>> Hon. Steve Bartlett: Welcome to day five of RespectAbility's ADA30 celebration, commemorating the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. This is our fifth and last broadcast for this week, and it has been an astounding week. Today we have some real treats in store for you. For those of you of my generation you would recognize I would say -- as Ed Sullivan used to say, this is going to be a really big show! Pause for chuckle. My name is Steve Bartlett. I'm chair of RespectAbility and I'm delighted to serve as your host again today for the Zoom broadcast. RespectAbility is a non-profit organization that fights stigmas and advances opportunities for people with disabilities. We are led by diverse people with disabilities and their allies. RespectAbility knows that people with disabilities and their families have the same hopes and dreams and aspirations as everyone else. At the end of today's broadcast we're going to open it up to a full Zoom town hall, open to questions and answers on any topic, hopefully relating to disabilities. RespectAbility accomplishes our mission with a three-part strategy. One: fighting stigmas by promoting diverse authentic and accurate portrayals of people with disabilities. Second: advancing opportunities by identifying and promoting best practices in education, employment and civic engagement, and access. Three: leadership development to strengthen a talent pipeline of people with disabilities. I'm sure sure you will see our strategy for positive change with the amazing speakers and the information you're seeing during these five days and today. We're delighted that thousands of people from around the world have chosen to join us today. We're grateful to our sponsors who helped to pay for this, but also provide content and substantive leadership at RespectAbility, and those are Comcast NBCUniversal, Sony Pictures Entertainment, The Walt Disney Company, and Murray/Reese Foundation who have made today possible. We're quite pleased that so many guest speakers and you have chosen to join us. Now these are challenging times, to say the least. It is our goal to bring forward solutions and inspire action, including both your involvement and expanded coalitions within many sectors and groups. Today is the grand finale, and our theme is appropriately focused on leadership - making a difference for the future. Together, we're going to explore the future of the ADA - the next 30 years from the perspective of our leaders and our policymakers. Together, we will learn from engaged citizens through a dialogue on civic engagement, and how we each can become an integral piece of that process. Now, together, today we're going to motivate one another to take action and to lead the way to make a difference for the future of people with disabilities, whether it's in your own neighborhood and community or at the local, state, regional or national level. So let's start with some messages that some visionary leaders who will give us a picture of how each of you can make a difference in the near future. I'm going to introduce the Governor of Maryland - one of my favorite governors - Larry Hogan. He's also chairman of the National Governors Association. He has a message to share with us today take it away Larry - I mean, Governor.

>> Gov. Larry Hogan: I’m Governor Larry Hogan. On July 26, 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act was signed into law, creating opportunities for more of our citizens to gain equal access to employment, communication, transportation, and other critical services. I truly believe our state is stronger when all of our citizens are able to contribute to their communities and reap the rewards of those contributions. Our administration remains committed to doing everything we can to make sure that adults with disabilities can obtain meaningful work, and to ensure that our schools and public places are examples of inclusion in both attitude and action. Together, we are making incredible strides, but even as we celebrate this important milestone, there is still much work to be done. I look forward to working alongside you to create a more equitable future for all Marylanders. Thank you.

>> Hon. Steve Bartlett: I truly appreciate the leadership and the message conveyed by Governor Hogan. He models civic engagement. Governor Hogan is a leader who battled cancer personally, and who battles COVID-19 on behalf of his state's residents day in and day out. As a leader who understands disability firsthand, Governor Hogan shows what a committed leader can do. Now I'm going to turn to another part of the state of Maryland. I suppose our opening is the Maryland-centric day, because of these two great leaders. And this is a message from Senator Chris Van Hollen who has a message to share with us today.

>> Sen. Chris Van Hollen: Hi, I'm Chris Van Hollen, and I'm proud to represent Maryland in the United States senate, and I'm especially proud of all the good work that RespectAbility does in its mission to end stigma with respect to people with disabilities, and to open wide the doors of opportunity for people with disabilities. And especially proud that you have your home in Rockville, Maryland and thank all of you, and your fearless leader Jennifer, for all the good work you do. I'm especially pleased that we're gathered here, at least virtually, on the 30th anniversary of the passage of the historic Americans with Disabilities Act, landmark legislation to move our country in the direction of more inclusion - building a more perfect union for all. And if you look over the last 30 years, we have made significant progress in the areas of education, in expanding services to people with disabilities, and in expanding opportunities. But as we take stock of the progress we've made, we also recognize that we've got a long journey still ahead to meet the promise of full equality and full inclusion. If you look at the statistics for graduating from high school, you find that students with disabilities still are 18% below the graduation rate for others. We especially have to make progress in the area of employment. The statistics show that between 60 and 80 percent of individuals with disabilities want to work - they want a job - but that only 19% actually have jobs. And so we've got to close that gap and work urgently to do so. I've been proud to be your partner in so many of these efforts. We need to pass the Keep Our Pact Act. This is legislation to require the federal government to finally meet its financial commitments under the IDEA legislation, where the federal government promised to pay 40% of the costs and today only covers about 18%. We need to pass the Transformation to Competitive Employment Act to really make sure that individuals with disabilities are integrated fully into the competitive workforce. So let us salute the work that's been done by so many to reach this point, but also recognize that we've got to come together to finish that journey, and that there is much work still ahead. Thank you to RespectAbility for all that you've done and all that you will continue to do. Take care.

>> Hon. Steve Bartlett: Thank you Senator Van Hollen. We're so proud that Maryland is the home -- we're proud of the work that we do together with you and what you do. We're also proud that Maryland is the home to RespectAbility's headquarters as you've heard. Maryland has just been very well represented on this panel, and it is important to note, from both sides of the political aisle. This is a prime example of the power of bipartisanship in the name of progress for people with disabilities and their residents. I cannot over-emphasize the need for bipartisanship. We must work together - both sides of the aisle, all parts of the spectrum, like Governor Hogan and Senator Van Hollen demonstrate, to make progress. Now, moving from Maryland to Rhode Island, we now have an opportunity to hear from Congressman Jim Langevin.

>> Rep. Jim Langevin: Hello. I'm Congressman Jim Langevin and I proudly serve the people of Rhode Island's second congressional district. Thank you to RespectAbility and Jennifer Mizrahi for the invitation, and I'm so thrilled to be able to join you as we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The ADA ushered in a new era of equality for people with disabilities by enshrining the rights of people with disabilities to learn, live, and work in their communities. As someone who's lived with a disability since the age of 16, I've witnessed firsthand the transformation we've made into a more accessible and inclusive society. In fact, without the ADA, I probably wouldn't have the privilege of serving as a member of Congress. We've come a long way toward realizing the promise of the ADA over the last 30 years, but there is so much work more yet to be done. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, only 19.3 percent of people with disabilities were employed in 2019. That's unacceptable. We must do more to create employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Businesses across the country recognize the contributions that people with disabilities can make in the workplace. We just have to break down the remaining barriers. Transportation is an enormous barrier to employment, also for people with disabilities. And that's why I introduced the Disability Access to Transportation Act. I'm very pleased to report that several provisions of my bill were included in HR2, the Moving Forward Act, including language to create a flexible power transit pilot program based on real life needs, improve accessibility of pedestrian facilities, and make the Department of Transportation's accessibility complaint process more transparent. The Moving Forward Act passed the House last month, and I'm really hopeful that my Senate colleagues will recognize the necessity of these policies and ensuring that people with disabilities are able to pursue careers that they're passionate about. However, that's not where the fight ends. We must continue to pushing fully for accessible classrooms, voting systems technology, health care, and housing. It's only when we fully empower people with disabilities to share their talents with the world that we can stop fighting. Until that day comes, I'm proud to fight by your side. Thank you, and happy 30th anniversary.

>> Hon. Steve Bartlett: How reassuring it is to know of Congressman Langevin's steadfast commitment to support Rhode Island residents and others with disabilities. And indeed he's a national leader. Turning our attention from Rhode Island to California, I'm going to pass the mic for a keynote address by Stephen Simon, Executive Director of the Los Angeles City Department on Disability. Stephen?

>> Stephen Simon: Stephen David Simon. Bald brown African-American man with glasses, visibly over 50, seated in front of a bookcase with not only books but assorted tchotchkes throughout. Protecting and perfecting the Americans with Disabilities Act can again be a high point of bipartisanship. On the government side, we must begin by acknowledging and confronting our own complicity in ableism. There is no policy initiative nor program that should come from a city hall nor a state building or hall of Congress or the US Conference of mayors, or the national governors association for that matter, that doesn't explicitly address the needs inclusion of or impact on people with disabilities. In LA, we recognize that efforts to ensure gender parity and racial diversity in contracting or appointed commissions cannot continue to repeatedly ignore people with disabilities. And COVID showed us the need for federally funded programs addressing food insecurity for seniors to evolve into programs that better serve people with disabilities. Trying to ensure safe and secure voting, standardizing distance learning - it all needs to be inclusive of people with disabilities. Rethinking policing, wherever you are in the spectrum of how to implement such a change, I can tell you that we're taking this opportunity to review police policies, training and tactics that directly impact people with disabilities. Is your locality shifting resources to address systemic racism? In 2018 the employment rate of working age African-Americans with disabilities was 60 percent lower than the percentage of working age African-Americans without disabilities. So if you're seeking to address racial wealth disparities, people of color with disabilities must be included. We hope to see cities recognize that accessibility is the risk management opportunity of the decade. Cities could collectively save hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars that could be reinvested in community instead of the rising cost of litigation defending ADA non-compliance. And where our title II obligations end, our title III ones begin. If local governments are to be the thread that ties our community together, we must actively support small businesses who are the backbone of our communities. You don't do that by making it harder for people with disabilities to force businesses to remove barriers. You do it by helping businesses enhance accessibility in the first place, which is what we're doing here in LA. This will improve their customer experience, save businesses the cost of litigation, and help them access the 175 billion dollars of discretionary spending power that people with disabilities have. And we know the COVID pandemic and social justice protests cannot be an excuse to delay access improvements, but rather a reminder that every emergency response, every facet of recovery and any planning to better prepare us for the next event must include the voices of people with disabilities in order to address the needs of people with disabilities. Along those lines, Mayor Garcetti spoke to our commitment to re-envisioning LA's implementation of the ADA post-COVID. Here's a part of what he said.

[Video Plays]

>> Stephen Simon: To not return back to normal when normal was inadequate for too many of us. Normal is a condition we rarely aspire to in disability circles, but it's the perfect word choice here. As the rest of the world slowly recognizes that our new normal will be anything but exactly and that's a great thing. The mayor's reference to competition with other cities is the friendly effort by the mayor's offices of people with disabilities and departments on disability in more than a dozen cities to share best practices to improve and expand accessibility nationwide. And we know that our vision for the future of access and belonging in Los Angeles is only as meaningful as our citizens' participation in that future. So today I'm proud to announce a landmark guide that we're releasing in partnership with RespectAbility, Unite LA, and Fiesta Educativa. The toolkit is aptly entitled "finding a job as a person with a disability in Los Angeles." It offers pathways forward and advice for Angelinos in many different stages of life who're trying to find, advance in, or maintain employment. It'ss another tool to build on the partnership we have with our city and county workforce development departments and the state department of rehabilitation. In closing, I note that for all the tools and trainings we can provide, for all the organizing and activism of our communities, it is city councils, county supervisors, state legislatures, and congress members who have the power to reset and reframe the playing field. Don't enact legislation of any type that doesn't contemplate its impact on people with disabilities. Don't inaugurate a project or build a new building or bridge that isn't accessible. No COVID testing program, no homeless shelter, nothing new that isn't accessible. Period. It's been the law for 30 years. Let's change the culture within our own governments and finally make it a widespread reality. I remind us that nothing is sustainable if it's not accessible, and as I've said at conferences from Atlanta to Jerusalem over the past year, you can't have a smart city unless it's equitable and inclusive, and by definition it's neither equitable nor inclusive unless it's accessible. We're 30 years in. May this be the decade of civic engagement that changes the face of disability and accessibility for generations to come. Thank you all for joining us today.

>> Debbie Fink: Our first panel today addresses how can you engage with your government. As leaders with disabilities and allies, we each have a role to play in engaging with civil society to bring about the vision of the future that we want. I'm honored to introduce three government leaders who are also people with disabilities. They will each speak to you on two topics. Take it away, Steve.

>> Hon. Steve Bartlett: First, how they came to serve the city -- to serve in the way that they do. And second, how they work with engaged citizens every day to help build the best possible future. So we hope that you'll hear their stories and see that, whether within government or as a partner to government, there's a place to you for you to be an integral part of the process. I now turn it over to RespectAbility's own California director, Matan Koch. Matan is a person with a disability, a graduate of Harvard law school, Yale undergrad, and someone who has spent a lifetime both inside government and engaging from the outside. He is a true champion. He will introduce our esteemed panel. Matan, lead the way!

>> Matan Koch: Thank you Chairman Bartlett. In 20 years of advocating for this community inside and outside of government, I've always been in awe of the committed civil servants who work with us - the public - to create the future that we all want to see. It gives me great pleasure to very briefly introduce three of the finest of those individuals. I'm going to briefly introduce because they're going to give a more full introduction in this part of their first panel. But first, can I ask the panelists for the first panel to turn on your video and be ready to unmute your audio? All right, fantastic. So we have on our panel Jaime Pacheco-Orozco, who is the deputy director of the Los Angeles department [on] disability. We have Andrea Jennings, actress, model, public speaker, a commissioner of the Pasadena disability commission and a founder of Shifting Creative Paradigms entertainment and productions, leveling the playing field. And Anastasia Somoza, disability liaison to the speaker of the New York City council. So thank you all for joining us today. I'm not going to speak at great length right now because people came to hear you, not to hear me. And so I think, first, you are each going to share with us a little bit about how as a person with a disability you came to public service and you came to do the work that you do. Jaime, might we start with you on that?

>> Jaime Pacheco-Orozco: Jaime Pacheco-Orozco with the department of disability. As Matan said, I am the assistant executive director of the department. I'm a 58 year old male heterosexual chicano with both hidden and visible disabilities. I stutter and frequently speak much too quickly, an unfortunate combination particularly in these types of convenings. So I ask you to bear with me. I am wearing a charcoal gray suit with a white shirt and a grey tie that has a pattern of diamonds. I wear glasses and am sporting a COVID mustache, and have a receding salt and pepper hairline. I'm sitting in my office in front of a blank cream-colored wall. I'm pleased to be a part of this gathering and discussion not only as a representative of the best department of the city of Los Angeles, but also a person with disabilities and as a father of two older teenage sons with hidden disabilities. As part of my response to your question, I'd like to take the opportunity to acknowledge a few folks who have guided me through this process who shaped the way I saw myself as being an individual with disabilities -- with multiple disabilities, and encouraged me along the way to stay focused on the endgame, particularly when confronted with challenging individuals and institutions. First and foremost are my mother and father, Madia and Jesus Pacheco. My mother would always remind me, "los milagros si existen" - miracles do exist. And my father would say "nada es imposible" - nothing is impossible. I will come back to them later on. Two other folks I'd like to acknowledge are Sue Qugley and Lisa Jordan, both of whom I walked alongside in the halls of DC and Sacramento as we advocated for the rights of people with disabilities to be full participants in the nation's workforce development system. Lastly, three other individuals who helped me understand the obligation that I have to speak up for marginalized communities: Don Nakanishi, who interviewed me for college 41 years ago. Robin Williams, who served as an academic mentor both in my undergraduate and graduate school. And A. Bartlett Giamatti, who while serving as president of Yale University would refer to himself as simply a professor of English. My first recollection of the power of individual advocacy goes back to when I was six years old. I was born with a congenital hip disorder and I spent a good amount of my time in and out of the hospital. And in my first grade, I was discharged from the hospital wearing leg braces. I walked to school, which was about a mile and a half away from the housing development where I lived. As I walked through the front gate, I was stopped by the schoolyard supervisor. The principal showed up and told me I wasn't allowed to attend school. I walked back home and my father asked me why I wasn't in school. I told him what had happened and he assumed I was embarrassed to be at school with my braces. He took me back and the principal told me it wasn't safe for me to be there - that there were stairs, that I could get hurt being on campus. My father looked surprised because we lived in the second story of a project. The principal didn't care. He said I could go to the special school for students like me, that I could take the yellow bus. My father simply said no, "he needs to be here with his brothers" and he refused to leave until I was allowed in. We came back each and every day to school for the next 10 days, and waited outside the school for the entire school day and each and every night, my mom and I would pray that the school principal would find it in his heart to change his resistance. I remember being embarrassed and begging my father to stop, to just let me go to the other school. He refused, and said I had every right to be there with my older brothers. The principal finally relented and allowed me to attend with the condition that we agree not to hold the district liable for any issues that might arise. Many years later I found myself in a comparable situation when my older son started school, and our district told us that they could not accommodate him on campus. And then subsequently, my wife and I had to continue the fight to ensure that our youngest son has the necessary accommodations in place, that he has a free and appropriate public education. In that process we have learned that our efforts have had a broader impact beyond our own children. I have spent the past 20 years working to ensure that people with disabilities are afforded the same opportunities and are held to the same expectations as those without disabilities. Fortunately, I've worked alongside with incredibly intelligent and progressive individuals, who have stressed the importance of listening to our constituents. As we say in the disability community, "nothing about us without us." That is why, as my mentors told me many times, I believe we each have an obligation to advocate for others particularly if we're able to be a voice for them. And that really is how I came to be involved in public service. Thank you.

>> Matan Koch: Thank you Jaime. And now Andrea, I would pose the same question to you - how your personal disability journey brought you into this realm of public service.

>> Andrea Jennings: Well first of all, I just want to say thank you so much for having me here, it's an honor. Happy birthday ADA - happy 30th birthday ADA. Such a pleasure to be here. My personal journey - I was not born with a disability. I acquired a disability. First of all, let me back up, let me give my description. I am a black woman, brown complexion, medium length hair. I'm wearing a royal blue blouse. I'm heterosexual. And again I'm just proud to be here. I was not born with a disability. I acquired a disability from a major car accident. And the residual effects left me with limitations. And when I tried to go back to work and go back into the community, I noticed that there were so many barriers. This was back in the year 2000. And I was so surprised. I knew that there was civil rights for people with disabilities, so I did not realize that they weren't -- the rights were not being adhered to. And I grew up in a household - my mom actually worked for a top law firm, so I grew up in a household where we were told to use our voice. And I was never told to hold back. And my mother was very solution oriented. So when there was a problem she would teach me how to resolve that and stand up for myself, which is so important. She was a major influence for me. And so when I became disabled, I was shocked that these things weren't in place. I formed an organization: Shifting Creative Paradigms. At that point it was more to create leadership roles for people with disabilities. And when we would have our meetings I noticed that the attendees would say "let's meet," and I would suggest restaurants and they would say "well, we can't go to these restaurants because it's not accessible." Now this was back in the year 2000 and I was shocked again. And so they were used to not having their voices heard, and that hurt me. And that's when I decided I've got to do something about this. I think for so long no one listened to them that they had just lost a desire to continue to speak. Me being a newly disabled, newly injured person, I was like, no, we need to do something. So I called those restaurants and I said hey we've got seven wheelchairs coming. You need to pull those chairs out and find a table that you can seat us properly and treat us with dignity. And I was nice about it but I had to be firm. And eventually I started to attend meetings in my community and I started to speak up and encourage people and encourage my disabled friends. And it was something that I realized - I wasn't just doing it for myself but I was doing for others and I feel like a lot of times, even the intersectionality of my identity, being that I'm a black woman with a disability, I feel that sometimes for so long that we're told - because I belong to so many underrepresented groups - that our voice doesn't matter. So one of the things I do as a leader is to tell people that your voice does matter. Use your voice. Your voice is your power. And so eventually after going to different meetings, I met with different leaders and they showed me how to speak up. I even met actor Danny Woodburn at an event and he spoke with me. Just to tell you how important it is to use your influence and your platform and just speaking to people and what that can do to you. With my mom speaking to me, how that encouraged me as a child. With Danny Woodburn and other civic leaders encouraging me. But Danny Woodburn told me to speak boldly when I advocate, and that meant a lot to me, because many times people don't want to tell women to speak up. And so he encouraged me. So that is how important it is. Representation matters. When someone sees someone that looks like them in a leadership role, that speaks volumes and people with disabilities make over one-fourth of the world's population. We are opinion leaders and we have buying power, and people need to pay attention to us and add us in that conversation that -- so often we're left out with diversity conversations. Disability is a part of diversity. And so that is how -- that was my path to becoming a civic leader, and I encourage people that want to get involved to remember that your voice matters.

>> Matan Koch: Thank you so much for that Andrea, and in a moment we're going to pose the same question to Anastasia, but I want to remind you that these panelists will be answering questions at the end of the panel. So please put your questions for them in the Q&A box. They want to equip you to engage in your own civic leadership, but can only do that if you ask your questions. Anastasia, if you could tell us a little bit about your path to coming to public service.

>> Anastasia Somoza: Thank you Matan, and for my fellow panelists and to Jennifer Mizrahi and to RespectAbility for having me. It's an honor and pleasure to be here. My name is Anastasia Somoza, and before I start telling you my personal story, I'll describe my background a little bit, or where I am and what I look like. I have a light white skin complexion, medium dark brown hair. I'm wearing a white top with gold buttons on the top of the shoulders. And I'm sitting in my living room, in a room with red walls with a couch behind me and a table that has some magazines and flowers on top of it. So to begin my personal story. As I've often said, I didn't choose advocacy. Advocacy chose me. And the reason I say that is because I became an advocate at a very young age because of my lived experience. I recognized when I was very very little, partially because I have both a disabled identical twin sister. So two of us have disabilities and two of my siblings do not have disabilities. And thanks to my parents and my mother who was already developing herself as an advocate in New York state and nationally when we were young, she began to involve us in developing our own experiences and our own voices. And when I say "our," I'm speaking about myself and my twin sister. We both have cerebral palsy. And my sister Alba is also non-verbal, so she uses assistive technology to speak. And it was even harder back in the early 90s to convince people to unlock her potential to live and learn happily and productively in the community. The first big opportunity I had to realize the power of my own voice was when I had the honor of speaking with President Clinton as a part of a children's town hall meeting back in February of 1993, where he invited a diverse group of kids to talk to him about any issue that they cared about. And at the time, my twin and I were watching our mother and our family advocate for our right to go to school in an integrated -- like one of the previous panelists said, gain access to free appropriate public education like the individuals with disabilities education act requires. And for some reason I was integrated right away, I was plopped in a mainstream classroom and nobody questioned that. But that wasn't the case for my twin sister Alba, and I came upon an opportunity to speak with President Clinton, and I did. I asked him to help us to mainstream my twin sister. And the next September, she became the first severely disabled youngster to be fully integrated in the New York City public school system. And that was, as I mentioned earlier, the first big moment and realization, at only nine years old, that even I had the power to change something, if I saw that something in the system needed to be changed. And I considered myself to be very lucky because I was raised by parents and a family that never gave me a reason to question that I was worthy and capable of achieving the same things as my non-disabled siblings. But the reason why I grew to recognize the power of public service and eventually ended up becoming -- continuing to become my own advocate, independent to my mother and what I had learned from her, is because I realized that that's how you make change. You not only follow people but the more of us, the more people that look like me that get to serve in government and hopefully in the future run for public office, that is how we're really going to see the greater degree of social change that we really need to see. The ADA has changed a lot, but we have a long way to go in terms of moving society at large beyond meeting the minimum requirements and really integrating it into the way that everybody lives their life. And I think that's going to take not only disabled individuals like us but society at large. And being a part of the political process just was my way of developing my voice and not only succeeding on a personal level but also helping others in my community gain access to the same opportunities. And that's why I'm so proud to serve in the capacity that I do.

>> Matan Koch: Thank you so much for that, Anastasia. So you've now heard each panelist speak of how they came to public service. But part of our real goal today is to help you, the public, understand how you can be involved with your government. And so now I'll ask these panelists if they would speak to an experience, an anecdote, a moment, an explanation of where interacting with the public has been particularly helpful to their advocacy. Andrea, could you perhaps lead us off on that one? We'll do about four minutes each, if that's all right.

>> Andrea Jennings: Sure. Thank you again. I have some good memories this past, prior to COVID when we were able to go out. My commission -- we did a lot of tabling events and I volunteered to be on a few of them. It was so exciting to see the community and engage with the community. And it wasn't in an intrusive way. When you do tabling events, people come to you, but we have the signage - and it's really big - that we are the accessibility and disability commission. And so it was great to see the community come to the table and ask questions and feel, again, that representation, when they see that someone looks like them. And one of the things that makes me feel proud to to be a civic leader in that capacity is that I can speak with the community. Although my role is more advisory, it's also so important because I'm more connected to the community. I recall children coming up to the table and asking questions and I recall people with disabilities walking by. They're at this event but they didn't realize that "oh my god, I can relate to this person," and we have conversations. Another time that I remember is just when I was being sworn in for my position, I had invited two ten-year-olds to witness the event, because it's not often that you see a black disabled woman be sworn into any office. And so I wanted that to, like my mom did influence me, and I spoke with them and I talked to them about the hierarchies. And we sometimes don't realize that even though they're not of voting age, what we instill in them now is so important. And they understood. And so in 10 more years when ADA is 40, these 10 year olds will be 20, so they'll be able to vote. So those are some great memories that I have.

>> Matan Koch: Thank you so much Andrea. Anastasia, same question: just an anecdotal moment that really shows the power of the public interacting with you.

>> Anastasia Somoza: For me, I have many of those. But an ongoing one, before I served with the speaker, a lot of my early work in public service revolved in participating in campaigns. And that gave me a lot of confidence. And when you're first starting to work on campaigns, I think most young people who have done that will have had experiences where they have to sit at a front desk and take calls, or be -- for me, I live in New York City, so I would often have to go out into the neighborhood and stand on the sidewalk with flyers and talk to people about why I was supporting a candidate, and get comfortable with putting myself out there, and recognizing that some people were gonna see that as a positive thing and others were maybe gonna state an opinion that was different from mine, and learning how to be brave enough to shape my own opinions, and stand by them and defend them, and get into sometimes difficult conversations with people who disagree with you, again, is just another way that I strengthened my skills, learned to believe in myself and learned to also hone the ability to listen, and understand how important it is to not only have a strong voice, but also recognize that as a leader and as somebody who does public service in any capacity, listening is a essential and vital part of that. Letting everyone tell their stories and working really hard to represent people from all walks of life and lived experiences.

>> Matan Koch: Thank you so much for that. Jaime, same question, and because I also want to make sure we have some time for these great questions coming in the Q&A box, give us your personal take on this one as well.

>> Jaime Pacheco-Orozco: Thank you Matan. I'm going to make it very brief and it may get me into some trouble here, so bear with me if they cut me off at some point. I think back to the the power of advocacy, particularly of parents. Part of the COVID situation - we actually had a group of mothers come to us. They were parents of children with disabilities who relied on the LAUSD buses to transport their kids to and from school - home to school. And their IEPs were clearly specific that it was door-to-door transportation made available to them. Now at some time during the year, our own city department of transportation posted signs saying that there was no stopping allowed during these specific hours. So what all the USD bus drivers decided to do was to tell the parents we're not picking up your children in front of your houses, for fear of getting a ticket. And the children were told that, and the parents, that they had to go across this major thoroughfare, around the block to this other spot that was convenient for the drivers to pick them up. Now, this was during the winter season so there was rain going on, and the parents had gone to the school district they tried to work with -- the city simply wasn't coming to a successful solution. They came to us, and I remember sitting with the parents and with Stephen and one of our staff members, and trying to understand the situation, really boggled that the school district would say that they couldn't stop to pick up children, that they could ignore the existing IEP and their own department of transportation might ticket a school bus for picking up a student. Now, we made a commitment to resolve and address this issue. Unfortunately for us, the pandemic started. But here was a case where you had immigrant parents who knew that they had a legal right to have their IEP in place, but simply ran up against obstacles and bureaucrats. And I'm a bureaucrat myself, but there's a positive and a negative to being a bureaucrat. In this particular case, it was troubling that we couldn't get these two institutions to do what was right, what made common sense. But those are the kinds of things where I think you can become involved and where we as a city entity need to hear from you. We did not know that this is a problem. And it wasn't just this particular set of parents. This was probably occurring city-wide, district-wide, and we weren't aware of it.

>> Matan Koch: Great, thank you Jaime, and glad that you were made aware of it by folks raising their voices, as we're asking everyone to do. I'm going to synthesize now a couple of questions that have come into the question box that -- essentially what they mean, what they say are: assuming that one doesn't want to litigate or take an adversarial approach, but wants to reach out to one's government to address ADA rights that are not being addressed, what are some recommendations you might make to someone who wants to engage on an issue, short of the legal process. Who would like to start? Andrea, it looks like you might have an answer for me. I don't have all the answers but I can definitely give you my opinion. I think what they should do is - first of all, the city has a website, get familiar. Citizens should get familiar with their city's website and see if there's -- there will be phone numbers for them to contact, email. Try to find out if there's a commission chair that they can reach out to. And so that's what I would do to reach out to them in that way.

>> Jaime Pacheco-Orozco: Matan, can I step in real quick?

>> Matan Koch: Thank you Andrea, and Jaime, yes.

>> Jaime Pacheco-Orozco: Let's turn the question around a little differently. I want to go back to something that Stephen Simon said earlier. We as public entities have an obligation, and that obligation is to serve our constituencies. Oftentimes the onus is placed upon the constituency to learn to self-advocate. What I think we need to be able to do is to work within our own systems to teach our folks to be receptive to listen to others. It is unfortunate that the first response you'll get - and we'll get it here internally as well - is no. And it's because of some bureaucratic rule that someone is following, but there isn't any time taken -- We talk about inclusive communication. It's a two-way street. We simply can't be the ones promulgating information and saying that we've complied. We have to take a different tact. I think it's incumbent upon public entities to make a concerted effort to educate their staff on how to listen and respond to the needs of people with disabilities.

>> Matan Koch: Thank you Jaime and thank you Andrea. Anastasia, do you have anything to add before we move to another question?

>> Anastasia Somoza: Yeah, briefly. I definitely agree with Jaime. You introduced me through my role for the city as liaison and the way that I describe what I do mostly the crux of it is working really hard to connect disabled New Yorkers to what the city council is doing locally, and to educate all New Yorkers, but especially those with disabilities like myself about the different ways that they can engage. And locally that often looks like testifying at hearings, like has already been mentioned, getting to know, rolling or walking up to or taking a car to your local representative's district offices in your neighborhood and learning about what the elected officials stand for. There are so many ways outside of litigation that citizens can educate themselves about their own rights, and about ways that they can get involved in impacting the decisions that are made in the communities in which they live. And that is essentially the biggest part of my role at the New York City council is bringing people with disabilities to the table so they feel like they have a louder voice in the work that is being done on any number of issues. What I think we all need to understand is disability cuts across every issue that we live and experience and deal with, not only just as human beings but as public servants. So whether we're dealing with transportation, education, healthcare, workforce development, increasing inclusion, diversity, opportunities for equality - all of those things have to involve disability. No matter what the issue, our voices need to be heard.

>> Matan Koch: Thank you so much. So since we've just received what we'll call our three-minute warning, I want to synthesize again a couple of questions and then literally ask each of you to spend 45 seconds to a minute on this question if you would, which is: if you had to encapsulate quickly your dream for how the populace with disabilities would engage with their government in the years to come, how would you describe that in one minute? Who would like to go first?

>> Anastasia Somoza: I'll go first. I mean, I'd like to see many more people with disabilities be able to vote independently and effectively so increasing access to voting which has to do a lot with structural accessibility and and other related issues. And also seeing more people like us run for office!

>> Matan Koch: Thank you! So two important ways to get involved: vote and run for office. Andrea?

>> Andrea Jennings: Just to go back and echo what Jaime was saying, I 100 percent agree it's a two-way street. And I would -- speaking to that point, I would love to say that I would love to see in the future people being engaged and going out and reaching out to the disability community -- the leaders not forgetting that we are opinion leaders and we do matter. We do make up a fourth of the world's population, and the US population as well. I think moving forward, especially with COVID, I think we're going to have to use digital ways of communication, that's the way of the future, but to keep in mind that not everyone has access to computers and things of that nature. So to kind of find out, especially in those underrepresented groups and those underserved groups, what those needs are so that they can participate, because not everyone can participate and not everyone has access to communicate.

>> Matan Koch: Thank you. So essentially finding ways to bring people together, promote that dialogue, different mediums for the future, or media as the word may be. Jaime, bringing us in with the last one minute.

>> Jaime Pacheco-Orozco: Bear with me as I reveal my age once again. One of the most powerful books that I remember reading was the autobiography of Malcolm X. And I remember reading this as a young man and thinking, "wow this is powerful that this gentleman says the most inspirational moment for him was getting off a plane in africa and realizing that black men could be just about anything they wanted to be." And that really stayed with me. And so in response to your question, Matan, I really think it's critically important not so much for people with disabilities to engage the public entities but really about public entities making a concerted effort to ensure that their leadership, that their departments, are filled with people with disabilities. So it becomes the norm within the department. It should not be the department of disability that has the employees with disabilities, it should be every single department. Every single department should have a mandate that they fill. The feds have this mandate when it comes to federal contractors. Municipalities don't have that when it comes to their own private -- to their own contractors. It should be the case that people with disabilities are in positions of leadership, people with disabilities are part of the process, the planning process, part of the implementation process. People with disabilities should be the norm. As much as we adverse to say the norm, that is what they should be.

>> Matan Koch: Thank you so much Jaime. I want to thank this whole panel. And the theme that you've heard over and over again is the notion that they want you to engage. Thank you.

>> Hon. Steve Bartlett: Remarkable, Matan. We thank you for sharing this meeting, and the remarkable panelists - the astounding panelists. What a great set of of information and inspiration that you provide. Thank you. We can all each play a pivotal role in paving progress. I would comment as an aside the hardest step to take is the first step, the first phone call. The first showing up at the first meeting. The first question to a public official or a government official. After you do it once, you find how much easier it is to do it the second time and the third time and then it becomes a lifetime habit. So keep up the good work panelists and all of you. I'm now going to invite everyone on the Zoom call to join me as we appreciate our grand finale virtual curated accessible gallery tour. This four part series was created with the Phillips Collection in Washington. It's creatives team has entitled the grand finale: celebrating great artists with disabilities. On to intermission with the Phillips gallery.

[VIDEO]

>> Matan Koch: Thank you Zazel. May we indeed all experience that ode to joy freedom and peace between all people. And thank you for that moving opportunity to view these great artists and their art through the lens of disability. In a few minutes we're going to hear about different ways that we can be agents of progress, ways that people have been agents of progress. But before we do that we're going to hear from a few disabled celebrities about what progress looks like for them.

[VIDEO]

>> Matan Koch: I don't know about you but I'm so inspired by these visions of progress and the idea that we can make it together. There are so many ways that we can be engaged in our specific society and make changes. Perhaps one of the most important is voting, but there are so many different types of which to choose. We're now going to hear a short message from Kayla Cromer, a neurodiverse self-advocate and star of Freeform's "Everything's Gonna be Okay."

[VIDEO]

>> Matan Koch: What an important message that we should believe in ourselves. And this next panel is going to talk about some other ways, other than engaging directly with government, that we ourselves can stand up and make a difference. I am so honored to introduce the three panelists of our second panel. Gloria Medina, who is a former RespectAbility Fellow and a trans activist. Ila Eckhoff, who is a member of RespectAbility's board and a professional at Blackrock. And also Ariella Barker, also former RespectAbility Fellow and an attorney for the city of New York. So each of you is coming on to talk about a different way that you have been -- that you are engaging activists. So Ila, I thought I would first reach out to you and ask you to share with us the activism that you have engaged in, both the electoral work that you've done, and also your work with our women's leadership program.

>> Ila Eckhoff: Thanks Matan, it's a pleasure to be here today. My name is Ila Eckhoff. I am a managing director at Blackrock and I'm also a founding member of Blackrock's ability network. I also happen to have cerebral palsy from the hips down and I joined RespectAbility's board about a year and a half ago. I had the opportunity in January to go with some other folks from RespectAbility to Iowa. This is not something I'd ever done before, and Iowa in January really wasn't on the top of my hit list, considering the weather and ice and snow, but we did it anyway. We put together a questionnaire on a variety of disability issues that we presented to all of the candidates -- all of the Democratic candidates that we had an opportunity to meet through attending their events and then speaking to them and asking questions in a public forum, as well as going to the offices for the Republican side of the equation, bringing and speaking to staffers there, walking them through our questionnaire and asking them to complete -- present their views and give the information back to us. We published all of those questionnaires on RespectAbility's website so that we could provide information across the political spectrum as we approach the election in November. It was a tremendous experience. There are photographs, there's a tremendous amount of information that you can read. We were able to meet staffers and it was an opportunity for me to do something that I had never done before and really get to hear our voices presented by us. I think most of you have seen Ollie Cantos speak - and it's "nothing about us without us," right? If we want the the world to change around how people see disability, we make up 20 percent of the world's population. Imagine what we could do if we harnessed both our buying power and our voting power to make a difference. We could change the entire political spectrum. There's a lot of issues around that structurally to ensure everybody has access and has the ability to vote. But it's in arenas like this and organizations like RespectAbility where we can reach other individuals and get our voices heard. Another thing that we've done this year that I was fortunate enough to participate in is we created a women's speakers bureau. We did that in New York with roughly a dozen women. Zazel, who you just heard do the voiceover for all of the Phillips exhibits that have been here, is one of those people that's graduated from that program. And it's really been a very rewarding experience for me, and just reinforces what I learned as a child. Luckily I had a father who said, "congratulations, you have a disability. You need to accept it. You may have to be better, smarter, faster at any given point to be looked at as an equal but you're going to have to learn to stand up for yourself to be successful." One other interesting point. I read -- John Lewis published an essay over the weekend in the New York Times, and in that article he says stand up, speak up, and speak out. And he refers to that as good trouble. What I love about what we're doing here today, what we've been able to do all week long, what individuals like Jennifer Mizrahi and Steve Bartlett have been able to do, both through legislation and connectivity and collaboration, is really make a difference, and allow for our voices to be heard. So really thank you guys today for letting me be here.

>> Matan Koch: Thank you so much Ila for your leadership in so many ways, as we hear the importance of speaking your voice out and also of engaging with the campaigns, I also wanted to bring forward something that Ila shared and pressed that I think is so important - that she didn't have special preparation or training to go engage with the campaigns in Iowa. She was a concerned citizen that cared about the issues and was able to make a difference. And I believe that that is such an important perspective that she shared with us and pressed that I just wanted to make sure it was elevated as well. Ariella, perhaps you could tell us a little bit about your role in the multi-faceted SNAP campaign where there was just this amazing effort to make it so that SNAP benefits, those that were formerly known as food stamps, were available digitally - online, so that folks with disabilities could get the food that they need. Can you tell us a little bit about that engagement and how you did that?

>> Ariella Barker: Sure Matan, and thanks again for having me. It's a real honor to be on this panel celebrating 30 years of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The same year that that law went into effect was the same year that I lost the ability to walk, and so that law means everything to me and to the disability community in general. The SNAP advocacy campaign that RespectAbility began once the COVID-19 pandemic hit happened starting around in April and May. At the time I had the opportunity to study at the Harvard Kennedy school, and so I was doing distance learning and actually studying and preparing and then taking my finals. And when those finals were over, initially my plan was to go travel, to have some fun in those two weeks before my graduation, but it was the pandemic. So I realized I have two weeks and I need to use it to help my community. I had previously published an article at the Boston Globe on some issues related to the pandemic and saw how quickly it had effect. And I wanted to help RespectAbility with their SNAP campaign as well. So as someone with a disability who is high risk and has to quarantine far more than than those who are non-disabled and not high risk, I encountered the issue that so many in the community did, which was we couldn't access food. We couldn't go to the grocery store, we had to order our groceries online and have them delivered. And the first time that I went to do this, I just expected, like any other time that you order groceries online, that you get that delivery fairly early. But in fact, it was - because of the pandemic and the high demand - it was going to be two weeks. And I was out of groceries. And what do I do? So luckily I had a community that could go for me. But a lot of people with disabilities unfortunately don't have that community. They don't have someone that could go to the grocery store for them. And those people with disabilities who relied upon food stamps in order to access food and to eat and to put food on their tables weren't able to order their groceries online, because SNAP was not working with any online vendors to take SNAP. However an online program was just started. So we at RespectAbility began to immediately have a campaign to get states to sign on to that pilot program for online so that people with disabilities could purchase their groceries safely. So I joined in, thanks to the broad network that I built, not just in the disability community, but also within government officials, my colleagues at the Kennedy school, my professors, I was able to very quickly network with really important people, or people who knew really important people that were in office right now. So that was the first thing that I did. But also, we did letter writing campaigns, where we were contacting every single SNAP leader in the country in every state and saying this is a big issue. We need help. Can you please help us? Can you please sign on to this? And we also contacted and pitched stories to members of the press, and in doing so, used stories of actual people with disabilities who relied on SNAP and couldn't access food. And that ability to storytell, and to connect the actual needs of a real person to communicate that story was so effective, in conjunction with the letters and the outreach that we did, we were able - in a very short period of time, I want to say maybe two weeks - to have ninety percent of all SNAP family households to be covered by the pilot program. And now almost every single state is covered and has that and is a member of the pilot program, with the exception of some states that simply are unable to really utilize the vendors of Amazon and Walmart because they don't necessarily serve their neighborhoods. So just in a short period of time, with communicating real life human stories of a need that was so great at a really difficult time, had amazing results so quickly.

>> Matan Koch: Thank you Ariella, and thank you for the tremendous work, but also for reminding us that letter writing, that pitching the press - there are so many ways to be involved if walking into a legislator's office is not for you. I want to take a moment to remind our audience that you can go to www.votability.com right now and it will allow you - or maybe when our panel's done - and it will allow you to send letters very easily to all of your governing officials. Just by putting in your zip code, you can have the kind of impact that Ariella is talking about. Now Gloria, can you tell us a little bit about your activism and your path to activism?

>> Gloria Medina: Okay. Thank you Matan, I'm so happy to be here. Yeah my activism with disability started with RespectAbility. And it was really something that I really appreciate, and I learned so much from at my time at RespectAbility. And after RespectAbility, I chose to focus on my last semester of school so I could graduate. And then COVID hit and the whole thing happened. So for me, the activism in disability is realizing that I still have so much to learn. So much to grow as an ally if I want to continue to help in activism for the disability community. And that really starts with learning and following the leaders of the disability community. I, for example, have taken the time to follow on social media various leaders of the disability community like Charis Hills, Vilissa Thompson of "Disability Too White," and others like the black disability collective. And yeah, I think it's important that the best way to get involved is education and being a support to the leaders by seeing what they need and seeing -- like, do they need donation? What do they want us to learn about now? What do they want us to engage in and be a supportive voice in? And also, following the leaders - they share stuff that we allies need to look out for. For example, the other day, Vilissa Thompson shared an article on casual ableism that happens every day, that we as allies don't really catch ourselves doing. For example, things in our language that - it's just so ingrained into and normalized that we don't really realize that it's affecting the disability community. And we think it's just such a normal way of talking.

>> Matan Koch: Can I prompt you just a bit? It's so helpful that we got to keep in mind that one of the important pieces of allyship is to hear what others were doing. I believe you were also going to speak a little bit about how one brings intersectional identities to allyship and also some of your activism around your trans identity, and so if you could make sure to address that as well.

>> Gloria Medina: Yeah. The thing with trans activism and activism in the disability community tends to overlap a lot. I noticed as I was following a lot of leaders in the disability community they were also -- had their pronouns in their bio, they also had gender identity and different sexual identities. And it's important because you can't have activism - any type of activism that is centered around the normalized, they're centered around white people, that are centered around cis people. It has to be an activism that -- and folks have saw in the trans community, the issues of disabled people tend to be discredited sometimes. For example gendered bathrooms. I went to the University of Maryland, and we had three gender neutral bathrooms, and they were very far away from each other. And that really doesn't take into consideration the mobility issues that a lot of people in the disability section have. It's a huge campus and we need to - in all our steps forward, in all progress - we need to include everybody and make sure that it's intersectional.

>> Matan Koch: Thank you so much. So I want to encourage the audience to put their questions in the question box. This panel is interested to engage your questions - wants to answer your question. I want to start by bringing up a question that was posed in the last panel, but that I thought was more appropriate for this panel. So I exercised some moderators privilege and I've brought it forward. And for reasons that will be obvious in a moment, I'm first going to direct it to Ila. Although everyone else is, of course, welcome to join in. An audience member writes in and says that they are a successful partner in their finance firm and that they are a person with a disability, and that they are looking for ways to volunteer and mentor and get more involved. And how might we recommend that that is done? And you of course also have a very similar bio Ila, I thought you might speak to that first.

>> Ila Eckhoff: Yeah thanks Matan. There's a multitude of different ways you can participate. What was very important to me - Blackrock talks a lot about purpose and about creating better financial futures for our clients, and 20 percent of the population has a disability. Well, that's 20 percent of our client base as well, right? So it's easy to connect the idea around inclusion and diversity is a very big topic now in corporate America, and I'm a firm believer in inclusion and diversity but my D for I and D is around disability. We talk a lot about gender. We talk a lot about race. We talk a lot about sexual orientation. I personally am very focused on increasing hiring and focus for the firm around disability. So there's a multitude of different ways you can do it within your own corporate environment. There are organizations like RespectAbility that would love to have you volunteer. And the nice thing about RespectAbility is it really goes across -- although I have cerebral palsy, RespectAbility deals with every disability whether it's visible or invisible. So it's a tremendous organization that can give you access and resource. Mentoring is a big deal, so for our ability network we actually have a buddy list. So for everybody in the firm who's willing to disclose, like next to my name, it says cerebral palsy, so if you want to know anything about that particular situation, or you don't want to talk to your boss about having a disability, or you're not comfortable disclosing, you can reach out to anybody within the network. There are other organizations like American Corporate Partners that deal with veterans. Some of those veterans could have disabilities, etcetera, that you can mentor in that vein. So there's a lot of opportunity, and I'm sure my friends Jennifer and others at RespectAbility would be happy to collaborate with you and find what works for you the way they have to do it for me, so that I could do the kind of political things and the women's forum that I did this year that I had never done before.

>> Matan Koch: Thank you so much Ila. Do either of our other panelists, either Ariella or Gloria have thoughts - I mean, maybe not as specifically focused as someone in the financial service industry, but other ways that you recommend that folks could get involved? And again, just a reminder to our audience we have the Q&A box and we want to hear from you.

>> Ariella Barker: Yeah. I will say that growing up with a disability also like this questioner, with a mobility impairment -- growing up, I never really had friends that had disabilities. I was the one -- I was the only one, and like many people with disabilities -- that I was the only one in a room with a visible disability and whenever I did encounter people with disabilities, their disabilities were often so much different than mine that I didn't really understand how much life experience that we had in common, until the ability to to have social media and groups online in which you're able to see other people's stories and relate. And I think that a really big part, if not the main part of advocacy, is educating the public. Educating people that you're with. And because most people don't know the story of disability, most people don't know the issues that we have and that need to be addressed. And even though they most likely have a loved one with a disability, they may not - most likely, they don't know what their struggles are and what are the things that they find important, that they want. So I've found that the greatest ability for me to advocate is to go online and to publish, whether it's sharing articles that someone else wrote and that were published in a newspaper or whether it's my own op-eds, to get these issues out, to educate and to share them, so that -- by you sharing it with your 1500 friends on Facebook or on Twitter or whatever, and those people then share it with their friends, and so forth and so on - it creates a snowball effect and you're reaching very wide offices. But also another really effective way of advocacy which has sort of a dirty name right now and it shouldn't is lobbying. We do it every day. It's a first amendment protected right, and we don't even realize that every single time that you respond to -- do a text where you're sending a letter to your representative, or you're sending a fax or you're sending an email - that's lobbying. It's called grassroots lobbying and this is one of the most important constitutional rights that we can fulfill: to tell our state and federal representatives - and local as well - that these issues are important to us, that we make up 25 percent of the electorate, and that our loved ones and community make up 74 percent of voters out there, and that they need to take heed of this issue. And the more people that grassroot lobby their political officers, the more ability that we have to make an impact on them. Because what they care about possibly more than anything, including fulfilling their own constitutional duties to perform their own duties as a public official, but more importantly to be reelected. And in order to do so they need to meet their constituents demands. So I very highly recommend also engaging in some form of lobbying.

>> Matan Koch: Thank you so much for that, Ariella. And I just feel like - and Ariella is also an attorney - I want to add the PSA that you need to be aware, however, if you work for an organization that, due to non-profit status or some other reason cannot engage in lobbying, then don't do that in your professional persona. But you can do it on your own time all that you would like. And that will be just fantastic. It is definitely not the case that every panelist needs to answer a question, but Gloria, do you have anything you want to add in for this particular questioner?

>> Gloria Medina: Honestly, I don't think I could say anything better than both Ila and Ariella said. But I do wanna say - bounce off what Ariella said about education. It's very important that we push for education because I remember, working at RespectAbility, there was a moment during national disability employment awareness month that we had to call Governors and give them resources and education about what's going on with national disability employment awareness month, and also ask if they were doing anything, if they had anything planned. And for me that was definitely quite a moment to see that national disability employment -- NDEAM, was that NDEAM was already such a - I don't want to say old, but it already had years being out there. And a lot of Governors didn't really have anything planned for that month yet. And I think I was hoping that at least 25 out of the 50 Governors we called would have had something, but they didn't. I think I got only 10. So it's very important to keep educating and keep holding the people we have - that we hold for office accountable.

>> Matan Koch: Thank you so much and it's so important to realize also - and I remember this when I was in government myself - it doesn't take very many messages before something is on somebody's agenda. That call from Gloria that those folks received? If they got that and maybe one or two others, that was probably enough to make it something at least that they were going to pay attention to, and try to figure it out. Again, something that you can do very easily today by going to voteability.com. But now I want to ask - and I'm going to start with Gloria on this one - what is one other easy thing that each person on our call could do today to begin to get involved? And I'm going to ask each panelist to give us one easy thing that someone could do to get involved.

>> Gloria Medina: I think currently -- well currently during COVID, I think the most important one would be to donate to leaders in the disability community. Even if it's just ten dollars or twenty dollars, I know COVID has gotten us - a lot of us - unemployed, but already people with disabilities were already going through much less rates of unemployment before COVID even started. So I think it's important that at these times we donate to gofundmes and all this stuff to make sure that -- you can't really have activism, you can't really focus on activism if you don't have your basic needs met. So I think donation, at least anything you can, to leaders will be great.

>> Matan Koch: Thank you - the importance of speaking by supporting those who are making it their work. Ila, do you have one thing that folks could do right now?

>> Ila Eckhoff: I think the best thing that we can do, and it's kind of what we're doing today right - we're being open. We're being honest. We're talking about the reality of what it means to have a disability. And we're focused on all the things that we do, right? In order to change stigmas we need to have people realize that people with disabilities are capable. First and foremost, when you see somebody with a disability and it's visible, obviously, rather than assume that they're not capable or what their limits are, assume they're capable until proven otherwise. And the way we can help change that is by constantly - whenever we see that, that that's not the case, you have to speak up and speak out, right? We really need to stand up for ourselves, because once we stand up for ourselves then others will stand with us.

>> Matan Koch: Thank you. And Ariella, do you have one strong suggestion for how folks can get involved, engaged and active today?

>> Ariella Barker: Yes. It's very easy. This year is election year. And what does that mean? A lot of politicians are out there talking, they're proposing their plans, they are being interviewed by the press. So I think and I recommend that every time you hear a politician or a member of the press or anyone really who is talking about diversity, who is talking about issues that relate to race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion. If they are not talking also about disability, call them out! That's it.

>> Matan Koch: Call them out. Such good advice, such important advice to be heard. Ila, you're just unmuted which makes me feel like you have something --

>> Ila Eckhoff: Yeah, I just second and third that. Speak up. That's what this is about. Call them out, right? We need to stand up. This is how we make a difference, so that when we get to ADA 40 it's a different world that we're looking at than we have today.

>> Matan Koch: The power of our voices. Thank you so much for elevating that moment and that feeling and I think also for elevating the importance of voting. It's interesting - I keep referring you to voteability.com because of the electoral contact tool, but as you might guess from its name, it also has on it fantastic information about every political candidate that has been willing to provide us that information. And preparations for how to be involved in elections, it's updated as we get more information. We're, of course, completely non-partisan. We simply want to make sure that folks are aware where candidates stand on issues. And I want to in some ways extend this question to the audience. And what do I mean by that? I took a look at who was registered for today and you're all an incredibly impressive group of people. You're leaders you're thought leaders, you're organization leaders: any one of you could probably join us here on this panel if the Zoom could accommodate it. It would be a little weird because we'd have multiple screens, but it would be good. So if you have ideas, if you have things that folks should do, you could please consider us a forum to share that, whether you put it in the chat box now, whether you talk about it in our town hall later. We want to hear about the different ways that people can get engaged, because if there's one thing that we have learned and heard it is the power of folks engagement. So I want to -- we're just about at a close for this panel, but what I want to do is do one more round robin to give you each a chance at a closing message. What would you like to leave people with? I mean it was almost - you already said the powerful words about speak up and speak out. Let us let Gloria give us some closing words, then Ariella, then Ila, just to give an order, so Gloria, a closing thought for our audience today?

>> Gloria Medina: I think the most important thing to take away is to keep things intersectional, to keep looking out for everybody when it comes to activism - any form of activism. And two, when you talk about trans community, about race issues or anything - always keep in mind the disability community as well.

>> Matan Koch: Thank you. Always remember where the disability community fits in your activism whatever your activism is, because disability cuts across every category. It affects us all. Thank you for that. Ariella?

>> Ariella Barker: I guess my closing advice or comment would be: if you think that you would be bad at advocacy or you can't do advocacy or you just can't make a difference, you're just one person, a drop in the bucket of the entire population out there and you think change is impossible to create, I will tell you that you can create justice. You can create change. The wheels of justice are slow, but they work. But they don't work unless you get involved, you get out there and you make your voice heard. So don't worry if you have no experience, you don't know what you're doing - there's really nothing to it. And if you need help, I'm available. We're all available. We want to help you help the community.

>> Matan Koch: Such empowering words. You can do it, you have that ability, and most importantly, we're standing by to help you figure out just how the right way is for you. That's what today is about and our panelists stand ready to help. Ila, any closing words of wisdom for our audience today?

>> Ila Eckhoff: Look. For anyone who gives you resistance to tell you that disability really doesn't impact them, I beg to differ. It may hit them when they're 95 years old. For any woman who's had a child, congratulations - that's short-term disability. You're already a member of the family. Disability affects just about everybody at some point in their life, even if it's for a short period of time. Or for some of us that were born with it we're kind of there. But it's going to affect everybody, so even if you're coming up with resistance, that person too at some point is going to have to deal with disability. Make it in their self-interest. One of those interesting things that will happen is when it affects you personally, that's how people then get involved. So get involved.

>> Matan Koch: Thank you. Thank you all for your breath of advocacy. Thank you for what you have done. And if there's one thing we can truly take away from these amazing panelists, it's that - in both panels - it's that from engaging directly in government to with your government to all of the other forms of activism, there are so many ways that you can engage and we all have the greatest power of a democracy: that's the power to vote. The power to make sure that the people representing us represent our views and our vision. To run for office, just like our chairman who has rejoined the Zoom call. We can be those voices in the halls of government. So I encourage you once again, maybe a little bit like a broken record, to go to www.voteability.com. Use that voter voice to make your voice heard. Use the election resources to figure out how you want to exercise your sacred right to vote. And above all, please stay engaged. And before we transition to our closing for the whole week, we now want to show you a video that speaks to the dreams and importance of the ADA.

>> Matan Koch: What incredibly powerful visions. May they indeed come to be a reality. May we work together to get there. I now turn the mic over to our chairman and our visionary host, the honorable Steve Bartlett.

>> Hon. Steve Bartlett: Wow Matan, you've got my heart racing. What a great set of videos, what a great panel talking about - I mean, the central fact is that democracy works for people who speak up. People who don't speak up doesn't work so well. So it's up to all of us to do our part in this democracy. Thank you to these activists who explained both how and why to provide that leadership at the grassroots level. May others on this call and elsewhere be motivated to do the same. Now, whoo, let's catch my breath. And thanks to the video you provided to from Hollywood. Back to our emphasis on essential partnership. We advance the ADA into its next decade, the next 30 years or let's make it the next 10 years because we are so poised to make so much progress in the next 10 years. We're pleased to bring you two messages from both leading parties as we gear up for the November election. RespectAbility is nonpartisan: we want all candidates from all political parties to be great on disability issues. We're going to begin with the Trump campaign message, so Eric, take it away.

[VIDEO]

>> Hon. Steve Bartlett: And now from the Biden campaign.

[VIDEO]

>> Steve Bartlett: We are most appreciative that both the Trump and the Biden campaigns took the time to send us these messages of support. Whatever your vote may be, be sure you cast your vote in November and speak out during the campaign. Now, I would like to invite RespectAbility's famous bundle of energy, CEO Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi to join me on the Zoom Stage, so we can kick off what will shortly be a conversation with you. Jennifer?

>> Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi: Thank you Steve Bartlett. It is such a pleasure to be here with you, and I love working with Steve, our Chairman. As everyone knows, Steve was one of the lead co-sponsors and co-authors of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and because of him and his work, we're able to have so much progress. So my name again is Jennifer Mizrahi, and for those who aren't seeing me on the screen, I am a white middle-aged woman who could use a haircut given the times that we are living in. I also happen to be dyslexic. I started learning to read when I was around 12, which by the way was when I was already 5 foot 10. So I am really delighted to be with so many disability activists, both self-advocates and allies, who are with us, and those speakers - wow, they were so fabulous, and so inspiring in terms of what you can do if you reach out and really get involved. In fact, all the speakers on all five days, I'm so grateful for them. But for those of you who are at home - and as Matan said, we have incredibly impressive people who are at home.

So I'm going to do a share screen, because I want to show you how you can get involved. So this is a website that we have called VoteAbility.com -- VoteAbility.com. And this website is the intersection of politics and disability, so you can see we have a little article on the fact that Michelle Kwan and Lara Trump just spoke here today. But then I come down to our take action section, because this is where you can make a difference very very easily. So if you go down to it you can read about why you should take action and whatnot, and then it shows you how you can compose your message. Now I'm just going to click on a few things, and I'm going to show you exactly how easy it is. First of all, if you want to tweet at an elected official, you can. If you want to call an elected official, you can. Personally, I'm an email person. I really like to email. And if you go in here, you can compose your message. So here, the subject header of this message is "People with disabilities left behind during COVID-19." But frankly, you can change it. You could go in, you could take this out, you could put something else in in terms of what message it is that you want to send to elected officials. Now I noticed when I looked at the registration form that some of the people here work for government or non-profits and you might not want to lobby. So I wanted to let you know that when you reach out to an elected official, and you give them general information, or you ask them a question, technically it's not lobbying, it's called educating and advocating. And so in this message here, I didn't mention any specific legislation, because if you mention specific legislation, and say hey, vote for this law or vote against that law, then that technically is lobbying, which, by the way, anyone can do as a private citizen, but your job may not want to be one where you lobby. So here you can put in your own personal message. You can say hello, I appreciate that you are working to help us during a crisis. I have a disability, period. Okay, so you write your own personal message. You might want to write about housing, or transportation, or jobs or whatever, you can write in your own personal message. But then what RespectAbility did is we put in a universal simple message, so that if you don't want to do a personalized message, you just want to have this message, it says "I'm writing because I care about the one in five people who live with a disability. They're at huge risk from COVID-19 job loss, and challenges in virtual online education. What are you doing specifically to help people during this crisis? More information is at RespectAbility.org." I'm gonna take that part out, I'm just gonna leave that without saying that they should go to our website, right? So that's my message, what they will get. And by the way, you saw that I took out some of the words. You could take out all the words and put in your own message. Then what you do is you go in, and you put in your name and address. So I'm going to put in my name and address. So you can see that I put in my work address here because I don't want to necessarily give all the politicians my home address, but you can do it either way, and you can say send me email alerts. Now I'm not really looking to get email alerts from a bunch of politicians on a regular basis. So I'm going to click this that I don't want to get a lot of email alerts, but you can keep the email alerts either way. And then what do you do? You just click send. So now what you do is you can really -- now, why is it asking me to enter a code to continue? Well I see that you're gonna get – oh, maybe because they knew me under a different email, because I'm used to doing this with my personal email, but you saw how easy it is to do this work. That's all you need to do to be involved in civic engagement. So if you go to voteability.com, you can do your own letter, and it's just a matter of a couple clicks, and it just takes a couple of moments.

So what it is that we do is really dependent on a theory of change, and the theory of change is that we're going to have to change public opinion. Why is public opinion so important? Because people with disabilities are seen for what they cannot do, instead of what they can. And so we have to change that if we expect that people with disabilities are going to get hired, and going to get promoted. So I want to show some poll data, because there's so many disability activists and leaders on here, and there is a mistake that we make in our community that is actually really hurting us. And the mistake that we're making, unfortunately, is that we are so marginalized, and we're frequently in so much pain, and our community experiences so much poverty that we want to feel heard so badly that when we're able to be in the media or talk to people, we talk about our pain point. And then sometimes we hear another marginalized group, maybe because of their race, or their gender identity, or their – some other reason they're being marginalized, and we feel like it's some sort of contest. It's no contest, this is not the oppression olympics. Nobody wins because one person has more pain than another. And in fact, what we've done is some very significant amounts of polling, if you go to the blue slide - Debbie, thank you for this -- I want to show you, this is a very large scale poll. A thousand people were asked this question. "What do you think is the most compelling reason to include and increase opportunities for people with disabilities?" So a lot of people think, again, that if you talk about the pain and the suffering the disability community, sort of like Jerry Lewis on the Jerry Lewis telethon would show these sad kids with disabilities, and ask for help, that that is going to get people to want to engage with us. But that's actually not the case. If you test the messages, you'll see that the messages about us being a community that is really hurting do not bring support. So you see that "Only one in three people with a disability has a job. People with disabilities are twice as likely to be poor as people without disabilities. They are disproportionately impacted by issues of school suspension and dropping out, unemployment, homelessness, abuse, incarceration, and other issues." Of all the choices of messages, only seven percent of the people who heard that message thought that was a compelling reason to step it up when it came to including people with disabilities. So that pity message, that pain message - it really fails for us. What works for us, and the first choice is, if you start at the top, its "organizations are at their best, when they welcome respect and include people of all backgrounds. This includes people with disabilities." If you ask people their first choice of the messages and the second choice of the messages, you see that combines to 72% of the people who heard that message thought that was a really compelling reason to do more to include people with disabilities. Likewise, the message "problems are best solved by working with people who have experienced them firsthand and know solutions that work. Just like issues that impact people of different racial, ethnic and other backgrounds, people with disabilities should be involved in solving issues that impact them." That works with 51% of the people. 51%. Now compare that to the combined total of the pity message, which was 17%. Then you sort of get to a middling issue. "Our nation was founded on the principle that anyone who works hard should be able to get ahead in life. People with disabilities deserve equal opportunity to earn an income, achieve independence and be included, just like anyone else." So this is really a message that I wouldn't really use, because it's not strong enough, and after so much attention on racial justice issues, this will break down by racial demographics, so you really want to use the ones that are above it on the line. Then there's another message that's good, which is "companies including Microsoft, JPMorgan Chase, Coca-Cola and others have seen that talented people with disabilities can bring unique perspectives, innovation and determination to organizations. It's time for non-profits and philanthropy to benefit from what people with disabilities CAN do." So you see, how you phrase the message is very very important.

So if we go to the next slide, you see another series of issues that really demonstrate some of these issues also. So you see that the messages that are around the difficulties of people with disabilities, like "32% of all federal prisoners, 40% of people in jail, the majority of women who are incarcerated have a disability." Does this make people really care about our issues? Well, you know what, it makes me care. I'm a person with a disability, I care about these issues tremendously, especially since I know that these are largely people of color with disability who face both ableism and racism, but guess what. It doesn't really work with most of the public. What does work is that "studies show that 70% of people with disabilities want to work, and that the majority of young people with disabilities can get jobs and careers when they are given the right opportunities and supports." That works tremendously well, as does this interesting piece. "Most accommodations to include people with disabilities are simple, free or low cost. With new technology and best practices, more people with disabilities can be included successfully." This is important because not only does representation matter, not only does getting people with disabilities in the media -- it means that you have to showcase them for what they can do, and how they contribute to a better world for everyone. Next slide.

So the second thing that I talked about is how we work on finding the public policies and the best practices that really work, and when we do this, it's not because we're a direct service organization. There are a lot of direct service organizations that are superstars that are on this call. There are organizations doing great work on employment. There's Project Search, there's Bridges to Work, there's Best Buddies, there's Easterseals and others. We work in partnership with these groups -- Paralyzed Veterans of America, UCP. We work with 120 disability groups nationally in a partnership, we work with the federal government in a partnership, because people with disabilities, when they're hired, heard, and listened to, are part of the solution. And so if you're on this call from a different disability group, we would love to partner with you. Next slide please.

This is just some statistics that show that over many years, there has been some improvement in graduation rates for students with disabilities, compared to students without disabilities, but still only 67% of students with disabilities are completing high school, compared to 85% of those without a disability. Next slide please.

I won't go into this in detail, but they'll be in our website, this also has an impact by race. So you see the intersection of racism and ableism, and so we have to work together as intersectional communities. Next slide please.

Employment has gotten better since the ADA happened, but not nearly enough. And that's why we're really pushing on the stigma, because a lot of people with disabilities have been told that they can't succeed, and they believed it. A lot of their families believed it, and certainly a lot of their employers believed it. So we've got to get the stigma to go away, so that people can be seen for what they can do, so that we can move these employment numbers up, because even pre-pandemic, only 37% of people with disabilities had a job, compared to 77% of people without any disabilities. This is just compared by racial groups. Next slide please.

And these, of course, break down a lot and change by race, and you can find these slides on our website. Next slide please.

We're working deeply, as you heard from Steven Simon and from Jaime and Matan, in Los Angeles. We love to work with the Mayor's Office there, and it really is our laboratory for progress, because we get to work with Unite LA and with the folks there, so we're really really grateful for that. Next slide.

And as you heard from Ariella Barker, we wound up working on SNAP. Why? Because we discovered that during the crisis, people could not get access to food that was delivered safely to them. So when we started working on the COVID stuff, only six states enabled people to use SNAP, that is their food stamps, for home delivery. After six weeks of activism by Ariella, and many others incredibly -- our director of policy, Philip Kahn-Pauli, we were able to make a change. Next slide please.

And so here in green, you see the states where you can now use online purchase and delivery with SNAP and food stamps. That means that 9.9 million people with disabilities now have safer access to food, which is so so important, because 11 million people with disabilities have significant food security issues, and rely on SNAP. Next slide please.

Our third area is this, "nothing about us, without us." It's the authentic talent pipeline of diverse people with disabilities. So I'd like to show you some of the people on our team. Next slide.

So first of all, I'd like to celebrate our very amazing board, which Steve Bartlett, who's been our host this week, chairs. We have more than 30 board members, and they are just amazing human beings - incredibly diverse in their demographics, their skills, their interests. The majority of our board are people with lived disability experience with a very rich background in skills and abilities, and we're so lucky to have them. You met a lot of our board members as speakers: from Ila, who you heard earlier, Vincenzo Piscopo, who chairs our strategic plan, which we've just started. You heard from Jim Sinocchi, from JPMorgan Chase, from Randy, and other board members, Ollie Cantos, Gerard Robinson, Sneha - we just have terrific people - Jonathan Murray, everyone on our board is fabulous. Next slide please.

We have a tremendous staff. So I want to give a special shout out to Debbie Fink, who organized this. Really really I want to give a special shout out to Debbie for the great work in this, and I also want to mention that you heard from some new board members this week also, who aren't on the slide because we haven't updated it yet, but Jaime, who you heard from LA, is one of our six brand new board members, because we just elected six new people to our board, and we're so excited about what they each bring, but we have a tremendous team. So the ones on the top two rows are permanent staff, and they're full-time, and the people in the bottom row are either consultants or part-time, but this is an amazing group of people that works really hard. Sometimes when I meet people, they think we have a really big staff. But actually in terms of full-time staff, it's only 11 people. Each one of them is just extraordinary. I'm glad you got to meet some of them, Lauren Appelbaum, Philip Kahn-Pauli, and Matan, but every single one of them - and Tatiana Lee - but every one of them is amazing. So I hope that you'll work with them. Next slide please.

We're very proud of our national leadership program. This is a program for young leaders, primarily with disabilities, but some who are allies, who want to work professionally on behalf of people with disabilities. So this is not for people who want to be CPAs or who want to be software experts. This is for people who want to be disability advocates. They want to grow up and be like Ariella Barker or Anastasia or Jaime, and others, and really do this in government, or do this in non-profits or work in Hollywood. We have a tremendous group of fellows, and they did so much on this conference, and so I really want to give a shout out to all of them, to Autumn, to KiAnna, to Lily, to everyone of them who did such a great job. And Nicole is one of our fellows, is working on a great new employment program, excuse me, education toolkit for parents of kids with disabilities that we're launching next week. So if you want to be a fellow, which is a great program, and we're doing it virtually due to COVID - you can be anywhere in the country - then in the chat is information about that. Again, we're looking for young leaders all the time. Right now, it's a part-time program, so people can do it while they're in school, or working, or in most cases at this point looking for a job in what is a difficult economy. Next slide.

Our lab program, led by Lauren Appelbaum, and by Tatiana, and Nasreen, and Leah, and Lizzie is our Fellow in that program - is for these rising superstars in -- working in Hollywood behind the camera. So they're not actors. They're producers, they're writers, they're directors, and they're all phenomenal. We just had our second lab program. Next slide please.

Our National Women's Division Speakers Bureau, are people who are training other people in how to do inclusion of people with disabilities. I want to thank the Coca-Cola company, and the New York Women's Foundation for making this program possible. These women are just tremendous and you heard from Zazel, and you heard from others as speakers during the conference. You can learn more about this on our website, and you can invite them to come and do lunch and learns via Zoom for your team. So no matter where you are in the country, we can set you up with a speaker to do sort of ten tips on how do you do disability inclusion by a speaker who themselves is a person with a disability, "Nothing about us without us." So it's a really great opportunity. So we're going to our theory of change, which is, again, we have these three areas where we're working. The outcomes that we're going for is that people with disabilities are viewed for what they can do, and that people with disabilities are hired and heard, and that people with disabilities are able to drive innovation, and solutions. And of course, so much of that takes you taking the initiative to do things like going to voteability.com.

I think that's the end of our slides, and I think that's all of the formal presentations until we go to the Q & A. I am so delighted and honored that so many people joined us, we put on extra time today, and I want to thank the sign language interpreters, and captionists for sticking with us for extra time because it's really important for us to hear from you, what are your experiences out in the field? What are the questions that you have? So I know that we will, in some cases, call on some of our senior staff to help us with the answers to these questions, and so they're standing by. But I'm going to turn it back to our fearless leader, Steve Bartlett, our chairman. Thank you Steve so much for all that you do for people with disabilities.

>> Steve Bartlett: That is terrific Jennifer, we should pause for a standing ovation for the great Jennifer Mizrahi. RespectAbility is an organization that has an outsized impact to doing good things in the world of disability inclusion. Thank you. I'm starting my video now. Now we're going to move into the disability inclusion town hall, looking for your questions, comments, suggestions, anything that you want to bring up. I'll refer the questions to someone here with RespectAbility, or i'll take them myself, or if it's just something you want to say, then we'll take it as a comment and go from there. So let me go to the first question, which is -- this is a two part answer. It is, should we disclose our disability when applying for a job. So I'm going to take the first part of the answer, the social sciences part of the answer, looking at it from the perspective of an employee and employer. And the simple answer is yes, but you shouldn't do it in a way that's -- you should talk about the whole you, everything that you offer this employer, of which your disability is a part of that, bring it up during the course of the interview as it's appropriate, not the very first thing, not the very last thing, but bring it up in a way of making it fit into the job description of how you'll be able to do the job. At least that's my advice. Now Matan, you're an attorney did I say anything to stepped on too many toes?

>> Matan Koch: Well thank you Steve, nothing you said actually stepped on any toes, I just want to elaborate a little bit that you are in fact never obligated to disclose your disability, right? It is a personal choice, you can hold onto it. That said there's a couple of practical reasons that you might think about doing it. First of all, in the event that you want to assert your legal rights, obviously, in order to assert your legal rights, you at least have to claim the identity of having a disability. You don't necessarily need to give too much detail, but you can't claim a legal protection if you won't also claim the status. But more importantly, I think we heard yesterday when some government folks were on, that there's now a 7% goal for federal contractors to hire people with disabilities, and frankly, we also heard from some private sector employees that they are looking very much to hire people with disabilities. So you might think about whether and when it will actually be a plus to you under a current regime to be open about where you are. And again, I want to echo what Steve said, that it is a part of your whole person, and so disclose strategically and don't feel obligated. And if you want a true ins and outs of when and how and should I disclose, there is a wonderful resource at the job accommodation network, www.askjan.org has some really good publications that walk you through all the ins and outs of self-disclosure.

>> Steve Bartlett: That's a great legal answer, and also, you brought in: the purpose of having an interview is to get a job, not to bring a lawsuit. So that's the -- the context is you're trying to get a good job that you can do and you have to discuss that with your employer. Philip, our director of policy had something to say. Philip?

>> Philip Kahn-Pauli: Yeah, I specifically like to direct the attention of anybody who is a college student, or recent college graduate with a disability who's with us today. There's something called the workforce recruitment program through the department of labor. And so WRP, as it is known specifically, is a pathway to both internships in the federal government, but also pathways to inclusive employers who are hiring people with disabilities in the private sector. But you specifically have to be a student with a disability who has previously received accommodations, can specifically detail what requirements you may have, and it's a really great resource that's one of those best kept secrets in the disability employment world. And so if you're a student or a recent graduate with a disability, I encourage you to check out the workforce recruitment program.

>> Steve Bartlett: Thank you Philip, and I'll put on my employer's hat again. I've been an employer and an employee for 60 years plus of my life. Just remember that your goal in being an employee is to figure out how you can help your employer, add value to the organization. And so your job with your disability is to figure that out with the employer, and then describe that in the best way possible. So let me move from there to the next question, which is oftentimes -- and Philip this is coming back to you also, so get ready. Oftentimes people with disabilities are not successful with Vocational Rehab. Are there any up-and-coming changes to how they support people? I don't know of up-and-coming changes, but Philip probably does, but I will say this is an issue that's sort of been a constant over the last 30 years. Voc Rehab does a great job in many cases, but they have limited budgets, they would tell you. And so there are occasions in which they fall short, and that's essentially the dilemma. So with that, are there any changes to how VOC rehab operates in the future? Phillip.

>> Phillip Kahn-Pauli: Thank you for that question, whoever it was that asked, and thank you for setting it up Steve. So in terms of vocational rehabilitation, you're absolutely right, it doesn't work for everyone. Part of the issue with that is that many state VR agencies are under something called an order of selection, which means that they, by law, have to provide services to the people with the most significant disabilities first. Now that creates a challenge, because by definition, those are the people who need the most resources to get into the workforce. And it means that there's limited resources for everybody else. As an example, before COVID the waiting period for getting services from Voc Rehab in RespectAbility's home state of Maryland was 18 months. 18 months before you could actually sit down with a counselor, and start working on your resume. So the great thing, however, the good news in all of this, is that VR - that's Voc Rehab - is only one part of the workforce development system in the country. The Department of Labor is a large federal department and has many different programs that all go out to fund specific programs in local communities to teach job skills, to teach apprenticeships, to train people for the jobs that are out there in the world today. And so even if you go to VR and you get on the waiting list, that doesn't mean that there aren't other services that you can go and access. Throughout the country, there are some places called the American Job Centers, which are largely providing virtual services these days, because of the pandemic. And for example in our workforce guide -- for our LA workforce guide, we specifically detail the paperwork you're going to need to fill out, where you would go and find your local AJC, as they're called, and ways to access other services. I would also suggest --

>> Steve Bartlett: What is that website again Philip?

>> Philip Kahn-Pauli: It's RespectAbility.org/lajobs. Now that information is just focused on LA, but if you go to the department of labor, they've got more information on other local programs based on your zip code. So there are a lot of other avenues to get support, specifically to get into the workforce beyond just voc rehab. And so I would clue you in that yes, that's one pathway, but there are many other pathways to get the support you need to succeed.

>> Steve Bartlett: Matan?

>> Matan Koch: It’s true that a lot of the links in the LA guide are Los Angeles specific, but a lot of the tips and tricks and instructions of the best ways to get from here to employment are worthwhile to you wherever you are. So please - I encourage everyone, even if you're not in Los Angeles, check that out. And if you're having trouble translating some of the guidance from the LA specific links to what your local equivalent would be, shoot us a note. Our contact information is in the guide, and we'll let you know how to find it where you are. Thank you.

>> Steve Bartlett: The point is there are lots of agencies that help people get jobs, both train for jobs and get their jobs, of which Voc Rehab is one, and it's a big one, but it's by no means the largest or by no means the only one. So next is how can - and this goes back to employers, we talked about employees - how can employers, and I'm going to delicately answer this first, Matan, then call on you to clean it up. How can employers and recruiting teams help candidates feel more comfortable disclosing their disabilities and asking for accommodations? Well the employers shouldn't approach it as to how can I get them to talk, to disclose their disabilities. The employers should enter it with reasonable accommodations, with we're an organizations that accommodate the diverse needs of all of our employees. Let me tell you about what we do. Use the words reasonable accommodation, because that's the word that triggers what an employer does to help an employee come into a job. I think Matan will say an employer cannot just ask if you have a disability, but listen and describe what the employer is doing in that area, and then, big step here, the open mind of working with the employee to develop a reasonable accommodation that works for both. And oftentimes, it has to be a - if you will - a negotiated accommodation, where the employee has certain needs and the employer has certain needs, and you figure out together how to make it work. Okay Matan, did I mess that up or is that okay?

>> Matan Koch: So everything Steve said is right, I want to recast it just a little bit though, because one of the things that I don't know if it's known that I came to RespectAbility after spending a few years advising employers on just this question. One of the ways that I recommend that they really approach it is, go to every employee - you don't need to know whether they have a disability - and ask them how you can help them to succeed. They're gonna walk you through what they need to succeed. If it's not something that is particularly difficult, you're just going to do it. Right? You're not going to ask us about a disability or if it's a reasonable accommodation. When you get to the things that are a little more difficult, a little more you're not sure, this is when you say well we're really happy to meet reasonable accommodation requests, or even just say, that one could be difficult, can you dimensionalize how that would help you? What that'll do is it's going to start the dialogue that's going to get you to where you really want, which isn't negotiating accommodation. What you want to be doing is collaborating on a strategy to help that person, that applicant succeed, and give to your business. So if you go in with that mindset with every employee, it's really going to take care of itself.

>> Steve Bartlett: Yeah that's the answer, keep an open mind, and then figure out the solution together with the employee. I could name a dozen times I've done that as an employer, again, by -- the issue comes up with the employee, and then you figure out how you're going to accomodate. I will say that the the simplest, and the least costly one was -- there was an employee who was making deliveries, a delivery courier, and discovered after 9/11 that she had to sign in with a signature to buildings for security, and her hands didn't allow her to sign, to actually use the pen. What's she gonna do, she said I'm gonna lose my job. So what we worked out was we bought her a two dollar rubber stamp that she could stamp her signature on the -- and it worked just fine, but you look at the problem, and then how you can solve it. Number four. Too many students with more significant disabilities get tracked low, side tracked if you will, in schools. That's so true, horribly true. What is one piece of advice you can give to help change this to eventually help increase employment? Well our education system right now, I think that this is a common problem among public schools and some private schools, and the change should be to view education, especially for those with a disability when you get to the secondary level, to high school. View it as a transition from school to work. There are -- it's amazing. The number of pieces of legislation that have passed in our law, that is school to work transition, but unfortunately, many of them -- the transition stops at age 18, and it's not a true transition. So if school -- our goal at RespectAbility is to get schools and school districts to start thinking in terms of the outcome, which is a good employment opportunity that the student transitions into, as opposed to the outcome of get the diploma, and get out. And I think it's mindset. It works with some school districts where it doesn't work with others. Jennifer or Philip, did I say all of that about right?

>> Philip Kahn-Pauli: That sounds about right, and I would just add that -- we've talked about it before on my panel yesterday, but I want to bring it up again, is the workforce innovation and opportunity act, which specifically oversees all of the workforce systems, really put a lot of investment in youth with disabilities, and ensuring that youth as young as 14 start thinking about earning and learning, can think about starting to do job shadowing, or go into an internship or start going into a job skill training program. And I think the more we can get -- the more we can more widely accept the idea that all students should be thinking about employment, not just students with disabilities, I think that that is very important. And I think one of the other nuances involved with this is if you go back and look at the numbers, we're in a situation now, wherein across the United States, the majority of students with disabilities are minority students. They are students of color with disabilities. And that creates a whole mess of issues and intersections of identity, and oppression, which needs to be at the forefront of -- the education system is imploding because of the pandemic, now is a chance for us as advocates, as agencies, and as people who want to build a better future for everyone to really start thinking well what do we want different? How do we want things to turn out differently? And what can we do to make it happen?

>> Steve Bartlett: Right. So it's a matter of -- what we focus on at RespectAbility is to convince school districts to think in terms of the goal, keep the goal in mind. How do you transition the student with a disability or others to the world of work successfully? As a person who is - number five - who's returning to the work field with an artistic portfolio, do we share with the employer we're disabled before the job interview, or once given the opportunity of an interview? In most circumstances, it wouldn't be appropriate, because it wouldn't be any reason to share that you have a disability, in order to get the interview, unless it's somehow related to your artistic portfolio. If you have a portfolio of art that you've drawn with people with disabilities, perhaps. By and large it comes up during the interview and you describe how you can do this job with your disability, and adding to it. So it's a good question. Don't be nervous about it, it's part of you.

>> Jennifer Mizrahi: Yeah, so thank you for that great question from the audience, and for the answers from my colleagues, but this question of how you get a job is so important, but that we're always hoping people will get jobs in places where they can have an impact on behalf of our community. I'm going to just try and show you on screen that right at our voteability.com, we have our candidate questionnaires. And we're going to be using these, not only with the presidential candidates, but also with the senate and the governor candidates. And you can get involved as a volunteer. But one of the questions that we're asking is whether the political campaigns are including people with disabilities in their campaigns, including as their staff, so when you're thinking about where you might want to get a job, one of the places we hope you look will indeed be working inside political campaigns. So again, if you go to VoteAbility.com, what you will see is our candidate questionnaire that focuses on that issue. This is the same website where you can find the ability to, you know, just take a couple minutes and do your take action now, and you can be engaged with us. So I hope that when you think of employment, that you will think not only about the income, but also the impact of the work that you do. Because when you're working you have a choice in your career, like so many people who are on the phone with us - on Zoom with us today who are working in disability organizations to really have an impact on behalf of the larger wider broader deeper community.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: I just wanted to go back to that question, because I noticed it specifically said artistic, and so I'm not sure exactly what field this person is in. We talked on Wednesday and we kind of covered some of these topics, and as the entertainment industry is being more intentional about recruiting people with disabilities, especially in front of the camera right now, while we're still working on behind the camera. Sometimes it can be beneficial to identifying as a person with a disability, and so, I think that's one of those things where different fields and different jobs, it might be slightly different. So I invite whoever asked that question to reach out to us, because I'd be more than glad to engage in a longer conversation with you.

>> Steve Bartlett: Great example. Make it fit the job. Number six, I help women with autism develop job skills. Many are college students but have limitations. They need job customization, but employers are reluctant or refuse to hire. Many are worried about legal and HR. So how do we change it? Well, two ways. First from the perspective of the employee, and that is -- have it come up naturally during the interview. Something like "you probably have noticed that I seem a little different. Well, let me tell you that I'm on the spectrum, and this is how it works for me, and this is how I can make it, and have made it work for other employers. The second way though, and probably even more powerful, is to get an advocate to kind of go in first, and talk with the employer about what being on the spectrum can do in a positive way for the employer. I've done that, in one case with a fellow of RespectAbility -- to help the employer understand how this is a good thing if you build it into the diversity of your company. So sometimes, you need an advocate, in that case, but always just be upfront and open about it, and in the concept of how can I help the employer. Next: I've worked on productions with inclusion riders, and know other performers, and Lauren - get ready this will be for you; other performers with disabilities who have also and still experience the lack of proper accommodation, even when needs were clearly communicated in discrimination. How can we fix this? So Lauren, how can we fix this?

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Well, there's no easy solution. I wish there was, we could snap our fingers, and make it so. Folks who have disabilities are less likely to speak up, because we feel that if we're asking for too many accommodations, that we might be seen as the problem child. So I think one is to be able to feel confident to ask, and I know that -- and that is one step. And then the second step is while you are the actor, and the producers, and the writers who are on one end, we at RespectAbility are working on the other end as an advocacy organization. So reach out to us, because what we do from our end is we get -- we are so privileged that we get to work with all these executives at the different studios where we can, without naming any names or saying anything about your personal experience, are able to bring issues to the attention to the people who can actually make a change. And so we will work with them to be able to say, do you know that xyz is still happening at this level? And so it's kind of advocating at both directions.

>> Steve Bartlett: Great. Now the next one - Jennifer, I'm going to throw to you after I give a short answer - I have rheumatoid arthritis, and my wrists are significantly affected to the point where I can't write much anymore. In thinking about applying for a job after COVID, how would you suggest I go about telling potential employers this without inviting discrimination? Someone told me if I can't write in an interview, I'll disqualify myself. Well that's not true. Think about that term, I can't write at an interview. The fact is, your goal in an interview is to communicate. Your goal in the job is to communicate. So ask yourself, think about it, talk with a qualified job coach as to how you can do various jobs, even though you cannot write, but - full disclosure. My handwriting would almost disqualify me, but it did qualify me for this question - so think about how you will get the job done, which in this case is not to write, but to communicate. Jennifer?

>> Jennifer Mizrahi: I'm going to turn it over to my colleague, Matan, because he can't use his hands, and he writes more than anyone else on our staff.

>> Steve Bartlett: Sure thing.

>> Matan Koch: Thank you. So yes, and I'm lucky to have been born into an era that we all now live in, where there is excellent technology at varying levels and, depending on the level of written work that you need to do that you will buy the cheaper or the more expensive technology, but that can transcribe literally everything you say, a full episode without writing. And why that's important is because, as Steve said, I would have never gone into a job interview, and said I can't write, though I can't. Because what I in fact am doing is looking and saying, I produce written work by means of voice recognition software. So this is what we're going to need to set up, so that I can do that. I recommend you do that for anything that you see on the job description, if you perceive that, something different that you need in order to get it done, go in and say I do this this way, but I can get done what you need. And if there is something that you just don't have a solution for yet, there is a moment when you can sort of say, look, I have solutions to 99% of what's on this list. I am extraordinarily successful, I'm the talent that you want, can we work together to figure out how we can close the gap on this one thing? Sometimes it might mean that that one specific thing is assigned to somebody else. Sometimes the employer knows of a solution that you didn't think of. I'll be quite honest; when I was at a law firm helping them figure out accommodations for my fellow lawyers as they came in, I was regularly turning those lawyers on to technological solutions that they had never heard of. So it doesn't hurt to find out what the employer might know that will get you to success.

>> Steve Bartlett: Very good. So then the next one is what can an organization do - from the perspective of an employer - if they lack the funds to make the necessary accommodations? Well the short answer is, do engineering, figure out a solution that you can afford that will get the job done, and it's amazing with some creativity, how reasonable accommodations can be quite reasonable. Not in every case, and for those that does require extra funds, I'm going to go to Philip, if you have suggestions of where employers can look for funding for accommodations.

>> Philip Kahn-Pauli: So first and foremost from the employer perspective, yes, disabilities are very unique, but there are certain common themes and common solutions that you could draw from. One of our great partners in this work is a place called EARN, it's the employer assistance rehabilitation network. And so EARN is part of askjan.org which we've mentioned, askearn.org, and EARN specifically is intended for employers who need to come up with accommodation solutions. And so they've got a great website that's broken down by different categories of disability, different categories of accommodation, and in fact, you'll hear a lot, and it's incredibly true. Most accommodations cost less than $500 for an employer. So the value prospect of providing an accommodation to a worker with a disability is there. It's just, you need to look at what has worked for other people, and then adapt that solution to the specific circumstance that you're finding yourself in as an employer, or as a worker with a disability.

>> Steve Bartlett: Very good, just keep working on the solution until you engineer it in a way that you can find the money, or it's affordable. Philip, the next one's coming to you also. It involves hearing loss for senior citizens in the sense of community centers, and auditoriums, and recreation centers that don't have the hearing devices that put the information up front. And so communication deprivation, it says, it's true, leads to isolation and dementia. Is there anything in the works to get regulations inserted for the hearing links, and volume assist?

>> Philip Kahn-Pauli: Well that's a great question, and he really emphasizes that something like 35 million people with and without disabilities have some kind of hearing loss, and so it is one of those issues where the interests of the disability community align with the interests of older Americans. I'm not aware of any specific regulations around this issue, but I think it is a chance for some -- A different form of that civic engagement we were talking about earlier is you should work with your community organizations. You should direct them to some of RespectAbility's inclusion ideas. Jennifer always likes to bring up if you're gonna put out a video of some kind at a community event, put it up on YouTube first, use the auto-generated captions as a way of bootstrapping a transcripted video so that you can provide a little bit more accessibility than just playing a video that nobody can hear or understand. So I'm not sure of anything specifically moving in Washington on these issues but, you know...

>> Steve Bartlett: But it does give us an idea for a new project for Philip. He needs more to do.

>> Philip Kahn-Pauli: Ha, definately need more work.

>> Steve Bartlett: The key would be in terms of regulation for new construction or new facilities, because sound lift technology is so amazingly cheap if you build it into the facility when you build it in the first place. If you wait until you have to retrofit it, it becomes more expensive. It's still affordable but more expensive. And the last one is going to go to Lauren, I think. You can read it, but during town hall with CSA casting directors -- the casting directors often told us that they cannot ask about our disabilities, but they feel more comfortable if they're invited to ask, because unless they're explicitly invited to ask, they can't legally ask. I'll ask Lauren and Matan to talk about that, but self-identifying helps them out. I now invite them to -- so, essentially what would your comment be about casting directors that want to ask about a disability and they believe they're prohibited? Matan or Lauren, either one?

>> Lauren Appelbaum: As Matan can add to after this, there are some legalities on if you can actually -- an employer can't actually ask and say do you have a disability? And for those of us with non-visible disabilities like myself, people wouldn't be able to tell that. And as I mentioned before, in the entertainment industry where in the same way - as well as some government contractors - where there is a push to hire more people with disabilities, it can be a plus to self-identify. So I think it involves doing some research on the industry as well as on the employer if it makes sense for you to self-identify, or as this person said, to basically say that they welcome them to ask that question.

>> Steve Bartlett: Matan, is that about right?

>> Matan Koch: That's about right, and to the end, I think, because I know we have a mixture of employee-side, and employer-side people on the call, I want to point out that it's particularly useful, therefore, for employers or casting directors, whomever - to make the affirmative statement of what they're looking for. You can't ask an individual what their disability status is, that's true, but you can absolutely say, as every federal employer does now in its job application, that it is making a special effort around people with disabilities, and give people the option to disclose because of that special effort. So you can always invite it as a positive thing as opposed to inquiring.

>> Steve Bartlett: Yeah, I think the casting director can say this is what we're looking for, and then let the interviewees respond. The next one is an answer to me. Thank you very much, assisted living listening systems are required for communal rooms with over 50 seats, fixed or not, by the ADA or ADA regulations. I didn't know that, but I'm glad to hear it. It should be extended to even more in my opinion, including frankly the classrooms, but we won't get into that. The next one is what kind of specific legislation - Philip, this is for you - should we currently be pushing for to better include and protect people living with disabilities? Philip?

>> Philip Kahn-Pauli: I mean, I think there's so many different ways you could answer that. You could talk about the importance of community living, when we've seen so many people with disabilities and others dying from living in institutional settings or being in congregate settings. We've seen the fact that the unemployment insurance protections that had been extended at the beginning of the pandemic just ran out today and millions are going to be left out in the cold, literally and figuratively. But I think the biggest and most important thing at the moment is obviously, we need to get our voices heard through platforms like voteability.com, But really, the things in Washington are the way they are and as we've seen, so much of the answer to moving issues forward, helping people with disabilities, has to come at the state level. There's 50 different Governors out there that you can advocate that they think about our issues, think about that video from Hogan today. I think about the leadership he's shown dealing with COVID, or the work that Ariella and the rest of our team did pushing states to embrace SNAP delivery saving lives. And so, as we look at ways of getting -- as we work on new ways of getting our nation to a higher ideal around disability issues, I think that we really as a community need to focus and push our states. We need to reach out to our Governors, we need to reach out the heads of our state Departments of Labor, state health departments, about what they're doing to either get people with disabilities back to work, ensure that we have access to health care, that we're staying safe from this deadly virus. And so if you have a passion for working in Washington, or working on Washington issues, great. Go to VoteAbility is your first step, get involved with our work. But really I think push your states. We've got a lot of state level elections coming up where we need community members to call candidates and say why aren't you filling out the RespectAbility questionnaire? Or what is your stance on home and community-based services to support workers with disabilities, and so really, I think where we need to focus so much more of our effort is at the states, because those are where we call home, and that's where we can have a difference as members of this wider community.

>> Steve Bartlett: Well stated. And then this last question sort of plays into that - is what I think is the most important federal legislation for the coming ten years. Elizabeth writes in, and says why can't we work a great paying job, and keep our medical benefits? Also if you get married to a non-disabled, why would you lose your benefits? Well there is the big question of the next 10 years that needs some -- we have a number of ways in which federal law, just simply puts a very low ceiling on people with disabilities, as if we somehow require someone with a disability to always be poor. So the answer is, number one, is to use the existing laws, section 1619, that allows a person to then re- qualify for Medicare if they subsequently lose their job. The difficulty is it's not an automatic re-qualification. You have to go through the process again, both 1619, and a companion on SSI. So the law is there, but the enforcement of the law takes 18 months to two years, where upon the person with a disability has no medical benefits, and no job, is out of their Medicare and Medicaid, so that would be job one. And then secondly is we have this awful asset cap law for SSI particularly, that says -- that's the two thousand dollars in assets in order to qualify for SSI. And it's just unthinkable that we would tell people that they can never have more than two thousand dollars in order to qualify for something they otherwise qualify for. And that's what keeps a lot of other people unemployed, so I think that's the big one that you'll see RespectAbility and other groups working on the next 10 years is how to solve that problem to allow people with disabilities to get a job, and get a good job, and to create some assets. So Jennifer, I'm going to turn it back over to you, I think we are not quite out of questions, but we are out of time. One last one - Philip, I see, who would we contact in our state to find out about disability issues? Philip, you want to give them the website so we can give them the answers to their state?

>> Philip Kahn-Pauli: Well I would first direct you to reach out to me personally. My email address is PhillipP@RespectAbility.org. I do a lot of outreach, I've got multiple lists of state agencies that you can contact. Look at the Department of Labor - the federal Department of Labor, they've got listings for all of the state agencies, and I do apologize about my cat interviewing with the last question.

>> Steve Bartlett: So every state has something called a disability council, and that's a good place to start. [Crosstalk] Philip, yeah Philip will give you your specific states. There's countless agencies that you can contact, and get involved, back to the earlier panel with Matan. The most important thing is to get involved, is to pick out something that you can do, someone you can contact, but to begin speaking out. So if you don't speak up, then you won't be heard, That's the way it is. So - terrific week. This has been a huge success for the disability community globally and in the nation, thousands of participants every day. We've had 75 plus speakers, thank you for those speakers. I also want to again thank our sponsors, Comcast NBCUniversal, Sony Pictures Entertainment, and The Walt Disney Company, and Murray/Reese Foundation for making the possibility. RespectAbility is the organization that sponsored this. We fight stigmas and we advance opportunities for people with disabilities. We hope that you will get even more involved with us in the future, and in your communities, and politics, but learn more at RespectAbility.org. We're currently recruiting volunteers and Fellows. We could use your help in our grassroots efforts where we'll give you information that you can then contact your local officials or your candidates. So it's a well-rounded way to end the well-rounded week, your thoughtful questions and answers, where all signs that our 30 year old ADA is -- well, the glass is not yet half full, it's perhaps a third full and the next time we meet, maybe we'll get up to half full and then all the way full. This week, we've seen that we still have a long way to go. The more we mobilize, harness our collective energies and commit to essential collaboration, the faster and more effectively we can fight stigmas and advance opportunities together. By doing so, we can speed up the process so that people with disabilities will be fully participating in all aspects of community. I look forward to connecting with you, and on behalf of the thousands of volunteers and supporters at RespectAbility.org, the Board of Directors, and our fabulous CEO, Jennifer Mizrahi, we thank you. We look forward to staying connected. Thank you.