Philip Kahn-Pauli: Good afternoon and welcome to the RespectAbility webinar for October 15 2020. We are just weeks away from the 2020 election and it is an election like no other - I will leave it at that. This has been a deeply conflicted, deeply divided election where the news changes day by day. But the issues that matter most to the millions of Americans living with disabilities are present and present in ways that they haven't been before. I’m joining a great panel of really insightful advocates, thought leaders, activists who are on the front lines of these issues, who have done research on these issues, who live these issues. And as ever with RespectAbility I'm going to start out by talking through a few statistics.

So I'm going to share my screen and bring up the PowerPoint for today's webinar. It is a friendly reminder for everyone there are roughly 61 million people with disabilities living in the United States today and we all want opportunities just like anyone else. Now — put it another way, that means there's about one in four adults who have a disability. And that covers the categories of physical, sensory, cognitive, mental health and other issues. I think it's very important to also always remember that disability is a cross-sectional, intersectional issue. There are people with disabilities in every underrepresented community in America today. The issues that impact African American people, Latinx people, women, the LGBTQ+ community, are all issues that impact people with disabilities who belong to both the disability community and those individual underrepresented communities.

So in total I am joined by four other fantastic hosts today who will be sharing their perspectives and their insights. And we're going sequentially. Bo will be presenting some slides, I will be talking through some slides, and then we're switching to a panel format where each speaker will be going through and answering questions that I am asking as your moderator.

So first up we have Bo Harmon, President of PTP mobile, who has also joined me previously for another webinar we did back in May talking about these very same things. We’ve also got Jack Rosen, the voter engagement specialist from the National Disability Rights Network, who's going to be helping talk about barriers to access with some of NDRN’s work with voters. We’ve got Andrea Jennings from the lovely state of California who's going to be sharing her insights both on local issues and her experiences as an engaged voter with disabilities. And then, I’m really excited that we've got Melissa Yingst joining us. She is a person with a disability but she's also a journalist, and so that intersection of disability and journalism is what she'll be sharing with us today. So I am going to transition now. I’m going to turn off my screen, I’ve got control of the PowerPoint deck, but Bo and Jack, please turn on your screens and here are your slides and let's get talking.

Bo Harmon: Thank you Philip. Jack, why don't you introduce NDRN and some of the work that we've been doing?

Jack Rosen: Sure. NDRN is the membership association for the protection and advocacy network. The P&As are federally mandated. And there is one in every state, U.S. territory, as well as one in Washington, D.C., and one in the four corners region specializing in assisting the Native American community there. What we do is we provide training and technical assistance to members of the P&A network, as well as advocate for issues such as increasing funding to the network, and for legislation that would improve the lives of people with disabilities. One area that we focus on is protecting the right of people with disabilities to vote, dealing with things such as barriers including inaccessible polling places. We released a report that found in fact 60 percent of polling places do not meet full ADA compliance, and through our network we work to fix situations like that, as well as to reduce other barriers such as guardianship. Recently, in addition to protecting the right to vote, we've moved into the space of voter engagement and tried to get both candidates to do more to understand and reach out to the disability community, as well as to get voters who are disabled to go out and cast their ballots. In that vein, earlier this year we commissioned this research with the Lake Research Group polling voters with disabilities. We also recently came across a battleground poll that was commissioned and asked about people with disabilities. With that, I'm going to turn things over to Bo who can walk you through the research.

Bo Harmon: Thank you Jack. One of the things that was really fascinating to me when we started this work about two years ago was the total lack of information about the political preferences and behaviors of people with disabilities. That we have decades of polling information on the political beliefs and behaviors of dozens of other demographic groups, you know, whether that's racial groups from African Americans and Latinos and white voters and Asian voters, to religious groups, you know, we have information on the on the political beliefs and behaviors of Jewish voters versus Evangelical voters versus Catholic voters, for example. And very little to none on the beliefs and behaviors of the disability community. So we begin to ask why that was. We talked to dozens of pollsters who work for political candidates, who work for media outlets, The Washington Post and NBC and AP and all of those organizations. We talked to academic pollsters and the most common answer that we heard was when asking why don't you include this among your demographic questions was we hadn't thought of it - nobody asked before. And so we began encouraging that and we kicked it off with some substantive research work - both focus groups and polling of the beliefs and behaviors of the disability community. And what we found is not surprising to many of you on this webinar but it was surprising, I feel like, to a lot of the elected officials that we shared this information with - that the disability community feels very unheard, very unrepresented by elected officials basically at every level, and would be willing to support candidates of whatever party that do show work on behalf of the disability community, making that a priority amongst their policy recommendations.

And in so doing, if candidates make disability issues a priority, the disability community is more likely to switch parties in greater numbers than any other swing voter group in all of America. We have two presidential campaigns and dozens of senate races and governors races all beating the bushes to find any voter who hasn't already made up their mind. And what we found is if they focused on disability issues then they would have tens of thousands of undecided voters who could be persuaded to join their effort. The battleground poll is one conducted by Tarrance Group, a Republican polling firm, and Lake Research, a democratic polling firm, together on behalf of a number of media outlets and they included disabilities, you know, at our suggestion and recommendation in their most recent battleground survey of thousands of people nationwide. And Philip, if we could go ahead and take the next slide. One of the things that we found is that if elected officials do not make disability issues a priority, then without that as a factor, the disability community votes just like everybody else - even numbers of Republican and Democrat voters, equal numbers of Biden versus Trump supporters, people who identify as conservative or moderate or progressive. You see here the Presidential level 40 percent Trump, 53 percent Biden on the total overall when this was taken. If you look down here at the bottom, impacted by disability, that number is exactly the same 41-40, 51-54 between those impacted by disability and those not. The same way with party ID, whether you identified generally as a Republican or a Democrat, same thing. In the absence of a focus on disability issues, the disability community votes exactly like the population in total. Next slide please.

We see this again at the congressional ballot level, equal numbers of those impacted by disability and not impacted by disability planning to vote for Republicans for congress or Democrats for congress. Same way with Trump favorable rating they — in the absence of these issues - they view politics the same way as the total population. Next slide please.

And what we see though is when we begin to really dig into some of this we see that this population is more persuadable, is not as firm in their support or opposition of either candidate. And it validates exactly the finding that we had from our own research that the disability community is ripe to be one of the largest swing voter groups in the whole country. We see that they are the most likely of all voters to vote, more likely to turn out by four percentage points, which, in a presidential election that had several states decided by less than a handful of thousands of votes, that is more than enough to change any of those state results. Same thing with the direction of the country. They're a little bit more pessimistic about the overall direction of the country than the population at large. If we look at the next slide we see similar findings —

that the disability community is more likely to say that they are undecided at this stage of the election. And this survey was taken in early September, so it's recent it's relevant but not within the last week so to say. But you can see here that there are higher numbers of people within the disability community who either claim to be totally undecided or only leaning towards one candidate or the other. Again those indications of willingness to change parties, if they have incentive of someone addressing issues critical to their day-to-day lives, and in the absence of that, they vote the same as everyone else. The next slide again.

Here we see that they are less strident in their opinions of Donald Trump. Those who have very strongly favorable views or very unstrongly favorable views are those who are most likely to be locked into a candidate least likely to change their votes. And we see that the disability community is significantly more likely than those not impacted by disability to be in the middle, not to be very strongly favorable or very strongly favorable, again, indicating that they could be persuaded by either party. One more slide.

And again, it’s not just on the Trump side. It's on both sides. The disability community is persuadable. We see that reflected that they are less favorable to both Biden and Harris than the non-disabled community and the population at large. So there — while their overall voting numbers that we saw at the beginning indicate that they are voting in similar numbers to the population in total, we see that that support is not as firm, is not as locked in, that they're not as sold, so to speak, on either candidate. The next slide please.

Again we see this on the issue comparisons. 14 percent of the total disability population is unfavorable toward both candidates. During the 2016 election we know that that population, those who disliked both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, that that percentage was ended up going about 70 percent for Donald Trump and providing more than enough for his margin of error. And so the unfavorable to both candidates category is essentially a proxy for being an undecided voter or an uncommitted voter. And we see that significantly higher amongst the disability community here. A couple more pieces of evidence of this kind of swinginess or persuadability, you can see in the next slide Phillip.

We see that they are five percent more likely to have had job loss. Again this was taken early September. So this was after the entire summer of COVID lockdowns, the massive increase in job loss that accompanied that over the summer. And significantly higher percentages of those either personally disabled or otherwise part of the disability community with a close friend or relative or someone in their household with a disability, that those individuals were significantly more likely to have had negative economic impact from the recent COVID pandemic than the non-disability community. Next slide.

Again, this shows similar impact of the economic crisis on the disability community being significantly heavier on those with disabilities, making them less — typically again — less committed in their vote and more willing to join candidates who focus on issues that are critically important to that community. Next slide.

Okay, that is the — that's the end of the survey questions kind of demonstrating the persuadability of the disability community in this most recent battleground poll. And I share that because it very much validates and reflects the work that we did with NDRN on our own and are encouraging other pollsters, Republicans, Democrats, media pollsters, academic pollsters to continue to include disabilities amongst their demographic questions, so that we can begin to build this store of knowledge and information and understanding and awareness of where the disability community falls politically, better understanding their motivations, their political behaviors and beliefs. And this is a critical first step to doing it. And what we find again most importantly is that candidates who do focus on those issues have enormous opportunity to pick up undecided voters or to create undecided voters where they didn't exist before.

Philip Kahn-Pauli: Thank you so much Bo and Jack and so I'm going to pivot now and talk about some of RespectAbility's own outreach work, both in past election cycles this current election cycles, talk about some of the responses we've gotten, share some of that information. And so you know since RespectAbility was founded we've been tracking political campaign issues as they impact people with disabilities. On this slide here, I have a picture from the campaign trail back in 2016, which was a long time ago it feels like, and we have a series of pictures of RespectAbility team members speaking respectively from top to bottom: Bernie Sanders, Hillary Clinton, Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio, the man who would become the President, John Kasich, as well as - you may not remember him anymore - but Jeb Bush. And we show these pictures because we actually as an organization made a commitment to educate candidates about the importance of voters with disabilities, trying to make the pitch that — why campaigns should go out and reach out to this community. We did this again in this election cycle, and so now I'm showing a slide that outlines pictures from this cycle of former Vice President Biden, Senator Warren, Senator Sanders, Andrew Yang, the President again, Pete Buttigieg, as well as Cory Booker, the great Senator from New Jersey. And so we did this in several parts. In the early part of the campaign, back in 2019, we hosted a series of training events just like we did in 2016. And these training events were talking about campaign accessibility. We tried to make the pitch about why you would want to make your campaign website accessible, why you'd need — why you should have closed captioning on your videos, talked about the importance of writing disability policy positions. We actually started seeing something different than 2016. In 2016, when she was the Democratic nominee, Hillary Clinton hosted an event and put out a part of her website that talked about disability and talked about her plans for people with disabilities. Now it was a relatively short piece and was relatively publicly ignored event, but that has changed in many ways, at least in the democratic presidential primary. Elizabeth Warren, who is famous for having disability plans, came out with a very comprehensive plan that reflected a lot of different issues. Bernie Sanders also came out with a plan. And I would note interestingly, Sanders deliberately released his disability plan the Friday before the Iowa caucus. Now obviously, the caucuses ended up not turning out that great, but I do think it was really interesting that he was being very strategic in presenting the case about why you should vote for him as a disrupter. And that goes back to the electoral piece that Bo talked about and captured in that battleground poll. People with disabilities consistently say that the country is going in the wrong direction and that they need a change — a positive change for the better. And you know, candidates like Sanders and candidate Trump made that appeal, that I can change the system, I can fix things. Now obviously Biden has ended up as the democratic nominee, and if you go to Biden's website it does have a very thorough disability plan that reflects a lot of the priorities that we saw from other candidates - from Yang’s plan, from Warren's plan, even some of the ideas from Bernie Sanders’s plan.

This is also the point I have to remind you that RespectAbility is a 501c3 nonpartisan non-profit organization that neither rates nor endorses candidates, and I will say that over this course of time we have also been reaching out consistently to Republicans and Democrats, providing them equal information, providing the same data and trying to encourage them to be active and proactive on this community. So once the presidential primary wrapped up in that very brief period of time between February and the beginning of the COVID pandemic, RespectAbility pivoted to focus on key Senate races and key Governors races because those are critically important races. And they're also races where that really directed focused engagement with, you know, underrepresented communities can make the difference between victory or defeat, whether you're going to Washington or going to the governor's mansion. We did a little bit of this back in the 2016 cycle, but we did something different this time. During the presidential primary we had a 15 question long questionnaire that covered a lot of things. It covered stigmas, employment, education, immigration, police violence, independent living, social security, technology and veterans issues. We did that because we wanted to provide voters in the primaries — and I will say we also reached out to the Joe Walsh campaign, as well as the very brief campaign of Mark Sanford on the Republican side, and we have consistently reached out to the Trump campaign and at one point they said they were going to complete our questionnaire but then events outside of the campaign intervened. And so you know when we switched from talking about the Senate to talking about the Senate and talking about Governors, we decided to shorten our questionnaire to just talk about seven questions. And if you're curious about what those seven questions are and how candidates responded, I would direct all of the audience members to go to [voteability.com](http://voteability.com), also known as The RespectAbility Report which is our non-partisan commentary on the intersection of disability and politics. Over the next couple days we're going to be releasing summaries of those seven questions and how candidates responded. Now we talked to a lot of campaigns, we talked to a lot of candidates in all of the different states. And these are the people that completed the questionnaire or otherwise answered our questions. And so I'm just going to quickly run through them.

And so, first up, we did get a completed questionnaire from the Biden campaign. You can find that on our website. We also got a really interesting response from Doug Jones who is the embattled Democrat in Alabama who is fighting to keep a seat against Tommy Tuberville. We also got a response from John Hickenlooper, the former governor of Colorado who is running against Cory Gardner. And I will say that, just as an observation, Senator Cory Gardner who is an embattled Republican, is missing out on a significant pool of voters because he didn't complete our questionnaire, despite actually being in the senate the co-sponsor of the Disability Integration Act, the major civil rights bill that so many disability groups have been pushing for for years. Gardner became a co-sponsor because of pressure and education from ADAPT, yet now when he's in the political battle of his life he isn't reaching out to the very voters that he previously committed to support. So again, we neither rate nor endorse, but I'm providing you information about what is happening. We also got a response from Theresa Greenfield of Iowa. Interestingly we got campaign responses from both Senator Susan Collins of Maine and her opponent Sara Gideon. I encourage you to take a look at that because that is one of those hotly contested issues. Likewise we got campaign responses from Governor John Carney of Delaware who is — whoops I'm gonna go back — running for reelection. He doesn't face a terribly competitive race but he talks a lot about his background in education and what his plans are to make education better for students with disabilities. Mike Cooney, the Lieutenant Governor of Montana, is in a very close race to become the Governor of Montana. I also am very pleased to report that both candidates in the Montana Senate race completed our questionnaire. Current Governor Steve Bullock, the Democrat, is running against incumbent Senator Steve Daines and they're really neck and neck right now. And interestingly, Bullock talked a lot about the work he had done as a Governor to help Montanans with disabilities. Likewise, Daines talks about his legislative record supporting things like IDEA, WIOA, and some of those other laws. Running through things - incumbent Democratic Governor Roy Cooper talked about his record, talked a lot about employment and the efforts they've made in North Carolina. David Zuckerman from Vermont actually, in his response to our questionnaire, included his official newsletter that they submitted on the 30th anniversary of the ADA so check that out. Both candidates in the senate race in North Carolina submitted answers to our questionnaires, as did the incumbent Republican and the insurgent Democrat in the Indiana Governor's race. And lastly, Ben Salango, who's running against Governor Jim Justice in West Virginia, responded to our questionnaire. So I encourage you again to go to our website votability.com and read these responses in full.

As a second piece of this, after months of emails and phone calls to campaigns we then have pivoted as a RespectAbility team providing state voter guides for all 50 states. And so I realize that the slide is very very small but when you get it you can go and link to it directly. And we wrote these voter guides to provide clear information, both where candidates responded answers to our questions, but also data on the state and links to further resources such as where to register to vote or who's running in your local elections. So if you want to know where your state stands or how things are going, go to those state voter guides. And so I'm going to switch off the slides now and we are going to switch from the talking heads to the panel of talking heads. And so first up I want to call on Andrea Jennings, who is a model, a public speaker, a commissioner from as I said from the great state of California. She actually has a masters in music which I think is really neat, as well as music business and entertainment industries. And so you have the honor of our first question if that's all right. So Andrea, you know, as a person with a disability, how do you want your elected officials or candidates for public office to talk about disability issues, and what actions do you want to see them to take to take in terms of outreach to our community?

Andrea Jennings: That's a good question and first of all let me thank you for inviting me to be here today. It’s an honor and a privilege to be able to speak on these issues as they're extremely important. First of all, 57 million people in the United States have a disability, some sort of a disability. One in three households in America include someone with a disability. And so to those points he pointed out a lot of statistics. So those are some of the — my concerns as a citizen. And these are my opinions, by the way, you know, they're my own opinions. I feel that a lot of the people with disabilities should be concerned about issues that disproportionately affect them. And so some of those issues are housing, employment, health care quality, access to quality health care. Keep in mind that when you intersect other underrepresented identities to being a person with a disability, your access sometimes is even affected more, such as people of color that are children. Sometimes their access to education is different, it’s even less access than most people would have. So those are some issues — housing, access to voting, there's so many issues at hand, it’s so important. And I would love to see the candidates address those issues because of the stats. The great news is that people are showing up at the polls already. So a report showed that in these last 30 days so far, the eligible voters with disabilities - that number has increased I believe by 20 percent.

Philip Kahn-Pauli: Wow.

Andrea Jennings: Right? That’s amazing. That's good news. So we have a voice, we have a power, we're using it so I'm really happy to see that. As opposed to non-disabled voters, they increased by 12 percent. But this report showed that this makes people with disabilities a huge— that we're a huge voice, we have a lot of voting power, we really have a lot of power but we still have a long way to go. We still have a lot of work to do. And so these are some of the issues. I would want to see the candidates talk about increased funding to some of those issues that I just spoke about, because we can say that we're going to do something, but we do need the funding to support that and back those situations up, those issues up. So that's very important to me. To engage with your local officials is very important, the local and state voting issues. I mean this has to do with voting for sheriffs, and judge, and judges, and your county clerks — it's just so many things that's so important on a local and a state issue. And again, those candidates have a responsibility to engage with the largest - the largest underrepresented group in America. And someone like myself, I wasn't born with a disability. I actually acquired a disability while going to work, while driving to work one day. So even if you're not a person with a disability, at any given time you can become a person with a disability. You can have a child that has a disability in the future. So these are issues that - even if they don't affect you directly, they could one day. And I would want to engage with my elected issues and officials, and talk about these issues because when one underrepresented group is affected, it affects everyone, believe it or not. And so those are some of the things that I would really want to discuss with those elected officials, and I would expect for them to engage people and talk about some of these issues as well.

Philip Kahn-Pauli: Absolutely. And I will say that I'm going to pivot to Melmira now. So if you can get your video on. That is one of those challenges that we have, now that we're campaigning in a virtual space. You know, you can't go to a town hall and, you know, sit in the front of the audience in the ADA section, raise your hand and get a microphone. It’s a lot harder to interact now. So I'm going to pivot, we'll get to audience questions in a little bit but Melmira, thank you so much for joining us today.

Melissa Yingst: Great, I’m happy to be here with you guys.

Philip Kahn-Pauli: All right, so I have a two-part question for you. So the first part is, as a journalist, what do you think your fellow journalists need to know about covering disability issues during a campaign? And then second: as a person with a disability yourself, what do people in our community need to understand about interacting and educating journalists about our issues?

Melissa Yingst: Okay, I think number one issue is just again accessibility. You know in journalism, we all have to write forms, and all that information can be very overwhelming for all of us. English is always our first language, but our first language is really ASL. It's some kind of sign language. So we think we have to make sure that all of the information there is accessible in sign language. That's why it's so important to do partnerships with deaf advocacy groups, deaf media, to see if you can work with them and create that information and make it accessible for everyone. But so many of us are in the same boat, just like you guys. There's so much information out there that we don't know, and it's overwhelming, and we're not sure who to trust, so that kind of information is really important. And yes, for us we need to know which candidates, their perspectives on all our issues that support us and our rights. It’s our right to have our knowledge, and we have our humanity. We can see who stands for that humanity for us. We need that information. I think journalists need to keep in mind that our needs are just like anyone else’s. It’s just the delivery of information is different. So we need to focus on that accessibility.

Philip Kahn-Pauli: Absolutely thank you so I want to pull in Jack and Bo now, because I want to talk about some of those barriers that we mentioned. And I also say that we have an audience question about guardianship, so Jack and Bo, what are some of those barriers to turning out the disability vote, and also interestingly what are some of the barriers that people might not think about in terms of getting people with disabilities out and voting?

Jack Rosen: Well there are several barriers, to start with some of the more common ones — and it's funny you know people ask if COVID has changed it. In a lot of ways it hasn’t, but it has exacerbated what was already a problem. Although to give you a newsworthy example, the kind of long lines we're seeing right now are you know real barriers to voters with mobility issues, to those with, for instance, also something like arthritis or chronic pain, where it may be difficult for them to stand in a multiple hour line to cast their ballot. So that in and of itself is a barrier. But that is not the only one either. As I mentioned before, 60 percent of polling places do not meet full ADA compliance. That means the majority of polling places in this country are not fully ADA compliant. That alone is a huge barrier. In addition a couple of others as I mentioned, one being guardianship laws, that in some states when someone enters into a guardianship arrangement, they automatically lose their right to vote or the judge kind of pro-forma takes away their right to vote, because no one really brings up the issue during the guardianship hearing. And finally another barrier, and one I think that perhaps could even be worsened a bit this year, is not having poll workers who have received enough training on how to operate the accessible voting equipment. And that is a bit of a concern this year since the majority of poll workers tend to be older. And while we're not sure if there'll be a poll worker shortage or not, there's going to be a lot of people who this is their first time being a poll worker. So hopefully they're being trained on how to use the accessible equipment. But we expect there could be a couple of problems come election day with that.

Philip Kahn-Pauli: Gotcha, thank you Jack. Any input Bo?

Bo Harmon: Yeah I saw a comment from Robin that one of the barriers is the lack of targeted campaigning to the disability community, and I have to say I totally agree that — you know, we hear all of the campaigns talking to different demographic groups, maybe African Americans, or catholic voters or LGBT voters, telling them again and again we need your vote, you have to come out, your vote is critically important. And we hear very little of that towards the disability community. So I would agree that that that is one of the things that could really help boost turnout is more engagement from elected officials and from candidates. I would say that yes - all of the barriers that Jack noted are real and significant and need to be addressed. All of that said, in 2018 the midterm elections, the disability — voters with disabilities demonstrated the largest increase of any demographic group in the election. There was higher turnout amongst numerous groups — almost all groups turned out in higher proportion in 2018 than they had the previous midterm. But nobody had a larger jump in turnout proportion than the disability community. And with COVID, the expanded ability for vote by mail and absentee and early vote programs, I think those sorts of things really offer the opportunity for the disability community, particularly individuals with disabilities, to have access to the ballot box in ways that they might not have before. So I see that as a real positive trend.

Philip Kahn-Pauli: great thank you I'm going to pivot to Andrea again. And you know, I want to say — I know it was some time ago and it was last year, but you know you served your local community as the accessibility and disability commissioner for the city of Pasadena. And I bring that up because engagement at the local level is so important. And so I'm curious, what are some ways that people with disabilities can get more involved in local political issues and get involved with local elections?

Andrea Jennings: Thank you for that question. Again these are my opinions. I just feel, what people can do, especially now in the pandemic, is find out as much as you can about what's on that ballot. Educate yourself. You know, that's really important that you understand everything on that ballot, because you know propaganda exists, and so you want to make sure that you are understanding that correctly. You know, there are websites that can help you understand that. Reach out to elected officials - even though we are in a pandemic, you can email, you can reach out to them. There are a lot of webinars that are being given in lieu of being in person. So that's one way that we can do that as well. But stay engaged you know. Right now, people with disabilities are disproportionately affected by many issues and the pandemic is one of them. So that's even more of a reason why we need to stay engaged and get involved in your local and state elections, like I mentioned before. The presidential vote is very important, but as we see in current times right now, who's on the Senate is extremely important as well. The senate seats are so important, and when you're in the senate it actually — you know, it's a very lengthy term. And so we want to make sure that we understand all of those things on the ballot so education is key.

Philip Kahn-Pauli: Definitely. And I will say that for example there's a website called Ballotopedia that actually has a great rundown of local elections, because oftentimes local elections are in off years. They'll be in, you know, 2021, not the years where you have a congressional vote or a big Presidential vote. So you know you got to get out there and find out what you can.

Andrea Jennings: And also can I add this that to your point once we — once this voting year is over, that's a great point that you're making, that we have to stay engaged. In order to see change, we have to follow through and keep voting, you know, every two years, vote. You know a lot of people after they vote for the four-year elections they — you know — that whole interest dies down. So I encourage people to stay engaged.

Philip Kahn-Pauli: Absolutely. All right we're going to bring Melissa back because I have another journalism question. All right, so Melissa, as we talked a little — you talked about this a little bit and Andrea touched on this is — the most important issues in America today all have disability components to them. Police violence against african Americans is a disability issue. Switching to virtual learning because of the pandemic impact students with disabilities. But really, you know, how can advocates with disabilities help journalists understand those intersection of issues? What can we do to really engage with them and tell our stories about what it means to be a person with a disability who is an African-American or be a student with a disability and have to struggle virtually - so how can we tell our stories?

Melissa Yingst: You mean how can I find stories, or how can you share stories?

Philip Kahn-Pauli: Both.

Melissa Yingst: Okay. So what's happening in the mainstream world is also affecting all of us, right, and the deaf community too. Many of us are people of color, many of us are queer, so yes, it's very important to make sure that we consider and we share those stories. For example, if I want to go participate in a movement or march, it's not always accessible for us. That in itself is really a big barrier. There's many people that are willing to provide accessibility by writing or giving an interpreter, so that's always appreciated, but really it's never fully equally accessible for us. And our movements — movements are really movements, but they're not really movements unless the whole community is involved. So I think we all need to think about how we frame our stories so we can get it in better audience. That way we can reach out to the deaf community, and not just deaf - deaf-blind, deaf-disabled, many of us we have smaller disabled communities within our communities. So we have our bubbles and we are all oppressed, so again, it’s huge for us to try and share our stories.

Philip Kahn-Pauli: Yeah and that becomes such a challenge of — especially now, you know, we can be so isolated but we need to build those connections across our communities. So thank you and I was going to say can you plug your plug-ables Melissa? Where can they find you and where can they find out more about your work?

Melissa Yingst: Oh okay okay. I just want to add real fast - one thing that really gives us somewhat is social media. So with that in mind, to answer your question, make sure that your stories, anything, your webinars all of those stuff are perfect examples. That's what accessibility looks like. If you have a sign language interpreter like you have here or captions here, I think anyone can share that stuff. We all need to use our individual social medias as a platform and share the good stories. If you want someone to reach them with their stories and you want to spread it to your community, make sure again it's accessible, but we share it.

Philip Kahn-Pauli: Absolutely. All right and —

Melissa Yingst: So okay, you can find me on — I’m very active on Instagram and on Facebook with my name Melmira, I often touch on many issues that have to do with our community. Some of the content is really important for our community to know and if I see anything like that, I’ll take it, I’ll turn into a video, I’ll talk with people and we can see everything in our language.

Philip Kahn-Pauli: Fantastic. Thank you. And so I'm gonna bring Bo and Jack back and also read out a question slash comment from one of our audience members. So Mark Safman asked if RespectAbility reached out to the campaign in the senate campaign in Tennessee. And I will say that yes we have. Neither the Republican or the Democrat agreed to do our questionnaire. I’m disappointed obviously, they're a little busy. And then last comment before I actually go to my question is I definitely seen an issue this cycle where because so many events are virtual, and because you have the pandemic going on, campaigns are much smaller than they were before. You don't have lots of volunteers because people are scrambling to work a job to stay afloat, because they may have lost their other job. You don't see big campaign staffs in quite the same way as you would in any other cycle. And so I think that creates a resource issue for campaigns to try and engage with the community. And so Bo and Jack, you know, I’m really curious — what I want to ask you is what do you think campaigns should learn from this cycle? What should campaigns learn about engaging with the disability community? What do they need to know and what do they need to do different, in the 19 days we have left, but also in future elections? What can candidates do, do you think?

Jack Rosen: Well I mean I think the first step is accessibility, and I understand that this is a difficult time for everyone including campaigns right now. On the other hand, you know, if you're not making your campaign accessible, then that means there is a segment of the population who is not going to be able to find out where you stand on the issues. So I mean the first step, the bare bare bare minimum, I think, is to make sure your website is tested for screen readers. That is something you should always be doing for really a campaign, but any sort of website that you might have. Beyond that, I mean, we really encourage candidates who are doing virtual events right now to have ideally both closed captioning and ASL interpretation. That would be a big step. And you know, meet with local groups in your area representing members of the disability community. Meet with your local Rev Up chapter for instance, or chapter of the Arc.

Philip Kahn-Pauli: And how about you Bo? I mean, you've worked in campaigns before, so what would you tell campaign staffers or people running campaigns about thinking about getting the disability vote out and active?

Bo Harmon: Yeah what I tell them — I do tell them — is they need to recognize that this is the largest swing voter constituency in their state or their district. And if they are not interested in picking up votes then go about business as usual. If you would like to win some extra votes, and most candidates do, then start making these issues a priority. Talk to leaders in the disability community. Include people with disabilities proactively in your events, in your campaign literature. Have a disability policy section on your website. Coalitions are a huge part of campaigns. They have coalitions for everything from, you know, professions teachers for xyz, and farmers for xyz, to demographic designations, to country of origin, you now, I mean, Italians for so and so, or Germans for so and so. And being able to do the same thing ,having that same sort of outreach to the disability community that, by the way, is many times larger than any of those others.

Philip Kahn-Pauli: Wonderful, thank you. Sorry, I didn't mean to cut you off. Okay, so we did have an audience question, we have couple of audience questions about ballot accessibility and people with intellectual or developmental disabilities. I can see where there's issues of guardianship and understanding things and being plain language. Are there any — are any of you aware of efforts around getting more of the IDD community out and voting?

Jack Rosen: Sure, yeah. I mean, we work, for instance, with SABE - Self Advocates Becoming Empowered — that has done some work there. In addition, we have worked with ASAN, the autistic self advocacy network, to review their toolkit that addresses guardianship issues. We also helped produce a video with them, and I know they do a fair amount of work around, you know, helping individuals who have guardians get involved in the political process. I’m just dropping a link to that toolkit in the chat here. In addition though — just to kind of get to a question that had been brought up about what we do also, you know, our network will assist voters who have a guardian or are entering into a guardianship arrangement so that they can either have their right to vote restored or to never lose it in the first place. So if you or someone you love is going to enter guardianship, and you want to still be able to vote, it’s a good idea to contact your state's P&A to make sure that your right to vote will be preserved.

Philip Kahn-Pauli: Gotcha. Thank you, Jack. So we are getting at — we're almost out of time, so let's bring Melissa and Andrea back so we can ask our final wrap questions. So I’m going to go in sequence, ask you to just kind of provide a closing thought, and I want to just give a shout out to all of these wonderful people who are part of it and who joined us today. So I'm gonna put you on the spot because I see you first, Jack, so far — I realize we're 19 days from the election. We’re facing a great deal of uncertainty. But I'm curious: do you think there are — and this is the question I want for everybody is — what do you think the biggest takeaway for voters with disabilities is from the 2020 cycle? What do we need to learn, and what do we take away from this election?

Jack Rosen: You know, I think that organizing works. I mean, I think the fact that we saw so many candidates put out disability platforms is — and while this is not an endorsement of any candidates, it is a huge step. And, you know, I think the community needs to keep up that pressure, not just in presidential years but next year when many cities will be electing their mayors and a couple of states will be electing their Governors. We need to know where they stand on disability issues. Everyone down to, you know, the candidates running for your local school board. We should know what they'll do, because everything in politics is going to impact the lives of people with disabilities.

Philip Kahn-Pauli: Thank you Jack. All right Melissa, same question. What do we as a community, as the disability community, need to learn from the 2020 election so far?

Melissa Yingst: Really, we need to take it serious. We need to look at two things. Number one: it's very important for deaf people to go and vote. I can't impress that enough. Many people don't realize the most important thing of voting is just voting, so we can't do that again like 2016. In 2020 we all have to vote. And second — same thing is very serious — we all have to look and really decide which candidate is going to let me live my life most comfortably. It really takes a close look at whoever's there, and I can say that one is providing definitely access for their platform, and another one's not, and that's all I'm going to say.

Philip Kahn-Pauli: Thank you.

Melissa Yingst: But we really need to think about those factors, I’m sorry, and what they're doing right now — what they're doing right now is only going to impact what they're going to do for the next four years. That's it.

Philip Kahn-Pauli: Absolutely and thank you Melissa, and as I said everyone go find her YouTube channel and subscribe, and like her videos, okay?

Melissa Yingst: Thank you.

Philip Kahn-Pauli: And then Andrea, you know, that last question like what do we as a community need to learn from 2020?

Andrea Jennings: To not give up. That we've been through a lot of things in 2020. And your voice matters, you matter. Your voice is your power. Don't give it up. As we heard Bo have a conversation about guardianship, so there are people that are still fighting for their right to vote. There's people who still do not have the right to vote. And as someone like myself that sits on the intersection of three underrepresented groups - I’m a black woman with a disability - I haven't given up. I still have hope. And remember, I understand that you may not feel like you're being heard. And that's why there's people like everyone on this panel that will advocate for you. But as Melissa brought up a great point about social media, there are some people with disabilities that cannot communicate the same way that everyone else does. And I’ve noticed that social media has given those people a voice. And it's a very powerful voice. And so voting is your voice as well, and so don't feel discouraged. There's still hope. And I know this sounds so cliche, we hear this all the time. People have fought for your right to vote. People have died for your right to vote. Educate yourselves. If you don't understand about civics, we have YouTube, but educate yourself about the history of voting, and about why people had to fight and why we're still fighting. And again I do understand people being discouraged, because they say that “well, we voted and I don't see change.” Change is like anything else. It’s a process. So once we get policies in place we have to follow through. Stay on top of your local elections and your local officials, and don't — you know, I understand everybody's very hyped up right now, but keep that same energy in your local elections every two years, not just the presidential election. And so that's my biggest — that's what I would love everybody to understand. Mobilize, and understand that if someone is trying to suppress something, that means it's powerful. They’re trying to suppress your vote, there's a reason for that. That's because it's powerful. And remember when you're deciding, I can't tell you who to decide and again, these are my opinions, but I would just say look for someone with accountability, that treats people all people equally, that takes equity into account, because if we're going to admit that there are some opportunities that are not accessible to everyone, then we need to understand what equity means. And so that's where the funding to certain places and certain programs comes in so that we can catch up certain things. It should not be okay that there is the largest segment in America is being treated a particular way and sometimes being ignored. It’s not okay that we don't feel that we're heard. So again there's people like myself that's fighting on your behalf so don't feel alone. But here's the thing, here's the takeaway. You matter. Your voice matters - all by yourself. It matters. Don't give up.

Philip Kahn-Pauli: All right. Well we are overtime so Bo, I'm gonna have to cut you off here. But thank you everyone. Thank you to our panelists for joining us today. Thank you for our attendees for listening to this. If you haven't already voted, go vote. Take care. If you haven't — we are still hoping campaigns will fill out our questionnaire. Thank you everyone for joining us today. Thank you for the panelists. Good luck. Go out. Rock the vote. Okay?