please; Amna Nawaz, American broadcast journalist, correspondent, and substitute anchor for the PBS NewsHour. Amna will introduce her honorable panel, and we're all honorable today. One of those is me, myself, and this panel, to quote Hamilton, were in the room, or in the rose garden or under -- in the rotunda of the Capitol, where it happened. Amna, you're on, lead the way.

>> Amna Nawaz: Congressman Bartlett, thank you so much for that wonderful introduction, I'd love a drumroll every time, that's just, that never happens. [Laughter] I am so very excited to be a part of this conversation, and to help kick off this week-long celebration today, and thank you to all of you out there who are joining us from wherever you are. I'm going to keep introductions very short because quite frankly, this esteemed panel really doesn't need too much of an introduction, but indulge me if you will. We have with us, of course, the honorable Steve Bartlett, co-author of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and chairman of RespectAbility. We have the honorable Tony Coelho, also co-author of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and founder of the Coelho Center, Loyola Law school. The honorable Lex Frieden, co-founder and leader of the Independent Living Movement, and the honorable Tom Harkin, co- author of the Americans with Disabilities Act and global disability innovator. We are honored - all of us - to be in your presence and have you all together today. A quick reminder to anyone out there, if you have a question for any one of these panelists, there's a little Q&A box at the bottom of your screen. Go ahead and submit your questions there, we'll be going through them and working them into the conversation. But for now, I get the treat of leading this conversation. So gentlemen, I have often wondered this, and I would love if you would take us back to that moment, because these big moments in American History don't come around too often, and we're now more than a generation removed from this landmark civil rights act moving forward. So I want to ask each of you to kick us off with just a couple of sentences if you can take yourself back to that moment when you were in the rose garden, or in the room, or in the rotunda, where it happened, and you realized this moment was happening, this was finally moving through. What was that like for you in that moment? And Congressman Bartlett, since you kicked us off, maybe you can kick us off with some opening thoughts. Do you remember what that moment was like?

>> Steve Bartlett: That's right I do, and I was -- it should actually go to Tony and Tom as I was -- and Lex -- as I was the last to come into the room. So thank you -- thank you for that. We didn't know -- we believed we would succeed, but didn't know that we would succeed right then that day. There were a lot of barriers to this, it's a complicated piece of legislation, but it was finally time in 1990, beginning in 1988 really, when it was clear, that this legislation to remove those legal barriers to access for persons with disabilities was -- time had come. So it was a process we started and we just kept working at it until finally came the day on the south lawn of the bill signing. But until the signature pen went to paper, I think it was always one of those things that we knew was going to happen, we just didn't know when.

>> Amna Nawaz: Senator Harkin, what do you remember about that day? What stands out to you?

>> Tom Harkin: I guess what I remember most is that it had passed the senate, it was in the house, and it got stuck in a lot of different committees, and Tony knows this better than anybody, but what sticks in my mind is that in early March of 1990, we were all worried that we weren't going to get the bill. But then, ADAPT, we got a group of, I think maybe there were 15 -- that sticks in my mind -- people in wheelchairs, and they alerted the press that there was going to be this huge demonstration in front of the capitol, the biggest demonstration ever of people with disabilities. Well, the press all showed up, but there was only like 15 people there. So what we did - they fell out of their wheelchairs and crawled up the capitol steps. Today, that still remains as one of the iconic moments in this whole disability rights movement that spanned a couple of decades. And when the evening news carried that all over, and in fact it went global, I now learned that people overseas were watching it too, I think that just provided the spark, that last little thing we needed to convince some of the people in the house and others that we had to get this bill through. So it's now called the capital crawl, but to me, that was the moment that crystallized it and just focused everyone's attention on it.

>> Amna Nawaz: Congressman Coelho, what about you, is there a moment that crystallized it for you as well?

>> Tony Coelho: Well I think I want to applaud, first off, Steve Bartlett, who was appointed by Newt Gingrich to represent the Republicans in the house, and Steve did a great job with Steny Hoyer, who was organizing the Democrats. But without the two of them we would have never gotten there, because the leadership had put it in four or five committees, Steve, I can't remember for sure, but seems like five, and then all kinds of subcommittees - basically to try to slow it down, and maybe even prevent it from passing. But the strategy was to go to a subcommittee that was easy, that was totally favorable, and it was the labor subcommittee -- Major Owens from New York was the chair -- he put it out very quickly and then we kept on going. We had people like John Dingell and Jack Brooks and so forth who were very tough guys getting things through, but it took the effort of Steve and Steny to move in the right direction, make this great momentum, and once you got it going, it was pretty hard to stop it. The capital crawl helped but it was actually the strategy of Steve and Steny that made this happen, because without that strategy, if we'd moved ahead two or three committees before you got the ball rolling, we would have never gotten there. So I applaud their strategy.

>> Steve Bartlett: And Amna, with Tony I might interject. We did it in regular order, so it's not like what sometimes happens today where it would just be taken into the speaker's office and written by a group of five people. We actually -- Steny and I went to each committee, and each subcommittee, one at a time, and worked through their concerns, alarms, objections. Nobody would ever say they had objections, but the bill wasn't moving. So we worked through it one page at a time over the course of that spring, and of course, we had the White House with us, and that helped a lot. George Bush was the guy that announced it the day before his inaugural in January of 1989.

>> Tony Coelho: Actually, President Bush announced it in the campaign that year, that he was going to support an ADA, and the Democrat candidate, Michael Dukakis, announced also. So either president was going to work on the ADA, so Papa Bush was with us from the beginning, he had a child with a disability who died, and so he and Barbara were very committed to this legislation. And that was very helpful because some people in the White House, as Lex knows, some people in the white house were very opposed. But with the president's support, that opposition wasn't going to last and it didn't.

>> Amna Nawaz: Well before we move on to all the issues today and into the future, I do want to make sure we hear from Lex Frieden on this as well. If you take us back 30 years, Mr. Frieden, do you remember what that moment was like? What stands out to you on this day?

>> Lex Frieden: Well, you know, that was a beautiful hot Washington D.C. day, and I think the real significance of the day came when CNN decided to cover the signing ceremony on their international network. And on that day in 1990, July the 26th, more people were exposed to the concept of disability, freedom and independence and non-discrimination than on any other single day in history. People all over the world, watching the international news network, saw the President live talking about the shameful wall of exclusion finally come tumbling down. That to me was really a moving event.

>> Amna Nawaz: It was a remarkable day indeed, and worth taking way more time than we have today to reflect back on, but while we have all of you together, I think it's so important to dig into the issues of what work is still left to be done, especially right now where we're talking about a time, global pandemic and also a national reckoning over racial justice. Senator Harkin, I'd love to begin with you on this, because it's important to remember, even before the pandemic, there was a massive employment gap. When you look at the labor force participation rate for people with disabilities and those without, 37% for those with disabilities versus 77% for people without - what do you think - when you look at the current crisis in America today, what needs to be done to make sure that gap doesn't continue to get bigger?

>> Tom Harkin: Well you're right to point that out Amna, that there were four goals in the ADA: it's full participation, equal opportunity, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency. The first three - we've done pretty well over the last 30 years, we've made good progress. We're not totally there, but we've made progress. But on the last in terms of employment, we're about the same place we were 30 years ago, as you point out. And going forward, we need to really focus on getting jobs, not just any jobs, but the key words are competitive integrated employment -- competitive integrated employment. That means jobs for persons with disabilities in the marketplace, not just some "disability job" or some job that's off in a corner someplace, but jobs like everybody else, with the same pay, the same benefits, same retirement, same health care. That's what we really need to focus on, and we need the private sector to do a better job of setting goals. We have a summit every year, just on employment, from the Harkin Institute, and I set a goal back in 2018. I said in 10 years, we had to double the rate of employment of persons with disabilities. In other words, if you're a small business and you have one employee who is a person with a disability, set a goal of making it two. If you're a big company, you've got a thousand employees and you've got maybe 50 persons with disabilities, make it 100, but set goals. It's so important for a business to set a goal. Secondly, we need better training programs for persons with disabilities. I can't tell you how many employers I've spoken with, that said, well, we hired someone with a disability, but they couldn't get through our training program. Well the training program is one size fits all, so you need to have training programs that are adaptable to persons with disabilities. And when you do that, they find they get the best employees they've ever had, once they hire, and train, and retain persons with disabilities, so I would say going forward -- plus, I don't mean to take too much time, we need to change the support systems. Right now, a person with a disability gets a job, they just lose their medicaid support or their medicare disability, they lose a lot of that. Well, we should keep the supports there for a person with disability until their income is maybe, I suggested three times the rate of poverty, because a person with a disability has extra expenses, devices, transportation, interpreters, whatever that might be, independent living, that costs more than what an average person has to spend. Lastly, we need to make personal attendant services part of reasonable accommodations in businesses, reasonable accommodations is in the ADA, but personal attendant services for individuals with disabilities are so important for people to get a job and keep a competitive integrated employment job.

>> Amna Nawaz: Mr. Coelho, what do you think the role of congress is in all of this? I have to say it made me and probably a lot of other people out there smile to hear you and Congressman Bartlett talk about this bipartisan effort, working together, going committee by committee, person by person. It feels like a different world when you look at congress today. So what do you think the role of congress is in closing some of these gaps, and making sure that these needs are met moving forward, and do you see that happening?

>> Tony Coelho: Well, one of the problems we have today is that because of the atmosphere in the congress, it's dangerous to open up the ADA. In the last congress, there was an attempt to gut it, passed the House, did not pass the Senate, but we got to make sure that the climate is there, so that we can get something through, like Tom feels that we need to get through in regards to employment. Is that going to happen come the next Congress? I don't know. And so I for one will not be aggressively pushing something through if the climate's not there. If the climate is there to change things, there's a lot that we could do. One of the things I'm -- I support what Tom said totally, but one of the other areas that is huge for us right now during this epidemic is access to the internet, access to websites. A study done by a independent reliable group - they do it every six months, and the last one they did was February of 2020 - this year - and they determined that 98.1% of all websites are not accessible. I said 98.1 are not. And if that's the case, which I think it is, that during this pandemic - we in the disability community need the websites, need the internet to be able to do everything we need to have done. One of the good things about this - nothing really good about the pandemic - but one of the good things is that people who aren't disabled are having to use the internet, and they're really spending money doing the things that they need. We in the disability community need that same right, and we don't have it, and the Congress should address that. Laws should be passed, Supreme Court has ruled that the internet, the websites are under the ADA, but that's a Supreme Court decision, because they ruled with the appellate court that it was. But we need legislation to put that in effect, and that should be a priority in the next Congress. I'm doing some things right now to see if we can move it faster, but that's a critical issue for our community.

>> Lex Frieden: Amna, one aspect that I'd like to add to this discussion has to do with COVID, and the way it's pointed out the restrictive nature of nursing homes and other kind of clustered settings. The Supreme Court in Olmsted said that people with disabilities, according to the ADA, should be able to live in the least restrictive environment, and there are many people with disabilities and older adults who are in nursing homes today dying from COVID because they are in this very dense populated organization setting, where caregivers are not able to provide the appropriate assistance to them. Those people probably would be alive and well if they were in the community, and the reason they're not is because we don't have enough affordable accessible housing. People with disabilities are frustrated, because the only way they can get a roof over their head is to move into a nursing home. And furthermore, it's the only way that their care will be reimbursed, or covered, or assisted with them, and they must have -- we all must have a community-based long-term services and supports network that's built into the infrastructure of our communities, where when people age, or they become disabled for another reason, they can live at home. They can age in place and they can get the kind of support and services they need in their own residence, in their own homes, and not have to move into an institutional environment in order to do so.

>> Tony Coelho: Amna, let me just add to what Lex talked about.

>> Amna Nawaz: Excellent, yes please, go ahead congressman.

>> Tony Coelho: Today, 25 states ration health care to individuals with disability during this crisis. 25 rationed. That means that they put people with disability at the end of the line, and if there's a choice between somebody with a higher quality of life as opposed to somebody with a disability, the person with a higher quality of life gets the device or gets the care. Higher quality of life? We in the disability community have a quality of life that's just as high as anybody else and under the ADA, it's wrong to do that, wrong to discriminate. It's a fight that we're into right now - we're very aggressively working it - but in line with what Lex said, we have all kinds of problems with the health care situation today, and with what some of the states are doing.

>> Amna Nawaz: Well, Lex Frieden you've raised the very important point of intersectionality, right? That none of these issues exist in silos. So if I can follow up with you on that Mr. Frieden, we also can't divorce this moment from the national conversation on race that we're having. And it's important to point out there that all of the gaps that exist between people with disabilities and people without are even more acute among Black Americans with disabilities. And so I'm wondering what your advice would be or how you're viewing this moment when you talk about how the disability advocacy community can work to have more intersectionality across all of these other conversations around racial justice, and affordable housing, and access to better employment, what would you say to that?

>> Lex Frieden: Quite frankly, we would not have an ADA today if it were not for people with disabilities in communities across America banding together and working toward that objective. And one aspect that we're missing today, if we're planning to move forward into the next decade, and have freedom of choice when it comes to housing living and full participation is that community-wide support. We need to expand our network of advocates. People with disabilities need to reach out across the lines of race and gender to bring others into the movement. We need to have older adults joining the movement towards independence and freedom. And we need to have parents of people with disabilities, children of people with disabilities, and advocates like yourself, and everyone else who are watching this program today, join us in an effort to ensure that we are able to age in place and that we can live freely in the community, be full participants, have the kind of jobs that Tom Harkin is talking about and actually enjoy the full benefits of life in the United States.

>> Steve Bartlett: Well, and that's absolutely right. It takes -- you asked about congress. So the fact is that Congress will act when the American people demand it, and so far, unfortunately, we haven't gotten through the message yet to Congresss. So yes, we do need members of Congress to do oversight, looking for legislative solutions, for regulatory solutions, but we also need more grassroots than we have now. Democracy works better for people who speak up than people who don't, and with one in five Americans with a disability, that's a powerful force to talk with your congressman, to bring these issues to the attention. The health care situation, as Lex said and Tony said is a crisis in the disability community, and for everyone else COVID is a pandemic, and it's a real problem, but it's life or death for those with disabilities as the reasons that are cited.

>> Amna Nawaz: Senator Harkin, I want to bring you back into the conversation to touch on another huge topic, which is of course, education. The pandemic is having an enormous impact on the existing gaps there too, and as we move into the fall, there's all these questions as Congressman Coelho mentioned, about internet access and the lack thereof. People getting - and young Americans in particular - getting their education, are relying upon that internet access. After years of ensuring equal access and equal opportunity for students with disabilities inside our nation's schools and educational institutions, what are your concerns now about the obstacles to learning as it seems like a lot of that learning is going to be happening remotely with parents and caregivers acting as educators.

>> Tom Harkin: Well, Tony put his finger on it. We're getting software designed for educational purposes without the input from the disability community, the broad disability community, and not just physical, but intellectual and developmental disabilities, as to how that software should run. Tony's absolutely right, I mean, we're entering this new era now, especially in education, where more and more will be done online, but if it's not accessible to persons with disabilities, they're again going to be isolated and segregated out from the educational system. So again, any funds that are -- at least federally designated funds or state, and any public funds - that's used for education, should have a string attached that says only to be used if in fact the educational services are broadly available to all persons including persons with disabilities, and they would have to show that in order to get those funds. Secondly, we have to really work with software developers to bring in people with disabilities at the beginning, to ask them what needs to be done. How do we get the software developed for a math course, or a history course, or whatever it might be that would be accessible to you? The other part also is the hardware. We know how to make sure that the hardware is also accessible. There's been some great technological advances. The problem is some of that hardware is very expensive. I have suggested that for a student with a disability, who needs hardware -- let's just say a person with severe cerebral palsy, they need either one of the machines with a touch thing where you can touch the screen or they need the eye contact developed in the hardware, those are expensive. That should be part of the basic support system in our educational system for students with disabilities, to make sure that they are able to afford it, able to get their hands on this kind of hardware. Anyway, you just have to make the technology - the software and hardware, not only accessible, but affordable. [Crosstalk] Steve Bartlett: That hardware is expensive, but it's not as expensive as not providing it, because if you take someone, a student, and you don't provide education during their formative years, then they're unemployed for the rest of their lives, and so the real expense is the lifetime of support as opposed to one or two years of education using this hardware, so It all comes down to motivation, and causing the education community to make distance learning work for people with disabilities. And unfortunately, that has not occurred very well or very widespread during this last spring. It's happened in some places, but many school districts, those with disabilities are just left out.

>> Amna Nawaz: Congressman Coelho, you had a point?

>> Tony Coelho: Yeah one other thing in regards to both what Tom and Steve have said is that we need to make sure that the makers, the manufacturers, whatever, of all these things include the accommodation in the design stage of the product. Because if you do there it's cheaper, number one. Number two, it's easily accessible, and number three, you don't have to provide an accommodation that sometimes is hard to maneuver and so forth. So if you look at just - and I'm not promoting Apple - but if you look just at Apple, they include in their design stage all kinds of accommodations for those of us with disabilities, also put a convenience for those people without a disability who need some help. So the design stage - with Tom's comments - if you include the design stage instead of after thought, it will be very very helpful and productive, as Steve says, for those of us in the disability community.

>> Amna Nawaz: Congressman Coelho, can I stay with you for just a moment? Because if you step back and take kind of a 10,000 foot view, I'm wondering how you as leaders, as founding fathers in this movement are viewing this moment. There's a lot of talk about, in all of this chaos, there being opportunity, right? Opportunity to reimagine institutions, and remake them in a way that does provide more equal access and opportunity for all. Do you see it that way right now?

>> Tony Coelho: Well I do, and I do because I see the rest of society is having to deal with the things that we've dealt with all our lives, and the difficulty they have of doing things. That difficulty has been there forever for us, and so now they're understanding that and hopefully, we can then move that into things that will help out everybody, you know? When you have a curb cut, it is for individuals in a chair, but it's also for mothers and fathers with baby strollers, it's also for delivery men and women who are taking their products to the store on that block. When you have a volume control on your phone, it's not only for us, it is also for any individual who has somewhat of a hearing problem, and they want to increase the volume. The print on a phone, you can enlarge it, you can make it smaller, whatever. That's also helping for people with side impairments, but it's also a convenience for everybody else, so all of that is what's really important in my view.

>> Amna Nawaz: Lex Frieden, I'd love to bring you back in here. What's your view on this, do you see there being an opportunity out of all this chaos?

>> Lex Frieden: At the independent living research utilization program and southwest ADA center in Houston, we did a survey more than a thousand people around the United States. This issue of internet accessibility clearly is one of the remaining issues. Employment, accessible affordable housing, each one of those. And finally, access to health care, those are the real outstanding issues as far as people with disabilities are concerned, and I think we have yet to get full implementation of the ADA. We need to work together on that, and we need to go ahead and extend it to the future, so that all people are covered by the ADA, and everyone has an opportunity to be a full participant in their community.

>> Amna Nawaz: Senator Harkin?

>> Tom Harkin: I want to take this theme, and go back to the intersectionality that Lex spoke about a little bit ago. Every African-American that's ever tried to find a house, or a condo, or an apartment knows what the term redlining means. Redlining was used by local jurisdictions, state jurisdictions, and even some in the federal government to keep African-Americans, black Americans from living in certain areas. Think about this. Every house that's built, every condo that's built, every apartment building that's built that is not accessible is like redlining for a person with a disability. Now, again, all buildings -- under the ADA, all buildings built in America have to be accessible. That's buildings. We couldn't get in housing. The realtors and the developers, housing people -- we couldn't do that. But now it's time I think, because we give so many benefits to people who buy homes, like deductibility of mortgage interest, for example. Well I'm advocating that after a certain period of time, say five years, every house, every apartment building, every condo that's built in America, in order to have access to that deductibility for interest on the mortgage payments, has to be accessible. Has to be accessible. Not only will that provide better housing for people with disabilities, as such, but as we all grow older, older people know that if they have a place that's accessible, it's easier for them to also live in. So back to universal design helps everybody, but housing, and using the tax code, not opening ADA, but using the tax code to focus on better housing for individuals with disabilities.

>> Amna Nawaz: Congressman Bartlett, you have something you'd like to add?

>> Steve Bartlett: It's all connected. So I think about where we are after 30 years, we've come a long ways -- we've come a long ways baby, but we have so far to go. Using the usual the glass is half full or half empty. I can't really say the glass is half full right now after 30 years, but maybe it's a third full. So as we keep working at it and making these connections, the world improves both for people with disabilities, but for everyone else. And so as we move, we just keep advancing the ball, I think in the next session of Congress, and the next President, I think we need to make some major steps forward again.

>> Amna Nawaz: To that point I would -- sorry, Mr. Frieden, please go ahead.

>> Lex Frieden: Yeah, you've heard from real leaders, these are people who made the ADA happen. It's one thing that we're missing today. We need leadership at the national level. We can have a huge movement, and we can join together, but we need people who are willing in Washington to stand up and say, people with disabilities need to be equal, we need non-discrimination, we need to provide opportunity. We need that kind of leadership, and I just want to encourage my colleagues to vote -- vote for people like Tom Harkin, and Tony Coelho, and Steve Bartlett. Vote for people who have a real understanding of disability and people who are willing to put their careers on the line at some point in order to support us. We really have a lot to be grateful for here, but we really have a lot of challenges ahead to meet us.

>> Amna Nawaz: As we're looking -- sorry Mr. Bartlett, go ahead.

>> Steve Bartlett: But it starts with the thousand people that are on this call. It's amazing how campaigns have a way of focusing the minds on people who will get elected, candidates, because they're after something, they're after your votes. So I would urge everyone on this call and can listen, to find the local candidates in your area, call their office, find out when there's going to be a meeting, go on Zoom, and just very firmly, but politely ask the question. Where are you on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in our society? Where are you on employment? 37% of people with disabilities are employed. What would you do to increase that if I vote for you? So now is the time to get their attention, because now is the time that they're asking for your vote, so use that as an opportunity.

>> Amna Nawaz: Okay, so we've got some advice for everyone out there from both Mr. Frieden and Mr. Bartlett. Mr. Coelho and Mr. Harkin, I'm going to turn to you with a related question to pitch us forward before we get to a couple of questions I see now in the chat. There's an entire generation now born and raised under the ADA. They've only ever known life in America with the ADA in place. So I'm curious what your advice and guidance would be for this next generation of leadership within the disability advocacy community. What is it that you'd like to see them do and, how should they go about doing it? Mr. Harkin, to you first.

>> Tom Harkin: Well I would say the younger generation, the ADA generation, don't be satisfied with what you got. As Steve said, what, is the glass a third full or a half full - we got a ways to go. We talked about employment, housing, living standards, health care, technology, take it to the next level. We need this younger generation that has grown up under the ADA, and they don't want to take a back seat. They're much more aggressive than people of our generation. So take that basis that you have, and that aggressiveness, and go out and push -- we always say push the envelope. You got to start advocating - and don't, like I said, don't just say, well things are pretty good now, well they're better than they were 30 years ago, but we still have a ways to go. So my advice to younger generation, go out and be aggressive.

>> Amna Nawaz: Congressman Coelho, what about you?

>> Tony Coelho: I agree with Tom. One of the things that I'm doing, working with a lot of the younger people in our community, is that we've gone after the Democratic party. We've said look it, you're now setting up for a convention, now you have a platform committee, deciding policy, going forward for the next four years. Let's get people with disabilities on the platform committee. Let's get issues in the platform that deal with some of the problems that we're having, and the platform committee meeting is right now, which I'll get on in a moment, but basically, what we have this year for the first time, we have it looks like 12 different people with disabilities on the platform committee. Four years ago we had two, before that we had zero. And we now have, what it looks like in the platform, we're going to have over 75 different references to people with disabilities, four years ago we had 19, before that we basically had none. And the people on the Republican Side should do the same thing on the Republican Party, because that is setting the platform for that party for the next four years. We need to get things like that in there, so that those of us in the disability community can point to that, and say you were committed to do that, why isn't it being done? But all those type of things, you got to stand up to power, I believe, and you got to be willing as a person with a disability to make a difference. And don't be afraid of offending somebody. If it is something that you personally feel, it's not offensive. And so, you need to stand up to power and speak out. I've spoken out to the Pope, I've spoken out to five different presidents, and trying to get things changed. Stand up to power.

>> Steve Bartlett: Speak truth to power.

>> Amna Nawaz: Truer words were never spoken. Truth to power, exactly. That's something we can all get behind. Okay we have about five minutes left, we have a few questions in the chat, I want to see if we can get through some of them. So please do speak up, actually Congressman Bartlett, I'll put this first one to you, because you referenced telling people to go out and look for candidates who will support their views. Margerie is asking the question, is there an Emily's list, or similar list for candidates who advocate for people with disabilities?

>> Steve Bartlett: So I don't know of an Emily's list, I know that RespectAbility has put out a candidate questionnaire, and we've specifically made it in a way to try to get candidates on our side, because many of these issues are not well known by many candidates. So we will be posting that on our website, and of course, the first test is did candidates answer the questionnaire? And that's, of course, the real test. And then when people think about it, if you ask a candidate, are you in favor of including people with disabilities in the great American society? Most of them say yes, and then of course, the second question is how? So I don't know of an "Emily's list," Tony may know one, but I don't know one. But we will post the answers from candidates on our website. Tony?

>> Tony Coelho: No, there is not -- I'm not aware of any Emily's list, but you're right. AAPD has a system where candidates have to answer their questions, RespectAbility has one, and so forth. So in either those lists, you can find out what people are thinking and not thinking, and you can then go from there and press people, but even if you don't know if it's on a list or not, you have every right to question a candidate running for city council, running for the board of supervisors, running for state legislature, running for Congress, and somebody running for President, you have a right to question them as to what they're going to do, and you should. It's an obligation on you, if you are a disabled person, it's an obligation that you speak up and ask the questions on behalf of the disability community. As Steve said much earlier, that unless we speak out -- unless we speak up, there's not going to be any changes. So we have to be willing to speak up.

>> Amna Nawaz: Just a couple of minutes left, and we have a few questions coming up on this one topic, so I'll combine them into one, if you'd like to answer. It's about enforceability of the ADA standards, both Arlene and Melanie, I see, submitted questions. Melanie's question is what are your feelings on the enforcement of various ADA standards, specifically title II with city sidewalks, etcetera. It's one thing to have the guidelines, it's another for them to be enforced. Who would like to answer that?

>> Lex Frieden: I'd like to say the U.S. Attorney's offices across the United States have done a marvelous job, considering the environment socially political, and so on, and people who do have issues, who identify issues, really should file complaints with the Department of Justice, and notify the U.S. Attorney's office in their area about these violations, because they have been really really good at following up. In our state, just on the ADA anniversary, the U.S. Attorney's Office announced a number of parking lots that have had to be rebuilt, a number of office buildings that need to be modified -- and they will do that. Even changing the access to voting in our community has been championed by the U.S. Attorney's office. So let me encourage people to file complaints, make public authorities aware of violations of the ADA.

>> Tony Coelho: Remember that these U.S Attorneys work for the Justice department. They're supposed to work for you as well. But they're under the Justice department, so the attorney general, his or her leadership in regards to enforcement is critical. All civil rights laws are merely a piece of paper. It's the enforcement of those laws that counts. Doesn't do any good if there's no enforcement, and as Lex is saying, these U.S Attorneys have an ability, and a right to go ahead and enforce these laws. The justice department should be encouraging that in every state, but that's where it goes, enforcement is critical.

>> Steve Bartlett: And I would put a little softer tone on it. Most employers, most agencies, most government agencies, most private corporations want to do the right thing. They're not aware that there's a problem, or they're not aware that there's a simple, and usually an inexpensive solution, so start with a conversation with whoever is not complying, and then go to the agency for enforcement, but in most cases, most, not all, they want to do the right thing. Sometimes you have to get their attention first, as Tony alluded to.

>> Amna Nawaz: Well gentlemen, I know some of you are on tight schedules, so let me just take an opportunity to thank all of you so much for being a part of this conversation. Thanks to everyone out there for joining in, and sending us your questions as well. It's been my pleasure and my privilege to be here with you, and to help kick off this week-long of celebrations looking back on the 30th anniversary of the ADA, so my thanks to the honorable Steve Bartlett, the honorable Tony Coelho, the honorable Lex Frieden, and the honorable Tom Harkin. And with that, I'll throw it back over to you, Congressman Bartlett.

>> Steve Bartlett: Tony, Tom, so good to see you. Lex, the very first person that came into my office to point out the problems that had to be solved in the area of disability inclusion. We're fellow Texans, so we always give each other a tribute to that. Lex, it's so good to see you. Tony, Tom - good to see you.

>> Tony Coelho: Thank you.

>> Tom Harkin: Thank you.

>> Steve Bartlett: So let's move on to part two, it's entitled Looking To The Future. We've come a long ways and clearly we have a long way to go - glass 1/3 full, 2/3s empty. So thank you Amna and fellow honorables Tom Harkin, Lex Frieden, Tony Coello. And Amna, you were quite adept at keeping four politicians and public servants on point, I would say Amna, I'll invite everyone to tune in on the PBS Newshour to see you on a regular basis. So this was a meaningful reflection on the past, and where we were, and continue to be able to draw from our history, as we imagine a better future for all people with disabilities, and get that into effect. So let's pivot to a whole new cultural arts experience. I'm eager to experience our part two, which will be brought to you on the Zoom call. It's called, Celebrating Great Artists With Disabilities, and its grand opening. Today's grand opening is the first of this week's four-part virtual curated accessible gallery tour Celebrating Great Artists with Disabilities. And you'll be surprised at some of the artists that you see in here. These gallery tours are the fruit of an innovative and collaborative endeavor between RespectAbility and The Phillips Collection in Washington D.C. Zazel Chavah O'Garra will be our docent and narrator. Together, we're about to celebrate great artists with disabilities, as we reframe the lens through which we view their art.

[Art Video Plays]

>> Hon. Steve Bartlett: Thank you Zazel - that was just astounding, and thank you for what you and what Phillips has done with the art presentations. That was astounding. Thank you. So, for those of you who are with us still, we have several thousand, have joined us today on the call, from not just the United States but actually globally, so we're pleased to have all of you on the call. We're getting a lot of feedback and a lot of comments through the chat session so keep those cards and letters and comments and questions coming. I was moved by the art we just experienced, and the artists that we celebrated. I learned that some of those notable artists had disabilities themselves; as is said by one of our RespectAbility's team, "every day is a school day - we learn every day." Speaking of school days, we're now off to school: we are a nation in a state of unprecedented flux regarding our school children's trauma to return to school in the midst of this pandemic. Parenthetically, editorial I would say, I think that from the perspective of many students with disabilities this last spring did not go well - I think that we're looking for ways for the coming fall to go much better by including students with disabilities in the learning experience in a better way than we're able to do in the spring. So our next panel addresses this so timely topic of education and skills for a better future. Ready or not, America's schools are reopening in one form or another: virtually, in person or a combination of the two, and they're opening in the next month or so. What will this experience be like for our nation's students? What will this experience be like for their teachers? Wearing our disability lens, what will it be like for the more than 6 million students with disabilities, many of whom had a rough spring, as I said, with distance learning? What about their teachers with disabilities? So let's open the classroom door to let in a rising star, 13-year-old, a real star, Sophie Kim - she's an actress in the Netflix show "The Healing Powers of Dude." Dude, by the way, for those of you who are my generation, that's an expression that younger people use regularly. Kim will address how the ADA has enabled her to have an accessible education as someone who uses a power wheelchair to get around. Sophie, you have our undivided attention. Sophie Kim.

[Sophie Kim Video Plays]

>> Hon. Steve Bartlett: Wow Sophie, we're going to be cheering you on with your career - continue to fight stigmas and break down barriers and thank you for your comments and for all that you do. So now I'm going to pass the microphone to our - our virtual microphone - to our esteemed moderator for this session, Gerard Robinson. Gerard is the Vice President for Education at the Advanced Studies in Culture Foundation. Early in Robinson's career, in Gerard's career, he served as the Commissioner for Education for the state of Florida, and as Secretary of Education for the Commonwealth of Virginia, so he's sort of a bi-state expert. Gerard is bringing his expertise as a member of the RespectAbility's Board. Gerard will introduce our stellar panelists. Our Zoom classroom is all yours, Gerard. Take it away.

>> Gerard Robinson: Thank you, Steve, for the very kind introduction. Thank you also for your leadership in this field for a number of years. As Steve shared with us, we're going to start what we thought would be a traditional school year, when school teachers and superintendents plan what 2020 would look like, it's very different; we know for the last four months, we've had to ask questions of when will schools open, why, what time and how? Today, we're going to have a number of people we're going to talk to and they're going to share their expertise with us. Again, my name is Gerard Robinson, I'm a member of the Board of RespectAbility and glad to be a part of this conversation. Now think about the fact that we have 6 million students in the United States who have a disability, and majority of those students are students of color. You look at the fact that 66 percent of African-American students, 77 percent of white students, 71 percent of Hispanic students and 79 percent of Hispanic students in the class of 2018 finished. Compare that to 85 percent of their peers in the same class of 2018 who graduated, and while we've made tremendous gains thanks to the work of ADA, thanks to the great work of superintendents, school boards and teachers, we've moved that number in the right direction, but we still have room for growth. Now, let's put in perspective exactly what we're talking about today: we have to figure out what education will look like. As has been shared so far by our speakers, we have something called virtual education or distance education, and right now there's been a lot of mixed views about it. It's been mixed for those students without disabilities, but think about our disability community - the 6 million who need services, who need in-person services, who also need support that virtual education alone cannot fully provide, or if they can, not in the same way. And so as we as a nation grapple with how do we have more than 55 million students in our traditional public school system and those in the private school sectors and others moving forward, we've got six million students at minimum that we need to work with to figure out how to make this happen. And I've had a chance to see this in a few different ways - as Steve said, I've had a chance to work in leadership roles in both Florida and in Virginia, and began my career as a fifth grade school teacher in Los Angeles, and every step of my career in education from the classroom to leadership to public policy and practice, I can tell you - we have a lot of work that we need to do for students with disabilities. I saw it when I worked for DC public schools, where we had a number of our students who needed services - I'm glad to see we could service some but wish to say that we serviced all those students well, and we didn't always do so in a great way and so we moved forward. Well, now we're in 2020, we're now in a conversation where the Corona-19 or Corona-19 virus has really opened up the school conversation of what does it mean for delivery of services to students and teaching and learning. And I'm proud today to have four people who are going to speak with us today. We have Ollie Cantos, who is a civil rights attorney, and he's also the father of the first three blind triplets to become an Eagle Scout. We also have Sneha Dave, who is the founder of Health Advocacy Summit and a Program Director for the Colitis Young Adults Network. She's also the 2020 Susan Butler Award recipient. We also have Nicole Homerin, who's a special educator and co-author of RespectAbility's upcoming virtual toolkit for special education during COVID-19. And last we have Paul Luelmo, who is an assistant professor of special education at San Diego State University. As a guy who grew up in California, it's always good to see people on different sides of the coast and in the middle as part of our conversation. With that, what I will do at this point is turn it over to our first speaker, who's going to be Ollie Cantos. You're the dad of three 21-year-olds who contacted COVID-19, so this issue is real to you on a few fronts. And this story was featured in the media. Thank goodness they're home and they're well and safe. So my first question for you is what is, or what was that experience like as a parent?

>> Ollie Cantos: It was literally, Gerard, the scariest experience that I've ever gone through - I actually was at a point where two of my sons, Leo and Nick, were in the hospital at the same time and Leo, in particular, at one point was really declining where his fever was increasing and his oxygen level was decreasing - it was simply horrifying, and I literally remember being so afraid that at one point I offered my literal soul to the Lord in love and prayed to God, and said to the Lord that, gosh, if this is a test, then you're welcome to have me - just take me, just make sure he's all right. It was just petrifying. But I'm just really glad it all turned out okay and they all turned out to have gotten better and they're all well now.

>>> Gerard Robinson: Well, thank you for opening up your family to all of us, hearing that, but also as a parent, a lot of parents right now are going through some similar challenges, but I think your words of wisdom and faith are going to be helpful to all of us. So thinking back to when your sons were in the K-12 education setting, what are your thoughts about the pros and the cons of virtual learning for students with disabilities?

>> Ollie Cantos: Well, there are a number of different considerations, especially considering students have all sorts of disabilities, including those that are visible as well as those that are invisible. In our case, we're blind and the pros to having an online education is that, provided that the platforms are accessible, it can be a way for them to continue to learn from home, and it actually can be an opportunity for them to leverage the technology that is available to them - whenever things work, but the difficulty is if learning platforms are not accessible, then it can bar students who are similarly situated from being able to have the same access to the same information as others, and that poses significant problems. For other people with different disabilities, let's say learning disabilities or intellectual disabilities or psychiatric disabilities, there could be other issues where, if they're not used to functioning in a setting other than a classroom or if interaction with other students and with teachers in-person is where they thrive best, then this is really difficult as well because all of us have no choice but to remain home and, to the extent that there aren't services that are available to assist those students and those families, then that can be also a difficult situation, too. And so there are a lot of things that need to be be put into place to be of support to students and their families, and the situation varies based on whatever the disability is that the student possesses.

>> Gerard Robinson: Now, I thank you for differentiating the fact that there are multiple disabilities, we'll often use the term and think that there's one or two but there are many as you know. You've shared some wonderful information with us as Dad, as a parent and someone who had children in the K-12 setting. You're also an attorney, and so what I'd like for you to do, keeping virtual education in mind - what suggestions do you have, for parents and and other adult caregivers, on how to effectively advocate for their students rights, in regards to ADA, IDEA and 504, given what we have right now with COVID-19 and beyond?

>> Ollie Cantos: Well, Gerard, within a K-12 context it's important for families to be well aware of what their rights are, and I have already provided our organizers here with the link to the Office of Special Education Rehabilitative Services information about the various resources that have been put together, and if someone can put that in the chat that would be great. That would be of direct assistance with sharing what the rights are of students, but the other thing that's important as well is for students with disabilities themselves to be directly involved in advocating for their rights - that means also encouraging and empowering them to speak up for themselves and families supporting that, because as students grow to adulthood, it is important for them to learn how to be their best advocates. And that literally includes, even if they are elementary school age, I had my sons lead their own IEPs from the time I had them and it really has made a world of difference because they're used to advocating for themselves and so in addition to that, families themselves should advocate hard and join with advocacy organizations as well that can really help add power to the things that are being done. The other thing is the Office for Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Education is open for business and they continue to advocate for and - I mean, they continue to investigate complaints of discrimination, and so I've provided that information as well. So in looking at the different educational possibilities here, it's just important to be knowledgeable and also to surround ourselves with people who can be effective and strong and leveraging all of that for the for the benefit of the of the kids that are really directly impacted by COVID-19 within an educational setting, and making sure, in the spirit of self-determination, always to believe in them and to have them speak for themselves because, in the spirit of making sure that we as people with disabilities don't just have people speak for us, they need to also learn that because as they do and as they learn the different resources as they grow older, that actually helps them in the long run and not just now.

>> Gerard Robinson: I really love your suggestion of students with disabilities becoming advocates themselves. We have a ton of people outside of the disability community who are doing great work - one of the things that we're doing here at RespectAbility, but I'm definitely with you, we need to make sure that those most impacted by it are the ones who are also the greatest advocates. Let me thank you again for what you've shared with us and keep up the good work.

>> Ollie Cantos: Thank you, Gerard, very much.

>> Gerard Robinson: I'm now going to turn to Sneha. You represent students with a chronic illness and you just graduated from Indiana University, so let me say congratulations to you. You were also part of a graduating class that had to experience a lot of shifts in how education was delivered to you in the spring semester. Often, appropriate support for students with disabilities in higher education is left out of the conversation so we're glad to have you here. So my first question is, how did you shift to virtual learning during COVID-19 and how did it really affect your experience in higher education?

>> Sneha Dave: Yeah. Thanks for that great question, I'm so excited to be here and that 300+ of you guys can join us today. So I just graduated, as mentioned, from Indiana University, and I've lived with a chronic illness since I was six years old, so I'm kind of experienced with education, the intersection of education and disability, but I'd say, I think for everyone at this point, shifting virtually was quite a dramatic shift - I think a lot of our professors were not prepared for this virtual learning aspect: I had quite a few old professors who rarely could use Canvas or other virtual tools but were now asked to basically immediately switch online, so I think in that regard our education experience was discounted a bit because not all of us were familiar with the technology that we would be required to use. I think another huge aspect that I did not predict would happen was how accommodations would translate online or how they would not translate online: so, for example, I was in an Organic Chemistry II class this past spring semester, and my professor said that "you don't need accommodations because you're doing well in the class," so these are sorts of misconceptions that we might not think are still existent, but they very much are. And so that puts a student like myself at a very uncomfortable situation to have to explain the ADA and how I'm legally entitled to accommodations, even though I might be doing well in the class. So I think that's an example, and then another example is that, I think a lot of these professors and teachers are not necessarily as mentioned, well-trained to be able to use technology, so for example, I have stop the clock testing, because I have a chronic condition where I have to use the restroom quite frequently, and so during this, my professor told me a month in advance "remind me a week before," so I reminded her a week before, and then she said, "remind me a day before," so I reminded her a day before, and then she said, "remind me the morning of," so I reminded her the morning of again, and then I had to remind her again during the exam, which was online, so I think that's another challenge that we're facing as students with disabilities is that our professors might not be well-trained or well-equipped or well-prepared to be taking on virtual accommodations. And that's also to say that my office at Indiana University, not to call them out, are not necessarily the most prepared to help students as is, and adding this virtual component adds a whole new level of complexity and communicating with us about how we have to communicate with professors, et cetera. So I know only mentioned about self-advocacy and self-empowerment of students with disabilities, and I think that's huge, especially because we can't expect all colleges to be fitting this model of high-level inclusion and fair inclusion. So we developed, as part of Health Advocacy Summit, a "Keep High-Risk Students Safe" campaign, where we provide tools and resources for high-risk students, people to reach out directly to their universities, whether that be their health services, their disability center, their dean, to be able to - we have a template written out so that they can send to their higher-ed officials to ask about what plans are in place for the upcoming school year.

>> Gerard Robinson: Great. Well, first of all, thank you for opening your story up to all of us. I can tell you Indiana University isn't feeling left out: you're a graduate, you have shown that it could work, but you're also letting all of us know things that we can do differently, and so you provide some great experience about how you had to navigate higher-ed. Let's go to the K-12 setting. Again, student with chronic illnesses, talk to us about what it was like in the K-12 setting for navigating some of the challenges at higher-ed - just find some at the same level of challenge? K-12.

>> Sneha Dave: Yeah, that's a great question. So, as mentioned, I was diagnosed with a chronic condition when I was six years old, and so my parents are also immigrants and they never, well we haven't had a huge history of disability in our family prior to this, so it was very new for me to be diagnosed at such a young age with such a severe chronic condition. So actually throughout elementary school, I did not receive accommodations because my school was a little bit, they were a little bit scared for me, so they kind of let me do whatever I needed to do and let my mom do whatever she needed to do for for me to be as healthy as possible at that point. But it wasn't - and we had no idea that things like the 504 plan existed, things like IEPs existed, and so it wasn't until middle school where I got called into our dean's office and I was going to be told that I was going to be suspended if I missed one more day of school. So, keep in mind, this is when I was using the restroom 10 to 15 times a day, I was very very severely ill, and my school was going to suspend me before asking whether if there was something wrong or if maybe I would need some accommodations, and so that was one of the most eye-opening experiences to the fact that a lot of schools are not very upfront about accommodations. And so I think, especially during COVID-19, I think it'll be very interesting to see if more students are able to have this flexibility of learning as well. So yeah.

>> Gerard Robinson: Thank you. You're now a college graduate. You have seen this, higher-ed and K-12; what advice do you give to, parents to policymakers, really to everyone on this cal,l who's interested in trying to make sure that virtual education works or particularly for students with disabilities, what would be your recommendations to all of us?

>> Sneha Dave: Yeah. I think that one thing to really recognize right now is that a lot of us, a lot of us high-risk students, are not just focusing on education, so education is a priority for us, of course, if we are enrolled, but we also have a whole other life for many of us, so that can be doctors appointments, that can be infusions, things like surgeries or procedures that are upcoming, and for a lot of us, for example, in the spring semester, we had to postpone these treatments, we had to postpone these procedures and surgery, so it was an added stress and an added burden to be in this global pandemic but also have a chronic condition, where we need ongoing care and will need ongoing care most likely for the rest of our lives. And so, I think that's really important to note, is that there are a lot of mental health repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic and I think I would urge colleges to make mental health services more accessible, increase access to them, because I think that it's very clear right now that there's a deterioration of mental health, particularly related to COVID-19, and particularly in the high-risk population, because a lot of times we felt isolated in conversations about this pandemic. So, I think that would be one of my greatest recommendations, is to increase access to mental health services, specifically at colleges as well.

>> Gerard Robinson: Well, thank you again for sharing your story with us, your advice - in fact, I'm thinking right now and you said the number of appointments that had to be cancelled because of this - I mean there's some spillover effects in the healthcare industry that we've got to think about. Well, again, thank you for your time and I look forward to more conversations in the future. We're now going to turn it over to Paul, again, who's a professor. Paul, thank you so much for joining us from the west coast. Your academic dedication to the field of education and your work in the field dealing with a non-profit organization that you support, Southern California, is critical. We know from the data that, of the six million students with disabilities in the United States, the majority of those students are students of color, and in the graph of student graduation rates and those with without disabilities, as we noted earlier verbally, there's a big gap between those with disabilities who finish and those who do not. You're bringing an academic approach to this and it's always a great thing to hear. So first question for you is based upon your research and your experience: what are evidence-based practices that families and immigrant families with limited English skills and other challenges, what should we do to help them navigate the special needs, special education system?

>> Paul Luelmo: Thank you for the question and thank you so much for having me today. I was just reading in the news about how many parents, mostly middle-class and upper-class parents, are creating these 'pandemic pods' for the school year - these are just small groups of families that share supervision of their children and in many cases hire a tutor and a teacher to help them with the remote learning of their children, and these strategies seem promising for children, and something that any parent would, with the resources, would do. At the same time, these kind of strategies are likely to exacerbate inequities for low-income families, particularly families that their first language is not English, so I'm concerned about that, I'm concerned how we can create the equitable or the environment that is needed for low-income families that are immigrant, that might be working essential jobs out there. So in order to make special education equitable, we need schools and districts at the local, state and national level to provide the necessary tools for all families. To give this equity lens, we really need to take care of low-income and minority families specifically, by providing them with the tools and resources they need to help children in this virtual world. These tools and resources may include but are not limited to technology, to parent training o how to use this technology that they might get from the school system, to have access to the internet and in many cases, additional assistance with things like breakfast and lunch for their kids. And if many families are moving forward with these 'pandemic pods' and we see that they're effective, then this is something that we need to provide a school system to all families, not just those that have the resources. Right?

>> Gerard Robinson: You work a great deal with families who are low income, as you mentioned, you work with families who are immigrant families, also families with limited English skills - are we doing a great job as a system -- even before COVID-19, are we doing a great job to assist them and now in COVID-19, you see any difference?

>> Paul Luelmo: Unfortunately, you may know this already, but special education has issues of equity across multiple factors that may contribute to the disparities that you see in graduation rates, in disproportionately placement of students of color in special education - this is pre-COVID-19. So after this pandemic, there's a lot of unanswered questions. I am particularly concerned that some of these inequities will grow just larger due to the nature of remote learning.

>> Gerard Robinson: Yeah. So we heard about the importance of having those with disabilities advocate for themselves, we've heard about the role a department of education can play in a college: you work a lot with parents, and we know that parents are tremendous stakeholders in what we call education before school, out of school time, in other words, what can we learn, from your research and what you've seen in the field, as relates to working with parents to help them as we go through this season of Covid-19?

>> Paul Luelmo: Right. That's a good question. My experience as a special education teacher, as a professor of special education currently and doing research with immigrant families, particularly Spanish-speaking families, it's very important that schools stayed engaged with them - I heard of districts that lost contact with the families, for example, and this is not okay, this is just gonna create and exacerbate the problems and inequities that we already have. So that relationship component of the school district with the parents, with the families, it's so important, especially during this time - and I heard of a school psychologist, for example, that is reaching out more, now through this pandemic, than before the pandemic, and she's a psychologist that works a lot with low-income families, immigrant families, Spanish-speaking families - who happens to be bilingual in Spanish and English, and she's reaching out more just to touch base with the families on how they're doing. I heard about, from this same panel and other professionals, that mental health will be so critical and it is so critical for so many of the families or so many of the of the children right now. So, yeah.

>> Gerard Robinson: No, continue.

>> Paul Luelmo: I just wanted to say that it's alarming if these special education and the services that are in the IEP for many students, stop because the schools are going virtual. So I think as school districts, as systems, at the local, state and national level, need to have some sort of continuity in the IEP - the individualized education program for students with disabilities - somehow, and one thing that this pandemic is doing is to push our boundaries of creativity on how we can do that. At the same time, it doesn't mean that we need to reduce the quality of the services that children receive, but we really need to be careful, have that continuity of services of the IEP, because if we don't, this is going to be very detrimental and there's going to be a huge backlog and greater gap of students with disabilities, particularly for those students from low-income, immigrant families as I mentioned before.

>> Gerard Robinson: Well, I want to thank you for your scholarship to this subject - I'm married to a university professor so it's really important to your contribution to what we do. Thank you for focusing on low-income families, immigrant families, those immigrant in limited-English speaking, but also raising the level of parents - they're important stakeholders in this, they've got to support the teachers but we also got to find ways to support them. So thank you for your research. We're now going to turn to Nicole, who's also on the West Coast. Nicole is a special educator who's now a PhD candidate and a RespectAbility Fellow, so we're always good to highlight the great things that our Fellows are doing. Nicole, you had a chance to experience virtual learning in a couple of instances, both formerly, prior to COVID-19 and informally, now that we're in this season, and we've seen COVID-19 shut down schools. In your experience, what are the biggest challenges special education teachers face to provide adequate virtual education to our students across the board?

>> Nicole Homerin: Thank you Gerard for having me and thank you RespectAbility. I think there's so many challenges we face as special education teachers, like we've talked about, special education covers a wide variety of different disabilities, so I think that one of the highlights that we've covered today is talking about access. and if Eric could pull up the PowerPoint showing disparities in race that we have mentioned - There's a huge disparity of access to technology for students from low-income or minority families, and also with that, Wi-Fi - so you read the news about a lot of these companies giving free Wi-Fi access, but there's a caveat in that, and the caveat is when I was on a call with Senator Harris's team recently for the Special Education Legislative Summit, if some family is renting in a home that already has internet, they don't qualify for that free internet service, because the homeowner in general already has services. So I think when you think of access, you have to think about access to what types of technology but also, do they have consistent Wi-Fi to connect in that way. So, like the graph is showing, there's definitely disparities to high school graduation pre-COVID, and of course we're just gonna have to see where post-COVID goes. So that's a huge challenge just to begin with. But I think also support - I think there's a misconception that special education is often - like we talk about, it's not a place - it's related services and accommodations and modifications like Sneha and Ollie have talked about. And so we, as educators, work with the support of related service providers, with paraprofessionals, which - I really want to shout out paraprofessionals and aides, they are the backbone of education in our special education system for K-12, they really provide such significant support, oftentimes one-to-one or small group - so when you're in an in-home setting where maybe the parents have to work, especially in a low-income setting where the parents are out doing essential work or something like that, the child doesn't have the one-to-one support that they might need in a school setting. And so how do we - we can't really replicate that via virtual technology, so that's been a really big challenge. And then I also want to talk a little bit about, just in general, there's the model of pull-out, so special education teachers will pull out students, but there's also the model of push-in services or services being delivered with the help of a regular education teacher, and what we're seeing right now is that it's going to be really difficult for regular education teachers to identify students who may not have services now but may need to be identified for services as we continue through virtual education. Senator Bartlett, in the beginning Zoom- side chat talked about the importance of early learning and how that is critical to break the pipeline of disability unemployment as students age and go through school systems, so it's really going to have an impact on how our students get identified right now and if they can be assessed, and that's another huge boat of questions that is being asked right now: how do we assess students through virtual learning? How do we identify students who may not have an IEP? How do we know that their IEP is relevant and appropriate to virtual learning? So, obviously there's a myriad of different concerns, but those are huge concerns that we, as special education teachers, face right now.

>> Gerard Robinson: Exactly. So you gave a shout-out to the paraprofessionals so to give you a two-prong question: number one, what attracted you to become a special education teacher and then two, so many special education teachers and paraprofessionals have been laid off, what's your recommendations to all of us to try to address what's going to happen as a result of the loss?

>> Nicole Homerin: Sure. So for the first question, of course I started out my own career as a paraprofessional - after undergraduate I went to Perkins School for the Blind and worked under amazing mentors in the Deafblind Program to learn and support students, and that mentorship program is so essential. So going into question two, we're going to look at - the statistic given by the Council for Exceptional Children was that, we've seen more layoffs of teachers now than in the Great Recession and 50 percent of those were in special education, and so the problem being with that is that, there's gonna - first of all, there's going to be a lack of of mentorship for those new teachers entering the school system, and also, for the new teachers, we know that teacher burnout is a very real thing, and exacerbated in special education for many reasons, caseload being one of them, lack of support, and so with that, I think that lack of mentorship we're going to see with these new educators entering the school system and also with that, all of these individuals like Sneha, if you were in education at the time, who graduated this year, weren't able to get their full-time practicum teaching, because school shut down in March, and so - right? They didn't get their full spectrum of education in general, so the problem is that they're talking about all these budget cuts and teacher layoffs, but in reality, we need more educators, we need more support, we need more related services because also, in virtual learning, the students are the smaller groups and one-to-one individualization, even more so than we give in the classroom, to make sure that we're reaching them. So that's a huge concern that we face right now now with virtual learning.

>> Gerard Robinson: Great points and thank you for the practical aspects of teachers not learning or getting the practice because of closure. Nicole, thank you so much for your input, thank you for your commitment to this profession. What we're gonna do right now is we've got time for a Q&A and so we're going to open that part and I will see where the questions will come in.

>> Debbie Fink: I'm calling in here, this is Debbie Fink. I will read the questions that are in the Q&A box. The first question is, "how would you recommend streamlining the process of getting your IEP set up during this period of virtual learning?"

>> Gerard Robinson: Anyone on the panel can feel free to weigh in.

>> Sneha Dave: I think I can --

>> Nicole Homerin: [Crosstalk] Uh... go ahead, Sneha.

>> Sneha Dave: Okay. I was just gonna say something really fast; I think it's a really great question and can be applicable to accommodations even post-COVID, when that time comes, but I think that one of the things that I see that's really difficult for many students with chronic illnesses in particular, is the communication between their doctors and the accommodation offices, so I think that - and I think for a long time, doctors were overwhelmed during this pandemic as well, so a lot of people who wanted or were intending to receive accommodations may not have been able to get those in time and appropriately, so I think maybe making it easier in terms of letters and the amount of, i guess I should say bureaucracy that occurs when often having to apply for these sorts of accommodations, I think that could be really critical, and not making people have every single documentation five or six times and giving that to the disability offices, so I think making that communication a little bit easier between the family, the doctor and the accommodation office - at least for 504, things like 504 plans.

>> Gerard Robinson: Thank you. Others?

>> Ollie Cantos: Hi, Gerard. This is Ollie. Something that is also important to help streamline this is for parents to, let's say in an IEP context, for parents to be aware that, any related obligations under IDEA are still in full force. There was an effort at one point by various superintendents and school districts and so forth to ask Secretary DeVos if various provisions could be waived, but she declined that and she stood with people with disabilities to say, "nope, the things that are still required under the law still apply and are still in full force." So that's just important because just in case school districts say, "well, hey, we don't have to comply with IDEA, Section 504, ADA, etc., because right now things are just really tough," no, they need to do their level-best, they need to do a good-faith effort and they can't simply just write our community off, not that they do but if they seem to, that that's just not acceptable.

>> Gerard Robinson: Thank you.

>> Debbie Fink: Thank you. So the next question that we have is from Melanie, and it's, "I am concerned about those students at the transition age that may be missing out on vital transition services due to COVID-19. Many may not be able to gain the community skills and experiences that are needed. Is there any long-term planning going on as they move into adulthood?"

>> Gerard Robinson: Who would like to address that question?

>> Nicole Homerin: I can speak a little bit to that. As far as -- in terms of formal transition programs, I think it depends on the district and the school you're at - some really set up great transition systems that are held online - when I was working at Boston College, campus school, they would go out into the community and do different work or volunteer-related things, and now a lot of the teachers are taking videos of that and simulating it at home or helping parents set up in-home kind of role-playing systems like that, and then others, not really - I think, again, we bring up the fact of there will most likely be huge disparities in that - what our families who don't necessarily speak English or don't necessarily know all the things that transition involves because there's a lot involved in the transition age. So, it kind of - there hasn't been official news that I've read about yet that discusses transition and assessment, as of the call that I had last week with Senator Harris's team, we did discuss that and it was a big vital concern but I haven't yet heard any formal legislation on it.

>> Gerard Robinson: Thank you, Nicole.

>> Paul Luelmo: Yeah and just to add a little bit to what Nicole is saying, as I mentioned before, this COVID-19 crisis is pushing us to be creative in ways that ensures that our students continue to get the services and the transition planning that they were planning to receive before. Something that I just want to add is that the communication and the engagement that schools keep with the families and with the students, it's so critical to ensure that these transition plans and assessment plans and whatever is in the IEP - it's so important, so it's also in part of the parent but also in part of the the school district and the schools to keep the parents and the family engaged as we go through this pandemic.

>> Ollie Cantos: And this is Ollie. To build upon that, it's important for parents and advocates really to document all of the communications, if ever there's a phone call or, in addition to this email, if ever someone speaks with someone, to always send a confirmatory email, saying "it is my understanding of this," or if people are unresponsive, to ask for a response. As far as there being formal transition plans, I think that would be under the Rehabilitation Services Administration and I don't know - I can't speak for them, I'm not with them, but if there are any plans, that would be the place to go to look and the site that I gave earlier should have a direct link to be able to go there, because anything that's new and developing in response to COVID-19, everything is being placed at the link that I gave.

>> Gerard Robinson: Thank you.

>> Debbie Fink: This next question is actually so relevant to something that has been keeping some of us busy at RespectAbility, so Nicole, this question will be for you: "as a parent, I am overwhelmed. I would like to know if you have any knowledge of overall information that highlights virtual education programs or whole homeschool programs that are out there."

>> Nicole Homerin: Yeah. So RespectAbility has been working on a virtual school toolkit for students with disabilities and it's in the process and it'll be published in August, and what it covers is a variety of different sections that are constantly being updated as we learn more, so for some families, your school system really may not provide appropriate services, and for that, there are virtual, full homeschool programs that are accredited through different states, nationwide, so through the toolkit, our first section will highlight those homeschool programs, the grades that they cover, whether they're accredited and what states they're covered under, and also the accessibility, so if they're accessible for students who are deaf, students who are blind or low vision, if they're appropriate for a certain group of students with a certain disability that maybe that program really focuses on, we've been connecting with those. The second pillar has additional virtual resources because oftentimes, even if the schools try to provide a lot of resources, they may not be appropriate for each individual student, because like we've talked about, every student is not the same, every family is not the same, so that section will include accessible websites and learning programs by grade level and also if they address certain disability categories or if they're accessible via - some students use AAC or switch devices, so some websites are compatible with that, and you can use them from home. And also highlighting the cost - that's going to be huge, so that will be included as well, if they're free. The third pillar um is going to cover social, emotional and mental health: I know that we've all talked about it, Sneha highlighted the big push for you - it's always important to address mental health, but I think especially right now, we need to talk about how we're supporting our students' mental health, and oftentimes they can't tell us how they're feeling or they can't express it and it comes out in different ways, whether that's behavior challenges at home or communication challenges, so that list will cover those parts of the curriculum for K-12 and then also Sneha's organization that is under that category. Another one, the fourth pillar is live synchronous learning opportunities, so that's live lesson - a big thing that was covered in last spring that people talked about not working for their students was that teachers were not required to teach live lessons, which was really difficult for our students. Now obviously, that was put in place as an emergency system with a lot of union backing to protect special education teachers, but as we move forward, we need to think about how to best support our students: at least in Los Angeles, it's going to be required for the next school year to have live synchronous learning, but some states may not require it and so for that, we have included some links to live lessons that will be held throughout the fall and hopefully as we continue to go, we'll identify more. And then the fifth pillar that we'll have under the toolkit is virtual resource guides: those were created by other organizations, but they have great resources on a variety of different related services or different programs relating to specific disabilities - dyslexia, autism - and they'll all be organized by different organizations so that families can really search and find what works for them, and also new teachers or administrators - there's been a lot of news about how this is incredibly difficult for for teachers and administrators too, and I think we need to all just come together and realize that we're all trying to do what's best for our students, and so if we can have one place that we can all look to go to and find resources that we can pass to each other, the more collaboration the better. So look for that coming out later in August.

>> Debbie Fink: Thank you, Nicole. Thank you. So we have a question coming in live from Shelly Cohen, New York City, who is a co-founder of RespectAbility and serves on our executive committee. Shelly, the floor is yours - the Zoom floor is yours.

>> Shelly Cohen: Hi. I think this is really vitally important and really helpful those people with disabilities and their allies who are constantly fighting for helping the educational process for their students and I think this is a terrific session and you all have added immeasurably to the insight and the need for self-advocacy that is so important for all families who have a member of their family with a disability. So, I just think you're doing a terrific job. Thank you.

>> Debbie Fink: That's great. Thank you, Shelly. And now, Gerard, we turn it back to you for the wrap up, and I echo Shelly that you've all been amazing panelists and Gerard, thank you for your great job as moderator.

>> Gerard Robinson: Thank you for your great job managing questions. So, Ollie, thank you again for your work in government and civil rights and to make sure that we can do what we can on the legal side for students with disabilities. Sneha, I want to thank you again, really congratulate you for graduating and thank you for closing the gap between what it's like in college but also a story of what it's like for students with disabilities in the K-12 sector. Nicole, I want to thank you for your work in special education, for your work with paraprofessionals, but also making sure that we don't lose teachers in the conversation about students with disabilities, because they're students of someone who's a teacher, and Paul, want to thank you for your scholarship and your commitment to research, thank you again for reminding us the importance of families, particularly those low-income, those immigrant families and those with limited English. I want to thank all of you who joined us today. This is a challenging time for all of us, but through every challenge comes an idea to be creative, so let's be creative for our students, families and educators who work with students with disabilities. Thank you. Turn it over to you.

>> Hon. Steve Bartlett: We will wrap it up and set the stage for tomorrow. First of all, what an awesome panel: Gerard, thank you for your leadership both on this panel and on the RespectAbility Board but also in the whole area of education. That was awesome. And thank each of you for the panel for your leadership in the classroom and in this whole field. It's quite enlightening. Shelly, thank you for calling in to point out what an awesome panel this is - this is a terrific, a real thought-provoking, virtual classroom experience, reminding us that every day is a school day, and we'll start the school days again, in many school districts about two weeks from now. Effective and equitable education are the key criteria as the students advance skills, opportunities and promote full participation in the community. So, as we come to close with this session with RespectAbility's ADA30 celebration and remember it's a five-day celebration, so today is day one, we thank all the artists and the speakers and the educational speakers that do it. Now, I want to take a moment to thank specifically our sponsors. Slowly. These are the sponsors that provide both financial support, but also a lot of content support out in the field of destigmatizing disabilities. That is: Comcast NBCUniversal, Sony Pictures Entertainment, The Walt Disney Company and Murray/Reese Fondation, and our artistic partner that you heard from earlier, the Phillips Collection, for making the event possible. RespectAbility is a non-profit that fights stigmas and advances opportunities for and with people with disabilities, and we hope that you get even more involved in the future. You can learn more about us on RespectAbility.org. Thank you.