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GSIL
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PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES FORUM

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>>CLYDE TERRY: If everyone could find a place, please.

If everyone could find a place. May I have your
attention? will you all please rise as the New Hampshire state
police drill team post the colors of the great country of the
United States of America.

>> Oh, say can you see. By the dawn's early light. What so
proudly we hail. As the twilight's last gleaming. Whose broad
stripes and bright stars. Through the perilous fight. Or the
ramparts we watched were so gallantly streaming.

And the rockets red glare. The bomb's bursting it in
air. Gave proof to the night. That our flag was still there.

Oh, say does that star spangled banner yet wave. For the
land of the free. And the home of the brave! [Applause.]

>>CLYDE TERRY: Thank you. Thank you so much. Will you
please remain standing for the retirement of the colors?

Okay. Indeed, thank you all. And thanks Donna Lombarda
a member of the faculty of the Manchester community school for
the rendition of our National Anthem. Thank you.

Please be seated.

Good morning. My name is Clyde Terry. And I'm the CEO
of Granite State Independent Living. And on behalf of the
Board, staff and members of GSIL, I want to welcome all of you

to this ground breaking event of the New Hampshire Presidential primary. As a community we have come together as truly a sleeping giant of the potential of effecting public policy. And this event today is a milestone of achieving our voice on the national stage. We represent one in five adults in this country between the ages of 18 and 64. One in nine children have a disability. And the growing population of one in two Americans over the age of 65. And that population expected to rise.

Between persons with disabilities, their families, their friends, their caregivers, their educators, we truly are a sleeping giant. And if we can exercise and use our voice and educate our family and friends and those around us as to what our issues are, we will effect positive change not only for ourselves but for all Americans.

Some day we will be able to fulfill our vision of a Equality opportunity and access for all. In a recent documentary called a shadow of a moon astronaut Jim Lovett talked about his journeys to the moon and telling his father who was born prior to the Wright brothers first flight at Kitty Hawk. And his father simply saying that he could not relay. Jim Lovett went on to say that he talked about his trip to his five-year-old son and his son said: No big deal.

Our dream is some day that our journey of equality, opportunity and access will become no big deal. Because people with disabilities will be full participants in their community. Competitively employed. And achieving the American dream just like everyone else.

[Applause.]

>>CLYDE TERRY: This event today is one of the milestones on that journey. As we get the leaders of this country to share in our vision of America for all. To share in our vision of justice. To share in our vision of equality. And to share in our vision of opportunity.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you, all, for coming here today to this ground breaking opportunity. And we hope that the Presidential candidates, those seeking the highest office in the land, will share our vision of a future and join us in our dreams to succeed. Indeed, thank you all for coming.

[Applause.]

>>CLYDE TERRY: At this time I would like to introduce one of the sponsors of this event that really made this possible. Recent changes in Federal law put forums such as this in sort of a unique category of complying with the law. And that is we needed somebody called a media exception or the Tim Russert exception so that we could have a forum where the candidates could come in and spend some real time with us sharing their views. And the way to accomplish that is to ensure that we had a media outlet so that this could be broadcast across the state.

I'm pleased to introduce that we have a partner in Manchester Community Television. And we have their Executive Director, Dr. Grace Sullivan with us here today to make this possible. Thank you so much, Grace.

[Applause.]

>>GRACE SULLIVAN: I would like to welcome all of you to the city of Manchester and to this very important conference. At Manchester Community Television our mission is to ensure that Manchester have the highest level of educated citizenship. And you being here over 35 organizations and many individuals bringing your knowledge, your strength, your passion, your creativity and most importantly your voices to Manchester New Hampshire the largest city in the state of the first in the nation primary. Because in New Hampshire, you just don't listen to the candidates. You ask the candidates questions.

A person cannot be become President of the United States unless they speak to people here in New Hampshire in people's homes, diners, clubs. So use your voices here today. It is a privilege. It's an honor to be able to host this event.

And more importantly, I hope you all enjoy the city and have a good time while you're here. Thank you.

[Applause.]

>>CLYDE TERRY: Thank you, Grace. As many of you may know, not only is this event being held here in Manchester and broadcast around the state of New Hampshire, we're also broadcasting this across the country. Trying to use the latest in technology to webcast this to -- from California to Florida and beyond. with particular emphasis to our friends in Iowa, South Carolina and Nevada. Hello, if you see us out there. Good morning. It's early particularly in Nevada. And welcome to this great event.

In addition to that technology, we are also attempting something new today for our individuals and friends and colleagues who are deaf and hard of hearing. We are using a CART system which is remote. Actually the persons who are listening to us right here on the web are sitting somewhere in Illinois. And they are remotely transcribing this event to our friends and colleagues who are deaf and hard of hearing.

If this works successfully, this will expand the availability of CART to conferences not only for this community. But we can educate other conferences that this is affordable, efficient way to make sure that persons who are deaf and hard of hearing are included in all aspects of American life.

So work with us to make sure this works today.

At this time I would also like to introduce the president pro tem of the New Hampshire Senate. Senator Maggie Hassan who has long shared our vision of equality and opportunities for persons with disability. Senator Hassin.

[Applause.]

>> Good morning. A very warm New Hampshire welcome to all of you on what we here call a crisp New England day. I'm delighted that you're here. I'm delighted to see so many of you here.

I've been asked to speak to you about the importance of the issues of equality, opportunity and access for those with disabilities in the upcoming Presidential Election. For those of you who don't know, my passion about this issue comes from the fact that I have a 19-year-old son who happens to have cerebral palsy. A wonderful young man. But a man whose life is very different today because of the progress we already have made in the issue of equal opportunity for all with disabilities. But who also knows, as all of you do, that there is great progress still to be made.

I drove in here today thinking a little bit about how to put the concerns of a mother and a state legislator into common parlance for those of you who may not be as familiar with the issues that individuals and their families with disabilities face.

And I thought a little bit about the bridge collapse in Minnesota this summer. After that terrible news came across the airways, we all obviously were saddened and regretted the loss of life. And then we began to think about the significance of that crumbling infrastructure.

I think we all thought about the fact that there was a whole metropolitan economy at stake when that infrastructure crumbled. And then we thought about the personal inconvenience and challenge for all of the people who commute in and out of Minneapolis and Saint Paul. And we thought about the impact on economy. And we thought, also, about the uncertainty that that bridge collapse posed for all of us. That infrastructure that we all rely on. Those of us who are able-bodied rely on every day all of a sudden seemed a little less certain.

That infrastructure, roads, bridges, police, public education, all of that infrastructure is so critical to the quality of life for all of us is something that I think much of the able-bodied world takes for granted.

But for those of us who either have disabilities or live with somebody who has a disability, that uncertainty is present all the time.

Two stories to tell you a little bit about where we are in New Hampshire and why we still have work to do.

I'm the chair of a commission on employment issues that face veterans in the state of New Hampshire. And recently a veteran came in and said: Well, I've been looking for work. I've had a little bit of luck. But I've learned to keep quiet about the fact that I'm a disabled veteran.

He said: Because as soon as I say the word disabled, the

employers eyes glaze over and I don't get the job.

Now, we passed legislation in New Hampshire two years ago to make sure that New Hampshire employers had to have the same standard as Federal employers do for reasonable accommodations. We have laws on the books in this state that require equal opportunity and non-discrimination.

But what that veteran was telling us is that he still faces discrimination. And that there's a large population of employers in this state who still don't know about their obligations. And worse, don't know enough about people with disabilities to even engage with an applicant about what his abilities are.

That's one story.

The second thing I want to share with you is that as the mother of a 19-year-old man with severe physical disabilities, I don't have the same certainty and vision about his future. And he doesn't, either. As I do for my 14-year-old daughter who doesn't happen to have disabilities.

My son had the great benefit of special education in the exit of public schools. He was included into a mainstream program. And the school in our community has been wonderfully welcoming to him.

But we do not know once he turns 21 what his future will be. All of those resources that help him learn and be a full participant in his school community, all of those resources risk being squandered because we don't have the infrastructure in place to help him be the full participant in New Hampshire's community life that I know he can be.

For all the progress we have made -- and it is significant -- for the closing of the Laconia state school in New Hampshire, which was one of the high points, if not the high point for people with disabilities in this state in the last generation, for all of the progress we've made, we still have progress to come.

For those of you who aren't from New Hampshire and may not be as familiar with what's happening in your own state, please know that here despite the laws on the books that give children the right to a special education, a free and appropriate education, we don't have enough expertise and trained people in our school system to provide the kind of services and educational opportunities that our young people with disabilities need.

There seems to me to be a real retrenchment in our commitment to special education because it is expensive. And because after only 30 years of trying, people are beginning to feel its too difficult.

Those are things that can be solved with full funding from the Federal government for special education services, as

we were promised.

[Applause.]

>> And they can be solved further, as we move forward with the vision that doesn't stop at age 21 with full supports, liveable wage, benefits, training and a professional career path for direct service workers.

[Applause.]

>> This country was founded on the notion that we have an ongoing obligation to make progress. Read the declaration. Go back and read the Constitution and read the New Hampshire Constitution. They call us to do better all the time.

And this country has made its greatest, greatest strides when we have looked out to those who are marginalized and brought them into the mainstream of our cultural and educational and civic and political lives. And that's what we need to continue to work for.

I have a vision for my family that goes something like this: My 19-year-old son will be able to continue to develop and learn and discover what he's good at and build a life for himself that is independent of the life of my husband and me. Just the way I hope and believe that my 14-year-old daughter will be able to do.

And then I have a vision that my husband and I will work until we feel we're done. Save for our retirement. And then retire knowing that our children have independent and full lives respected by their peers, able to contribute to the economic, social, civic and political life of this state and this country. And knowing that because they can do that, this state and this country will be a better place.

So that's the vision I share with all of the candidates today. We have great work to do. But as always, when we bring people in from the margins and when we work for them to be free, and have the power of self determination and self sufficiency, we all benefit. I thank you for being here. And I look forward to the day.

[Applause.]

>>CLYDE TERRY: Thank you, Senator. Thank you so much. And now it's time to pass the reigns of this program over to our national sponsors. We have a lot of groups. A lot in this hall. A lot of people from across the country that came together to make this event happen. And one of the principle architects of this and consultants on this venture was the American association of person's with disabilities. AAPD. At this time I would like to turn the microphone over to its CEO and president, a friend of New Hampshire who might even be wearing a New Hampshire tie this morning, I'm not sure, Mr. Andrew Imparato. Thank you.

[Applause.]

>>ANDREW IMPARATO: Thank you, Clyde. Let me -- before Clyde leaves the stage, let's here it for Clyde Terry and all of his staff at Granite State.

[Applause.]

>>ANDREW IMPARATO: I'm delighted to be here. And I just want to point out that the shot has united financial association and VSAR in the shot so we expect you all to pay extra for the sponsorship. But in all seriousness I do want to echo what Clyde said and welcome the folks who are watching on the Internet and on television around the state of New Hampshire and around the country. This is an event for voters in New Hampshire where you all represent a constituency of more than 50 million people around the country plus our family, plus our friends. We're a huge voting block. We're a voting block that doesn't get enough attention during political campaigns. And we're here to say that that needs to stop and it needs to stop today.

So thank you, Granite State Independent Living.

[Applause.]

>>ANDREW IMPARATO: I want to echo, also, the theme of today's event, which is equality, opportunity and access. Those three words are really about civil rights. And that's why we're here today. We're here today because people with disabilities have a right to be full participants in all aspects of society. And we need leadership from the top, from the White House. From the President of the United States. In order for our civil rights to be truly enforced and respected.

My organization, the American Association of People with Disabilities was founded on the fifth anniversary of the Americans With Disabilities Act by people like Paul Hern, Justin Dart. I. King Jordan and other national leaders in the disability community who saw what happens when our community comes together. When we come together we accomplish big things like the Americans With Disabilities Act. And we accomplish big things like this forum today. We're delighted to have so many candidates that have agreed to be here.

We reached out to every campaign, every Democrat, every Republican running for President was contacted repeatedly. And encouraged to be here. I want to acknowledge Ted Kennedy for really reaching out aggressively to all of the campaigns. He's our Board Secretary at AAPD.

[Applause.]

>>ANDREW IMPARATO: And I also want to acknowledge Cheryl Sensibrenner our Board chair who reached out aggressively, as well.

[Applause.]

>>ANDREW IMPARATO: And Tony Coelho the vice chair of our Board who has also been helping us get folks here.

[Applause.]

>>ANDREW IMPARATO: We have a lot of national sponsors involved in today's event. And their national leadership is here to be part of the event with our brothers and sisters in New Hampshire. From the American foundation the of the blind we have Mark Rickert. Stand up as I announce you and stay standing and we'll applaud every. From the arc of the United States we have Sue Swenson from the association of university centers on disabilities we have George Jesien from the Epilepsy Foundation we have their immediate past chair Tony Coelho. From the National Association of the Deaf we have Barbara Raimondo from it's the national coalition of survivor organizations we have Dan Fisher and Lauren Spiro from the National Council on Independent Living. John Lancaster from the National Spinal Cord Injury Association Marcie Ross. From the United Spinal Association Paul Tobin.

From VSA Arts we have Sula Antonio. From telecommunications for the deaf incorporated we have Claude Stout. And from Self Advocates Becoming Empowered we have Julie Petty and Chester Fin. So let's hear it for all of the national sponsors and their leaders who are here.

[Applause.]

>>ANDREW IMPARATO: I also want to acknowledge the other sponsors. And I just don't know who is in the room representing them. But we also have AARP, ADAPT, United Cerebral Palsy, Easter Seals, the New England Chapter and the national office of paralyzed veterans of America. And I think that's it for the national sponsors. So let's hear it for all of the sponsors.

[Applause.]

>>ANDREW IMPARATO: We also have local co-hosts for the event. And they are listed. It includes the New Hampshire Developmental Disabilities Council, the disability rights center, which is the protection and advocacy agency for New Hampshire. All ways accessible. The Institute on Disability. The New Hampshire Chapter on the -- and the Boston Chapter of the National Spinal Cord Injury Association. TASH and People First of New Hampshire. So thank you for the local co-hosts.

[Applause.]

>>ANDREW IMPARATO: And before I introduce our MC, Ted Kennedy Jr., I just want to say something briefly about why we're here.

We are here today because 17 years after the passage of the Americans With Disabilities Act the employment rates for people with disabilities in this country have not gone up. We are here because people are still being forced into nursing homes and other institutions. And are being forcibly medicated when they complain about the way they are being treated.

We are here because children with disabilities are not

graduating from high school at a rate comparable to their peers.

We are here because the next generation of technologies that are connecting our world and making it -- changing the workplace are not including accessibility features at the design stage of those technologies. We are here because the United States Supreme Court has not embraced our civil rights. And we're still waiting for a Brown versus Board of Education decision that truly reflects an understanding of the civil and human rights of people with disabilities.

[Applause.]

>>ANDREW IMPARATO: We are here because our rights to vote privately and independently is not being enforced. And we are still having to fight to have equal access to the ballot box.

[Applause.]

>>ANDREW IMPARATO: We are here because our access to healthcare, transportation, housing and supports in the community is blocked by miserly budgets and overzealous bureaucracies. We're here because 17 years after the Americans With Disabilities Act, we say that our time is now. That we are ready to take our rightful place as full citizens, as voters, as a central part of the American electric and the fabric of American society.

So let's hear it for all of the sponsors that are sending that message today.

[Applause.]

>>ANDREW IMPARATO: Now, please join me in welcoming Ted Kennedy Jr. Ted is an attorney. He's a cancer survivor. He's an amputee. He's the secretary of the AAPD Board of Directors. He is one of the brightest lights in the next generation of disability rights leaders. I'm proud to have him as a friend and a mentor. Please join me in welcoming Ted Kennedy Jr.

[Applause.]

>>TED KENNEDY, JR.: Thank you. Well, thank you very much. It's great to be here in New Hampshire. We're going to be spending a lot of time together today. But one of my jobs is to make sure that the program keeps moving along. So I'm one of the official time keepers. But let me just say before the program begins how honored I am to be asked by Clyde Terry and Granite State Independent Living to be today's moderator.

This is an incredible occasion. For those of you like me who have been involved in disability rights issues, never before has an event been put together on a scale like this. And we are so thrilled that national political campaigns have taken the time to come and learn about our issues and speak to our issues.

Because we in the disability community believe that people -- people with disabilities deserve the same rights and opportunities as everybody else. We base our beliefs on concepts of independent living, self determination, equality and

political and economic empowerment.

Unfortunately, the history of people with disabilities in the United States has been one of social and political and economic isolation. People for years throughout our US history were removed. People with disabilities were removed from society. We were educated and housed in separate facilities, in separate communities and institutions, as if we had some sort of contagious illness. Integration and participation in the public life were not even -- were not even goals at that time.

We are a young movement. We have to remember that it was really only about 30 years ago. In 1975 where the education for all handicapped children act was all passed. Before that time millions of children with disabilities were not even afforded an education in the United States. The most powerful country in the world.

We made incredible strides with the rehab act of 1973 and with the ADA. And we're not trying to hide or deny our disabilities. In fact, we are proud of who we are here today.

[Applause.]

>>TED KENNEDY, JR. We really -- you know, people -- I'm on the phone with a number of different communications people from the various campaigns. And I'm trying to explain that we really want the same thing out of life as everybody else. It really is that simple. To go to school. To live in our own apartment. To go to the movies. And restaurants with our friends. To have a family.

To have a job and pay taxes. And to vote and participate in the political process. We're diverse. We have a lot of different opinions. We may not all agree on everything.

But we are -- we all share and are unified I believe by a common experience.

This is, again, a ground breaking event. I would like to thank, again, the 23 national sponsors and Granite State. We have tremendous leaders here today from the disability community.

Also with us today in all likelihood is the next President of the United States.

[Applause.]

>>TED KENNEDY, JR. I think I'm going to ask the audience just a couple of housekeeping. Obviously I think it's important for us to show our appreciation and respect to all the candidates. Both Democrat and Republican. Who have taken time to participate in this day's event.

I think just by being here these campaigns and candidates have already expressed their interest and commitment to disability issues.

We have question cards on the tables I think for a number of reasons, including the webcasting that we're doing that's

taking place nationwide. We felt it was better that the questions all be asked from one location. But a number of organizations have already been submitting questions to me. That a representative of the die -- that are representative of the diverse opinions of the group. But again, we'll be collecting the cards throughout the day. So please fill out questions.

You can hand them to Ann Summers. Ann, will you raise your hand? She's sitting at the table over here.

She's going to be collecting some of the questions from the audience. And I think -- are we almost ready to introduce our first speaker? I'm told my first duty -- and this is the fun thing about being the moderator at an event like this. Because you never know what is going to happen.

[Laughter.]

>>TED KENNEDY, JR. Again, so Ann will collect the question cards from throughout the day. My name official duty here is to introduce New Hampshire state Senator Lou D'Allesandro. Is Lou in the building yet? No? Okay. Well, will somebody please alert me when he arrives so we can get that portion of the program going?

Just so you know by -- I want everybody to understand that all -- as Andrew Imparato said, all political campaigns, Democrat and Republican were contacted to participate in this day's event. And repeated attempts to get them to come ensued. We have a couple of folks, including Senator John McCain this afternoon, who is unable to be here in person. But is going to be participating via telephone hookup. So we're thrilled about that.

We have, as you can see from your program, we have a number of candidates who are going to be here in person, Senator Clinton, Senator Bidden, Senator Dodd, congressmen Kucinich, Congressman Bonior representing John Edwards, Senator Gravel and Senator John McCain. So we have a very full program here today.

Okay. Well, you're going to hear my life story then.

[Laughter.]

[Applause.]

>>TED KENNEDY, JR. You know, some people ask me, you know, how did you get involved in the disability movement? And I think like many of you, you know, it just, you know, kind of happened to me one day when I was 12 years old. And the doctors told me that I was going to lose part of my leg. And I thought it was simply they meant cutting out the swollen part right below my kneecap. And they said: No, from the knee down.

And I remember how shocked and horrified I was when I was told that. Because I couldn't imagine living my life with a disability. Because you see, I had grown up believing that having a disability was worse than living at all.

Even though I had grown up in this progressive family with my uncles and my fathers, my aunt Rosemary for example born with retardation and a very active family I was somehow in view of this idea. And that's why I'm spending so much time today trying to break down the attitudes and stereotypes that surround disability.

[Applause.]

>>TED KENNEDY, JR. And I think that's -- because I really believe that it's really not a person's physical or mental condition that creates the handicap. Most often it's society's perception of that condition that is the most disabling thing.

[Applause.]

>>TED KENNEDY, JR. And I remember a tremendous amount of social and emotional isolation that I experienced. And yes, I tried to be brave and keep a smile on my face throughout everything. But I remember when I was changing in the boys locker room to go to swimming. Swimming was one of the sports I could continue to do. I would wait until all the other kids would leave the locker room before I would remove my artificial leg. Because to me, my stump looked purple. And it looked deformed and disgusting. And I was incredibly ashamed by the way I looked.

And I can remember my teachers and others saying: You shouldn't feel that way. Or: Don't let that bother you. But you know what? It did bother me. And if there's one thing I'll never say to my two children, I'll never say: Don't let that bother you.

And I share this story today because I think that people with disabilities do -- have experienced a tremendous amount of social and emotional isolation. And that is why we need to have these connections. And we need to have civil rights so people are able to -- be integrated not just in the school. But also in every single aspect of life.

In college I met this woman named Judy Humen. I was invited to go to the Yale political forum. I was a student at Wesleyan in middle town. I had never heard of disability rights before. I was about 20 years old. Didn't even know what disability law was. And I went down there. And I listened to Judy Humen speak. And from that moment on, I realized that this was my mission in my life. We all have the things that we do for our work, what we have to do to provide for our families. And then we have our life's work. And this is I think, you know, truly my life's work.

So do I have to tell you more about my life? Or are we ready to go?

Five more minutes.

I am going to ask at this point my good friend and co-Board member, Cheryl Sensibrenner, who is the Board chair of

AAPD. She's the wife of Congressman Jim Sensibrenner. She's my favorite Republican. And she is -- Cheryl is really almost single handedly I think it's fair to say leading the effort in Washington, D.C. To get co-sponsors for the ADA restoration acts. And I would like for her to bring everyone up to speed.

>> We're going to do this together, though, aren't we so we're always bipartisan. And we should have Tony up here, too, I think. But what I thought we would do for a moment while we're waiting is talk a little bit about what's going to be next. Ted, you were kind enough to talk about where we've been coming in the last 30 years but let's talk about hopefully what we can get signed next year. Get passed by both parts of the Congress and go onto have the President sign it. And that's the ADA restoration.

[Applause.]

>> Now, the thing about the ADA we thought we made it. We thought we finally had what we needed. But without ADA Restoration being passed, ADA will be an empty fulfillment for us. What is happening right now with the courts as I see it, and Ted, I think you would agree with me on this, is that the courts are not understanding the definition of a disability.

Right now in particular people that have type 1 diabetes, epilepsy, cancer, the intellectually challenged are being proved -- first of all, they have to prove they are disabled before they can go on and take their cases to court as far as employment discrimination.

The original intent of the ADA -- and again, you're a lawyer, Ted, you can tell me about this, as I understand, the original intent of Congress was to keep the definition broad of disabilities. And unlike other civil rights legislation that has passed for our country, we disabled have to prove we're disabled.

Then we can talk about our civil rights. What's going on -- I like -- I testified at the -- had the opportunity to testify before the judiciary committee a few weeks ago. As I explained to them, I have a sister that has Down syndrome. I, myself, have a spinal cord injury. My sister that has Down syndrome with her hard work over the years bought herself a car, paid for her insurance. Drives around. She's a taxi -- she's a taxicab for most of her friends. But because she is so high functioning with her Down syndrome, she might have problems proving -- and it's been shown in some of the cases that she really is disabled.

I don't think her waking up tomorrow morning and finding that her chromosomes have been realigned.

Because she's too high functioning, she is not protected with her civil rights in employment. That's crazy! She's disabled.

But she's too high functioning. You know, I wear a leg brace. Or how about if I had epilepsy and I take my insulin. And it's working for the time being. Well, we are always trying to make it work.

But because of that, am I really disabled? The person that's taking their insulin, doesn't that make them all better? They are not disabled.

So why do they need protection of their civil rights? What kind of a message are we giving to the soldiers that are coming back from Iraq, from Afghanistan? You know, guys, why don't you just sit around in front of the TV. Don't worry. Your civil rights will be protected because boy, oh, boy, you're disabled.

No, but if you really try hard, if you really try, strive, continue to strive for your dreams, then maybe you'll be considered not disabled. And then, then you don't have your civil rights protected. This is a real catch 22 that we're facing right now.

So as we try to explain to the congressmen and the Senators and hopefully that will happen quickly and we can go onto the President that we want to be like every other civil rights legislation. We don't have to prove that we're disabled.

We want to just go forward.

Now, Ted I was going to go onto my story next.

>>TED KENNEDY, JR. I've got to cut you off.

>> That's excellent. The only time I'll ever let you do that, Ted.

>>TED KENNEDY, JR. We're very lucky to have Cheryl, aren't we? Thank you very much, Cheryl.

[Applause.]

>>TED KENNEDY, JR. I'm told that our first candidate is here. And in the room. And at this point I would like to introduce New Hampshire state Senator Lou D'Allesandro. And Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton.

[Applause.]

>>TED KENNEDY, JR. My job this morning --

[Applause.]

>>TED KENNEDY, JR. My job this morning is to introduce state Senator Lou D'Allesandro, who will then introduce our first speaker today. But really Senator D'Allesandro needs no introduction to Granite State Independent Living because he was one of the founding Board members of Granite State. Today he's serving in his fifth term in the New Hampshire state Senator. He's from Manchester. He serves on the finance committee and has a successful and long career in politics, public service and education. He serves on so many civic boards. It's too numerous to mention. But at this time I would like to ask Senator D'Allesandro to introduce our first speaker.

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR LOU D'ALLESANDRO: Thank you very much. Great to be here. Almost 30 years ago the late Ron Papus who some of you remember, myself and a few other individuals gathered in Golfstown and created the Granite State Independent Living foundation. And look what it's grown to be. Just a magnificent organization that addresses the needs of those who have needs. And isn't that one of the most important things that this society can offer, addressing needs when needs are apparent? So we're blessed to have Granite State Independent Living. They do a marvelous job. And I'm very, very proud to have been a part of the beginning of Granite State Independent Living.

Now, when you enter politics and get involved in politics, you find some extraordinary people. And these extraordinary people grow as your association with politics tends to grow.

We're in a very, very difficult time in the history of this country. The country both domestically and in foreign affairs has some extreme challenges. And we need someone to lead us through these trying times. We need a person with experience, a person who is committed. A person who is capable of handling these challenges.

In looking at all of the Democratic Presidential candidates, we have the greatest array of candidates I think that we have ever been presented. But obviously when one has to make a choice, there's one that sticks out. And in my opinion, the person who can do the job as the next President of the United States is Hillary Clinton.

[Applause.]

>>TED KENNEDY, JR. She brings -- she brings to this --

>>SENATOR LOU D'ALLESANDRO: She brings to this campaign a sincere interest in all of the items that we are concerned about. Taking care of those who have special needs. Addressing the economy of our country. And restoring America's place in foreign policy. Giving us the position of leadership that this country maintained for years.

As a nation where freedom thrives, where honesty, integrity and responsibility are an important part of what we do.

And as a result of my soul searching, I have come to the conclusion that Hillary Clinton will be the next President of the United States. And therefore, I am proud to endorse the candidacy of Hillary Clinton for the next President of the United States of America.

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR LOU D'ALLESANDRO: Now, all of you have been waiting patiently to hear the words of Senator Clinton. And I'm honored to say to you that together we can make the difference

not only in America but in the world. And the person who will lead us down that path is Senator Clinton so without further ado, the next President of the United States, Hillary Rodham Clinton.

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: Thank you all so much. My goodness. Thank you. I am thrilled to be here. And I have to say having the endorsement of this extraordinary Senator, leader, champion means the word to me. Lou, I am thrilled to have you on this team. It's a winning team. And we're going to go together to the White House and get the changes that America needs. Thank you so much.

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: I am very happy to be here. I want to thank Clyde Terry, the Executive Director. You know, Lou in his remarks pointed out something that all of you know so well. That he was one of the driving forces to help form the Granite State Independent Living organization. And I salute him for that.

And then you've been blessed with good leadership to keep it going and keep it growing. And Clyde, thank you. Thank you for your efforts, as well.

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: It's also wonderful to be here with Ted Kennedy Jr. He is a great leader in the tradition that we would expect. And I'm going to proudly tell his father when I see Senator Kennedy that I was with his son and his son is much better looking.

[Laughter.]

>>SENATOR HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: it is great being here with all of you. I want to make a few remarks. And then -- Lou, do you want to sit down? Yeah, take that seat.

I want to make a few remarks. And then I know you've got some questions.

It is really important that you're holding this forum. The Manchester -- Manchester Community Television is covering it. You've got more than 20 national disability rights organizations coming together to host this. I've already seen friends from New York and Washington, D.C. Who are here today.

Well, you are doing what has to be done. And that is standing up and fighting for the rights of people with disabilities. My friend and supporter, Senator Maggie Hassan was just telling me she said: You know, it's a lot easier to be kind than to be just. And we want both.

We want both kindness and justice for people with disabilities.

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: Disability rights are

civil rights. The right to be treated equally. They are human rights. The right of all people to fulfill their God given potentials. And they are an urgent issue for America. Because America will never achieve our full potential until all Americans can achieve theirs.

Now, obviously we have come a long way in this country. But we have our work cut out for us if we're going to keep the promise that we should, that we will continue to work toward a more perfect union that includes all Americans.

For the past seven years it's as though people with disabilities have been invisible to this president and his administration. If you're a child who can't get the special education classes you need, you're invisible.

If you're a citizen who wants to vote but the polling place doesn't have the right equipment or the right help, you're invisible.

If you're a worker who wants a job but you can't find one that accommodates your disability, you're invisible, too.

Well, people with disabilities may be invisible to George Bush. But they are not invisible to you. And they will never be invisible to me.

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: This is a cause that I have been involved with for 35 years. My first job out of law school was with the children's defense fund. I did not want to go to work for a big law firm. I didn't want to go to work for a Federal judge.

I wanted to work on behalf of children. I was assigned to go to new Bedford Massachusetts. As part of a nationwide effort to understand why so many children were not enrolled in school. And how did we know that? Because we had census figures of how many children there were in the community between the ages of 5 and 18. And we had school enrollment figures. And they didn't match.

Where were the missing children? Knocking on those doors was an eye opening and heart breaking experience. I found children who weren't in school because of physical disabilities like blindness and deafness. On a small back porch off her family's home, I met a girl in a wheelchair who told me how much she wanted to go to school.

But she knew she couldn't go simply because she couldn't walk. These children were kept home because the schools couldn't and wouldn't accommodate them.

They wanted to learn. They wanted to succeed. But they never had the chance.

I knew then that I wanted to spend my life fighting to be a voice for children who were left out and left behind. I wanted to give them the same opportunities I had growing up.

The children's defense fund submit approximated our results to the Congress. And with the help of strong leaders like Senator Kennedy and all of you who are advocates, it led to the individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: Mandating that children with physical, emotional and learning disabilities be educated in the public school system. My work on this issue came full circle when as a Senator I helped to write the IDEA reauthorization act in 2004. To ensure that we had targeted resources dedicated to teacher training.

In the Senate I have also worked to pass the community choice act, will finally --

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: Will finally, we hope, eliminate the institutional bias in our Medicare and Medicaid system. I have aggressively fought to investigate the linkages between environmental toxins and disabilities. And I have strongly supported the ADA restoration act. And I look forward to signing it --

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: I look forward to signing it when I'm President. And you're all invited to the signing ceremony.

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: When I am President my White House will welcome you. Our government will be a partner with you. And new opportunities will be open to you. I have laid out an agenda to increase employment among people with disabilities.

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: These reforms are long overdue. Americans with disabilities have half the employment rate and double the poverty rate of those without disabilities. Even those who have graduated from college work at only two-thirds the rate of others.

We need to provide more opportunities for people with disabilities to break into the middle class. Not just to survive. But to thrive.

One of my first acts will be to reinstate my husband's executive order that committed the Federal government to hiring 100,000 people with disabilities.

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: President Bush was wrong to abandon that commitment. And I'm going to get us back on track.

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: I will also double our

investment in work enabling technologies by providing more low interest loans for purchasing them. I'll provide real time support for employers so they can make the accommodations necessary for their employees to do their jobs. I want --

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: I want to, also, propose and work to pass a \$1,000 per worker tax credit to offset the expenses of work and transportation for workers with disabilities.

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: But in addition to the positive agenda that I will pursue, I want to get rid of the disincentives for work in so many Federal programs. Right now people with disabilities can lose their Social Security disability insurance, their Supplemental Security Income, their Medicare and Medicaid benefits when they earn even a tiny salary. That is absolutely upside down and backwards.

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: I mean, just think about it. It makes no sense. Even if you can work and want to work, there's a penalty if you try to work. I mean, we are a nation that believes in work. And we want people to make a contribution. We believe its in the individual's interest as well as our country's. That's bad for taxpayers. It's unfair to people with disabilities. And we need to end it once and for all.

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: One of the proudest accomplishments of the Clinton Administration was to sign the Ticket to Work and the work incentives improvement act into law. As a result 31 states have enacted policies to reduce the disincentives to work. That's significant progress. But state policies are still uneven.

That's why we need to move at the Federal level. As president, I'll help working individuals with disabilities buy into Medicaid. Eliminate the Medicare eligibility time limit on the number of years an individual can work. And conduct a review to determine where disincentives to work still exist in Federal benefit programs and where we can and must do better.

I think we can break down these barriers to employment and empower people with disabilities to find the jobs and careers that are fulfilling and important for them and the rest of us.

Finally, I want to mention my healthcare plan. It's called the American health choices plan. And it has real significance for people with disabilities.

My healthcare plan will let you keep your existing coverage if you are satisfied with it. But it provides

affordable choices if you don't have coverage or you are dissatisfied. And it covers every single American.

Everyone will have access to the same choices members of Congress have now. We have a congressional plan that covers members of Congress and Federal employees. It works pretty well. And you pay for it.

It provides more than 250 options. And it has a lower cost than you'll find through most employers and certainly on your own in the marketplace.

I believe if it's good enough for members of Congress, it's good enough for you and every other American.

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: Under my plan you will never be denied coverage because of pre-existing conditions or risk factors. Right now health insurance companies in America spend \$50 billion a year trying to figure out how not to cover people. I mean, that's their business model. They claim they are in the health insurance business. But they are really in the health no insurance business.

They are trying to avoid covering people. And then if they somehow get caught and they actually cover you, they try to avoid paying for the services that you have received.

I think that's wrong. And I'm offering a new business plan. In fact, I'm going to save them a fortune. Because here is the new policy: No more discrimination. Period. Cover everybody. Cover pre-existing conditions. No questions asked.

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: My plan requires insurance companies to compete based on cost and quality. Not how skillfully they can exclude patients with the greatest medical needs.

We are also going to start covering prevention. I believe we can actually avoid some disabilities if we provide prevention. The clearest example of that is the government and health insurance plans rarely pay for a visit to a podiatrist for a diabetic. But they pay for the amputation of the foot.

Therefore, we have created a disability instead of preventing a disability. And there are many other examples that one can go through in the absolutely backwards way that the healthcare system currently operates.

My health plan, my disabilities agenda, all of the policies I've put forward, have one unifying principle. We are all in this together in America. And it's time we start acting like that again. I do not believe --

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: I do not believe in the Bush Republican policy of you're in this on your own. They call it the ownership society. And they are trying to put the entire

burden of coping with all of life's unpredictable events on the individual. That was what was behind their attempt to privatize Social Security. That is what is behind their efforts to cut back on supports and other systems that enable people to fulfill their God given potential.

Well, I believe that whenever anyone in America can't live up to his or her potential, that diminishes all of us. We owe our people wise sensible policies that recognize the dignity, the value and the humanity of all Americans.

I know that's what most Americans believe. We just need our political system once again to show the leadership necessary to make it happen.

I am excited --

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: I am excited by my campaign because of the broad support that I am receiving from across New Hampshire. But I know that we have a very tough two months plus to go. And I'm going to do everything I can to travel this state, to meet with as many citizens as possible, to answer your questions. But one thing that I am proud to be representing is the change that Americans deserve to have.

Now, change is just a word if you don't have the strength and experience to make it happen. But I don't know any people who are stronger than people with disabilities who get up every single day. Do the best they can.

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: Reach out to others. And I want to recognize that strength. So yes, kindness is called for from all of us to one another. I believe that we've got to get back to treating each other with that sense of recognition and respect. But never forget that justice is at the core of the American dream. And we must, once again, stand for justice here at home and around the world.

Thank you all very much. And God bless you.

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: Thank you; thank you.

Now -- thank you. thank you!

Thank you.

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: And I know that Ted has some questions. So I think we'll turn to him.

>>TED KENNEDY, JR. Senator Clinton thank you very much for joining us today. The first question is from Debbie Kryder of Stotter New Hampshire. She asks: What steps would you take to fill key leadership roles in your administration with people with disabilities and individuals who understand disability issues?

>>SENATOR HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: Well, I will certainly

aggressively reach out and seek people who have the talent, the qualifications, the drive. Who can fulfill these leadership positions. And I will be casting a very wide net. Asking the disability community to provide recommendations.

I was very proud that during the Clinton Administration key positions were held by people with disabilities. And they weren't all positions that had to do with people with disabilities.

They were broadly based positions.

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: And I think that we have a great opportunity here with a change in administration that I'm confident will happen January 20th, 2009, to once again have our government reflect the very best of our country.

So I will certainly be looking to groups like this and others throughout America to provide the names of those who have expertise and experience and the qualifications necessary to serve in my administration.

And it will be an administration that not only aims to hire 100,000 people with disabilities. But aims to have leaders with disabilities in our country.

[Applause.]

>>TED KENNEDY, JR.: The second question I have and please ladies and gentlemen when you fill out these question cards please put your name on the card so I can recognize you as the request asker. But regarding long-term care, many seniors are unable to stay in their own homes since there are not enough services or caretakers.

As President, what will you do to make sure that services can be provided in people's homes?

>>SENATOR HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: Well, it's one of the questions that I hear everywhere. Because of course, as people age, they often acquire certain disabilities. So it's not only the disability community that is deeply concerned about this. It is the aging of America that is requiring us to address this issue.

Well, the community choices act is a good down payment in what we need to do. We have for too long supported an institutional bias toward institutional care. It's the most expensive care. And in many ways, it's the least useful kind of care in keeping people involved in their communities, their families, active insofar as they are able to be.

So I will vigorously enforce the community choices law.

There are several other things we need to do. In order to have more home-based and community-based care, we have to work hard to create those options. And we don't have enough. I mean, that's one of the reasons why people have a fall-back position to institutional care.

So we need to have a really concerted effort that is not only from the Federal government but also state and local governments. Because a lot of the ultimate decisions about whether we have more community and home-based care rest with decisions made at the state and local level.

So I want a partnership. Now that we're going to try to change the bias in the Medicare and Medicaid system, we need to provide the tools, the technical assistance, the understanding that will promote that kind of change and provide those options.

I worked for nearly five years to pass my legislation called the life span Respid care act.

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: And I know that was something that many of you helped me with. I can hear from the applause that you were aware and working on this. The idea behind it is pretty simple. Every year we have about \$300 billion of free care given to individuals with disabilities and illnesses. That care is given by family members. It takes a financial toll on the family. It takes a physical toll. It takes an emotional toll.

And we don't do much to support the caregivers. It will be difficult to transition to more home-based care if we don't do more for the caregivers.

So we can change a system. But we have to support the caregivers. So the life span Respid care act is a down payment on that. It became law. It authorizes the secretary of health and human services to start developing these Respid care programs at the state and local levels.

Also, we have to help states comply with the Olmstead decision. That was a decision --

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: -- that basically said what all of us believed, that we should be moving people from more restrictive institutional settings to less restrictive community-based home-based settings. We've got to pay attention to this. I mean, it's no good having a law if we're not working to enforce it.

So I intend to ask the office of civil rights to enforce this law. To ensure the safety and the security of people with disabilities. And do everything we can to implement it.

Finally, I think we've got to do more on long-term care insurance. We've got to do more to help provide financial resources for families to plan.

One of the most common questions I'm asked by parents of children with disabilities, as those children grow older, is: How are we going to take care of our child?

You know, our child is now in his 20s or her 30s. And what happens to us after we're gone? Sometimes there are other

family members who can step in. A lot of times there aren't.

So how do we help families plan? In addition to the government assistance that needs to come from Federal, state and local governments, how do we give more tools to families to be prepared?

So we have to look at all of this much but I am convinced that if we're serious about it and we begin addressing it as soon as I'm President we will have some solutions and we'll have some models. We'll have some ways of pointing people to what works. And I invite your help in helping to make that happen.

[Applause.]

>>TED KENNEDY, JR.: Thank you, Senator. We have time for one more question.

How can our community be more effective in getting our messages across to candidates for public office?

>>SENATOR HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: Well, I think you're being pretty effective right now. I applaud you on that. Advocacy is hard work. And never ending.

I remember one of my good friends from Arkansas. And this was probably more than 30 years ago now. Her son was born with cerebral palsy. And when he was a toddler my friend began to get involved in groups that were formed of families of children with disabilities. And this was I guess back in '77, '78. Somewhere back then. Right after the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act had passed. But really before it was fully implemented and people understood it. And the disability rights movement was just beginning.

And I'll never forget my friend saying that she went to the Legislature to lobby on behalf of increased services for families with children with disabilities. And certainly educational services. And she was meeting legislators. She had never done this before in her life. And she was holding her son.

And the legislators were just very uncomfortable. You know, they didn't know what to say. They were confused. And she said: You know, one gentleman was trying to end the conversation. He said: Well, look on the bright side of things. You'll never have to chase him around.

And my friend said, you know, that was the moment I moved from being a concerned mother to an activist.

Now, a lot of attitudes have changed in the last 30 plus years. But I don't think advocacy ever ends in America. Because you have to continually raise these issues. You have to fight for what you believe is right. You have to keep going back to Legislature. You have to elect people like Maggie and Lou who know about these issues and care about them.

So I think that the community is well organized. But you can't ever get discouraged or disheartened.

I think it is fair to ask when this administration began making decisions that truly undercut goals, objectives, programs, rights, I think the community was so discouraged that there really wasn't much happening. And everybody just is kind of waiting for this administration to end. But I believe you have to be constantly advocating.

And sort of forcing decision makers to be put on the spot. So I would urge that you do what you do best in New Hampshire. Spend the next two months going everywhere anybody running for President is and asking them the questions about what they are going to do.

I had a healthcare forum in Las Vegas. A couple -- I don't know. About ten days ago. And there were about 8, 900 people there. And we had a special section for people in wheelchairs. And there were three gentlemen in wheelchairs. One was in a head brace. One was clearly suffering from multiple chronic conditions. And another was in a wheelchair, as well.

And so I called on them. Because I wanted the audience to hear their questions. Because there still is a lot of misinformation and lack of information in the electorate at large about these issues.

And I think that any time you can be present to ask these questions to make it an issue, to have an agenda, you have to do it. Even if you believe that the person appearing before you is totally opposed to everything you stand for.

In fact, I would argue that's even more important to be there. Sometimes advocates say: Well, what's the point of going to so-and-so and so-and-so. What's the point of having any kind of demonstration or any kind of event because you know they are against us? Let's go to the people who are sort of for us and push them.

Well, that's fine. But don't forget the people who are against everything you stand for. Don't let them off the hook. Get out to these events. Raise these questions. Ask them what their policies will be.

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: Because this is about changing minds as well as changing votes. And changing administrations. We need to continue to create a broad-based critical mass of Americans who understand why what you're advocating for is important not just to you and your loved ones. But important to the kind of country America is. Thank you all very much.

[Applause.]

>>TED KENNEDY, JR.: Ladies and gentlemen, we are now going to take a short break.

(Break)

[Music].

>>TED KENNEDY, JR.: Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to ask you now to take your seats. We're ready for the next presentation. Ladies and gentlemen, please spend the next few moments taking your seats. Thank you. We'll begin again shortly.

Ladies and gentlemen, I'm told Senator Bidden is here in the building. So I would like to ask everyone to take your seats as quickly as possible. And we'll be introducing him in just a few moments.

>>TED KENNEDY, JR.: Ladies and gentlemen, please take your seats. We're sorry for the delay. But we have with us here Senator Joe Biden. Welcome to New Hampshire Senator Bidden.

[Applause.]

>>TED KENNEDY, JR.: This is very exciting. Thank you Senator for taking time out of your busy schedule to join us here in Manchester today. Here at this point I have the pleasure of introducing to you a great friend of Granite State, New Hampshire State Representative Jim Ryan. Jim Ryan is a professor at New England college and Cain state college. He teaches political science. He has a career in Wall Street publishing. He's had an impressive career in elective office. He's concerned about environmental policy, college affordability. And he's the chairman of the House committee on transportation. So I know that's a big issue of concern to everybody in this room. He's active in Democratic party politics in the state and national level and is a state house advocate for Granite State Independent Living. He is going to introduce our next speaker, Senator Joe Biden. Thank you for joining us today, Mr. Ryan.

>> Thank you. Good morning. That was a wonderful introduction. I hope I can get him back in about a year to introduce me when I run for reelection. I want to acknowledge someone in the back. Jeff Dickenson. Where are you Jeff? Jeff with Granite State Independent Living is my neighbor. Jeff the other night when we had an event I called him up and said Jeff I have to go to a dinner and he said Jim I know you're politically busy send the kids down. So my three daughters have been be with GSIL member Jeff very often and Jeff I wanted to recognize that because I don't get to politic unless you tend to my kids. So would you help my baby sitter with a round of applause.

[Applause.]

>> Ted Kennedy inspired -- John Kennedy a number of great quotes was to cherish our children's future. And Ralph wall doe Emerson always referred to the Democratic party as the party of hope. When I think about the hope that the future will bring and when I think about cherishing the future that we will need

and are entitled to in November of 2008, when I close my eyes and envision the person that I want in the White House in the oval office making the decisions that will touch our domestic agenda, our family agenda and our international agenda, when I look at the person who I want negotiating in a troubled world, the picture to me becomes crystal clear. I want someone who can step into that office, lead us to hope. Lead us to a point where we cherish our future. And lead us to the change that a simple, good and decent man can bring, my candidate and I hope you'll listen to him attentively, my friend, Senator Joe Biden of Delaware.

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR JOE BIDEN: Thank you very much.

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR JOE BIDEN: Thank you all very, very much. You're very kind. Thank you. Thank you.

It's a delight to be here with you today. I appreciate the opportunity. And I must tell you, I value what all of you advocates are doing. And I value all of you in this room.

I particularly value Teddy. Because his father still runs my life in the United States Senate.

[Laughter.]

>>SENATOR JOE BIDEN: By the way, the person that should and could and is able to speak for all of us in terms of our aspirations is your dad. He is by far and away -- I'm not being solicitous he's the single most persistent and effective Senator that I have served with and I've been there for 35 years. And -

-

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR JOE BIDEN: Folks, I have a -- a nice speech here. That all of you are welcome to a copy of. And what I would very much like to do -- I thought about it coming up on the plane. I flew up from Philly this morning. And I thought about it on the way up. As that old joke goes: All of you in this room have forgotten more about the subject matter than most of us in Washington will learn.

So what I would like to do is give you an outline of how I approach the subject of dealing with Americans with disabilities and the concerns and the problems and the opportunities.

If I'm not mistaken it says equality opportunity access. I think that all translates for me so you understand where I come from a single word: Dignity. It's about dignity. Dignity is about opportunity. Dignity is about access. Dignity is about enforcement of the basic fundamental values that we say we so cherish as a nation.

I approach -- I guess I approach most of -- and by the way, I am fully cognizant of the fact that all of you in this

room who are providers as well as those of you with disabilities, every one of you has interests beyond the subject matter of this morning's conference.

I know you're all equally as concerned and equally as involved and engaged in matters relating to foreign policy and larger domestic issues, as well. And so in the question and answer period I would be delighted to try to respond to any questions that you have.

My focusing on the subject matter today is in no way should be read as my assuming that that's the only thing that occupies your attention and your concerns.

Let me say to you that I kind of approach things in a fairly basic way. I have a bad or good, depending on your perspective, reputation of being fairly straightforward. Of telling you what I think, what I value, what I care about. And why I care about it.

Because you know, folks, I think we're beyond the point where posturing and telling you what you want to hear as opposed to what you need to know is en vogue. The politics of the day I think have changed. At least I hope they have changed. If they have not, then I'll continue to work for you as the United States Senator and that will be it.

But if they've changed as much as I think they have changed, then I may have an opportunity to use what this roster man in the hands of a President becomes. A pulpit. A bully pulpit.

Ladies and gentlemen, the vast power of the Presidency resides not in the legislation he or she suggests or in the in other words they initiate. The vast power of the Presidency lies in keeping the keeper of the flame reminding the American public of what key fundamental values we say, we say not only in our Constitution but in our everyday discussions with one another in coffee shops. We say we care about.

My dad used to have an expression. My dad passed away several years ago. My mom was 90 years old. And still lives with me in my home and runs the show. Reminds me of his expression. He used to say: Don't tell me what you value. Show me your budget. And I will tell you what you value.

Don't tell me what you value. Show me your budget. And I will tell you what you value.

And ladies and gentlemen, a lot of people these days in American politics, particularly the other team are talking about family values and core values, religious values, et cetera. When the truth of the matter is that every American knows in his or her gut, their gut, what America is about.

Americans believe that they are pretty fair and decent group of people. Americans believe that it's important to help other people. Americans understand that we're all in this

together.

But we've spent the last couple of decades trying to convince Americans that that commonalty is really a line of division.

We are cast in terms of whether and how often we go to church, what our religious views are, whether or not we live in a red state or a blue state. Whether or not our ideology is the definition of our value set.

When in truth, we're the only nation in the world that, in fact, has laid out in its preamble to its Constitution that the basic writ that we've signed on of basic human rights is not derived from our Constitution. But it's derived from something higher, something bigger, something more significant.

And we've gotten timid about talking about it.

But I think the President in using this bully pulpit in the future has to remind people of the commonalty and the source of all the things you're fighting for.

It says: We hold these truths self-evident. That all men are created equal. Endowed by their creator. No other Constitution says that.

Endowed by their Creator. It's not about religion. It's about spirituality. It's about the essence, the essence, of what it is to be a human being.

It's about a soul. It's not about a body.

It's not about a physical capability. It's about person hood. And too often in our society, those of us in power, particularly this President, remains silent. When there's somehow an equation made between the work and capacity and potential of someone wheelchair bound or in some other way seriously limited physically. And their self worth -- in their self worth.

And so folks, it seems to me, it seems to me, that you know the old expression: Tell me where you sit and I'll tell you where you stand, well, one of the things we have to reassert and we have to do it affirmatively, we have to holler about it. We have to remind people about it. And that is that our basic speak for myself minority star is about -- my north star is about dignity. The dignity of every single man and woman in this country.

The notion instead of going through all the bills I've sponsored or co-sponsored, there's not a single thing I think we disagree on substantively from a legislative standpoint. That's all about legislative speak.

But it's much more than the legislative speak. It's about what do we really care about?

Who are we as a nation? Because I would argue how we deal with the issues before this conference today define who we are. And measure more accurately whether or not we are keeping

up with what we say we aspire to than any other set of issues that the nation faces.

Those of you born with disabilities, those who have acquired the consequence of your environment or accidents disabilities, a disease, you're not somebody else's children. You are all our children.

You're the kite strings upon which our national ambitions are literally lifted a lot of. And the measure -- aloft. And the measure of how we deal with your aspirations, your possibilities, seems to me to be the single best measure of who we are as a nation.

And so I'm prepared and anxious to talk to you. I want to hear from you. About everything from what I would do in terms of appointing judges who understand the literal meaning of the equality, all men are created equal. To the kind of judges I would appoint. To what kind of justice department I would have as your President.

To what I would do about dealing and explaining to the American people that what we're about in this room is not only morally right, constitutionally required, but practically in the vast majority of Americans from a moral as well as economic standpoint.

The degree to which we educate all those to the degree to which they are educable is not only the right thing to do. We don't talk about it in these terms. It is economically politically sound. Its physically and economically -- it physically and economically makes us stronger.

The idea that we say we value families and institutionalize a half a million people, many of whom if we had a different attitude about -- and a practical attitude about reimbursing family members who provided for this care, where else, if possible is it better for a person with a disability to be than in the environment, if possible, of those that love him or her and would care for and nurture them had they the economic wherewithal to do so.

What are we doing?

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR JOE BIDEN: What are we doing? I'm serious. This is not rocket science. This is not rocket science. This is the intersection. Tony Coelho was one of the great leaders in the United States Congress, Tony remember our buddy Senator, Governor Chiles came in the Senator two years apart. He in 1970 and me in 1972 and we sat up in the peanut gallery the upper left hand corner if you're looking from the gallery. And one day a miniscule amendment passed. It didn't matter much. And he was really excited.

And I thought I was missing something. I turned to him and I said: What's the big deal? He said: Joe, it's so seldom

in American politics when conscience and convenience cross paths. You should celebrate.

Well, ladies and gentlemen, what we're about here is both conscience and convenience. Every single thing each of us have supported from ADA to fair housing to all the access programs, they are not only the right thing from the perspective of conscience. They are the right thing from the perspective of convenience. For the nation.

There are millions upon millions of families affected. Every disabled person. Every disabled person.

Their dilemma and their opportunity has a ripple effect through this society that's far beyond what we ever pay attention to outside this room.

So folks, let me get right to it. I would suggest to you that we have an opportunity to do something we haven't been able to do in this administration and arguably haven't done sufficiently even in the last couple of administrations.

And that is we have an opportunity to take a significant leap forward in America's commitment to itself, its values and the disabled community. And it comes out of a tragedy. The tragedy is the war in Iraq.

We are going to be bringing home thousands, thousands, a minimum of 14,500 so far of seriously disabled people. Traumatic brain injury. Traumatic stress disorder. More amputees per capita in this war than any war since the Civil War. And the nation's focus of I have anything to do with it is going to be intensely, intensely shined upon that population.

This is a new opportunity for us to take and state our claim more solidly, more significantly, and more broadly than we have any time in the recent past.

You've all been soldiers. You've literally been soldiers in this fight. We've made significant progress. But the idea we're still arguing over whether or not a caregiver who is a family member should be compensated, the idea we're still arguing over whether or not we fully fund ADA.

The idea we're arguing over whether or not we should have strict enforcement of the Americans With Disabilities Act or IDEA, the idea we're not funding these things and that's still a debate?

I'll conclude by saying this and go to questions. Because I want to talk about specifics. But the specifics you want to talk about.

I would respectively suggest to you that next time someone tells you: We can't afford to do these things, remind them -- I love my conservative Republican friends. They talk about the new paradigm all the time.

Well, there's a new paradigm here. I'll remind you that it's been their outrageous spending habits and tax habits that

have fundamentally altered our ability to fund the things that are so much more important.

I can hardly wait as a Democratic nominee to debate my Republican opponents about their value system. I can hardly wait to have them explain to me why it is more important to give good and decent and honorable Americans -- and they are -- who make an average income of \$1.4 million a year an additional \$85 billion tax cut. And it's not reasonable to spend \$111 billion to make sure we fund the -- \$11 billion dollars to fund the program we have here. That it's not reasonable to spend the money on Section 8 or adequate housing. That it's not reasonable to spend considerably less in meeting every, every single solitary goal we set out. Tell me your values. Which is more valuable?

And beyond that, tell me: How will the nation benefit the most?

Ladies and gentlemen, it's clear to me the way to do it. I'm anxious to hear your questions. Teddy, I'll cease and assist.

[Applause.]

>>TED KENNEDY, JR.: Thank you, Senator. Senator Bidden thank you again for taking the time to join us today.

Our first question I have is from Lisa Thompson of north Salem New Hampshire. She asks: This past March the United Nations made open for signature of a brand-new convention that establishes rights for people with disabilities around the world. Would you work to have it signed and ratified in the US, if elected President.

>>SENATOR JOE BIDEN: The answer is yes and as chairman of the foreign relations committee, I will do that. But I warn you, think about this: There are almost 154 nations I believe already signed a similar convention relating to equal treatment of women. We were one of the few nations that still hasn't signed it.

And we wonder why. We wonder why we have lost the sense in the world that somehow we're that shining city on the hill. We wonder why.

These things matter. I would strongly support it. And as chairman of the committee, I will push it.

[Applause.]

>>TED KENNEDY, JR.: Senator Bidden, this question is from Sara Denencourt of Canterbury New Hampshire. She asks as President what would you do to increase the availability of affordable, accessible, integrated housing?

>>SENATOR JOE BIDEN: I would significantly increase the budget. Look, this administration has for the last six years had an all-out assault on any form of public or assisted housing. Whether its Section 8 housing. Whether or not its

Section 8-11 housing. Or whether or not it is housing for the -
- whether it's low income housing. We have to provide -- you
want to use the tax code to promote activity that is in our
interest. We should be doing that with regard to the housing
choice voucher Section 8 low income housing tax credits and
expanding not only the money we put in. But I would
significantly expand -- and I mean this sincerely and when I was
chairman in the judiciary committee like your father before me,
I spent a lot of time insisting the administration focus civil
rights advancement of enforcing of existing housing.
Enforcement of existing housing.

So I would and I'm happy if you contact me or I take that
name, I'll go into great detail about how much I would spend and
how I would do it. But I would fundamentally increase the tax
credits for those to provide this housing so rents can be lower,
significantly increase enforcement and provide availability
overall for more construction.

>>TED KENNEDY, JR.: Thank you, Senator.

[Applause.]

>>TED KENNEDY, JR.: The next question comes from Cheryl
Hurst of Conway New Hampshire. There is a national shortage of
direct care workers to assist people with disabilities.

What would you do as President to address this shortage?

>>SENATOR JOE BIDEN: Well, you know, as you know, not all --
all those folks need nurses. But the truth is, folks, we have a
shortage of nurses, about 1100,000 -- 100,000 shortage of nurses
I've introduced with Patty Murray a legislation piece to provide
100,000 nurses. But the log jam is that not enough people want
to be nurses there's not enough folks with doctorate degrees to
provide for graduate studies as well as entrance access. 48,000
people try to get into nursing school last year and there's no
school to get into.

And so I would focus there, No. 1.

No. 2, I would reward by paying off tuitions for those
who are prepared to work in those areas of the greatest need.
And I think we have to do the same with school teachers, by the
way. We are way understaffed in our schools. We have
overcrowded classrooms. I've also proposed -- I'm kind of hung
on 100,000 because I'm the guy that did the 100,000 cops
legislation. But to provide for another 100,000 teachers. The
purpose mainly being to provide for smaller classes.

Smaller classes get better access to our children with
disabilities who have cognitive capabilities that are normal or
exceed the rest of their class but are left behind so often. So
there are things -- the kind of things I would approach.

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR JOE BIDEN: We can afford it, by the way.

>>TED KENNEDY, JR.: Senator Biden, how can our community

become more effective in getting our messages across to candidates for public office?

>>SENATOR JOE BIDEN: Well, what you're doing now. And elect me. That's the most important thing.

No, all kidding aside, any of you in a couple -- a couple of you here know me. The one thing I think you will find no one -- and I have many flaws. I doubt you'll find anyone with whom I've ever served or anyone in my state who will tell you -- sometimes they are chagrined -- that there is a single bit of difference that I say when I'm campaigning and what I will do or attempt to do if elected. I promise you, I plan on being the education President. And what I mean by that is education for everyone.

Everyone. We keep forgetting the commitment for universal public education relates to the degree to which you are educatable. That's what it relates to. It's not just educate the kids without any problems. It's not just educate those that are easy to educate.

It says educate everyone. Universal. And so you'll find no -- and you'll find I will use this pulpit, I will use this pulpit, to remind the American people -- and they need to be reminded sometimes. Because look, understandably they are preoccupied with their daily lives. How they can put food on the table. How they keep their job. Whether or not their kid like mine is going to head over to Iraq. What's going to happen to their daughter who is in a bad situation? What's going to happen -- I mean, they are occupied 24 hours a day just figuring out how to deal with themselves.

And it is the responsibility of a President sometimes to remind us. Remind us of our better angels. Because I'm absolutely convinced the American public will respond, will respond. It's not that they aren't willing.

They are not being led. They are not being reminded. They are not being encouraged. And they are not being given practical answers. We're a practical people.

How to do what they want to do. And that is help.

>>TED KENNEDY, JR.: Thank you, Senator. I now have a question from Melissa Drew from Merrimack New Hampshire she wants to know what your thoughts are on autism. How do you think we should prevent it in the future?

She says 150 -- 1 in 150 children are getting diagnosed and it is getting worse.

>>SENATOR JOE BIDEN: It is getting worse. Let me start off -- I'll tell you what I know and what I don't know. Or at least what I think I know and what I don't know. I don't claim to be an expert. I have a daughter who is a social worker. And she deals in this area. And I look at it. And to me although it's not -- it seems to me there must be an environmental Nexus. I

don't understand how it's likely that there's not an environmental Nexus.

So I would continue and increase research into dealing with determining the cause. The cause. What has happened? It's not merely the parents are all of a sudden recognizing a quote disorder that didn't exist that people didn't recognize before. It's a reality. It is larger. It is more significant.

And I would do a great deal more to try to determine and make a commitment at NIH and also by providing for direct research grants and pure research grants to determine what is the Nexus.

In the meantime what's starting to happen now -- is you're starting to get more and more -- I know all of you know this better than I do. You saw yesterday on many of the networks talk about how -- it's kind of frightening, how to get parents to recognize more early in infancy and in the first eight, ten months whether or not their child is likely to be autistic.

And so there's a lot more focus on it. Here is what I believe: I believe when the American public and your government focuses on a problem, it has enormous resources. And it becomes a self generating commitment if the government will continue to provide the funding for the basic research and the applied research in the area.

And so I think we're on the cusp of fig something out. But the -- figuring something out. But the truth is: I don't know. I don't know. I only know what I can do as your President.

I can and I will in the research budget increase considerably the amount of money to determine what the causes are.

>>TED KENNEDY, JR.: Senator, I know you have time for only one more question. This question comes from the national MS society. The Supreme Court in Olmstead held that ADA require states to offer services to people with disabilities in the most integrated community-based setting possible. Despite this important victory, states are still struggling to implement Olmstead.

What would you as President do to rectify this problem?

>>SENATOR JOE BIDEN: Two things: One, some of those states have difficulties because they have very bad tax bases. They do not have some -- some states are considerably poorer than others. Other states have the capacity but choose, choose, other priorities over implementing what is Constitutionally required with the -- what the Supreme Court is acknowledging is required under the law.

So I would engage in two things. No. 1: I would provide for more money to the states in order to be able to get thing to

-- get them to encourage them to enforce and to implement the law. But I would also much more strictly -- I would much more strictly enforce the law. I would bring civil rights actions out of my -- out of the justice department to insist that they be enforced.

And so there's two steps to it. A carrot and the stick.

[Applause.]

>>TED KENNEDY, JR.: Thank you for joining us.

>>SENATOR JOE BIDEN: Thank you. You're very kind. And thank you all. Thank you, all. I appreciate it.

[Applause.]

[Background noise.]

>>TED KENNEDY, JR.: Ladies and gentlemen, we have a slight change to our program. I understand -- I've just been told that Senator Dodd is on his way. But to make use of time, I would like to ask Tony Coelho to come to the podium. Tony is going to talk about voter mobilization. Tony needs no introduction to this audience.

You all know Tony as a leader in the House of representatives serving as a majority WHIP in the house. Tony also has a spoken openly about his epilepsy. He's co-authored the Americans With Disabilities Act. He's had senior positions in many different agencies, including being the chair of the President's committee on employment of people with disabilities. We're really lucky to have Tony and his expertise. And I would like Tony to come up and talk about voter mobilization and no matter who we're supporting today, you know, how we can go and mobilize our community to get out to vote. So Tony, please join us? Thank you.

[Applause.]

>> Thank you, Ted. Thank you very much. I appreciate it very much.

It's a pleasure to be here. And it's really great to see this type of crowd and see this type of audience and all of the activity that's been put into -- put in place to get the Presidential candidates to recognize what we're all about. So I want to give all of you a hand. And you should give each other a hand and say: Congratulations to what you've done and what you've accomplished today. So give yourself a nice hand.

[Applause.]

>> You know, what you've done today is really only the beginning, though. It's not the end. And so it's nice to have this crowd and have all of these Presidential candidates come and visit us and talk to you about what they want to do.

But the one question I want to ask you -- you're asking all of these Presidential candidates all kinds of questions. But I want you to be honest with me right now when I ask you this question: By a show of hands I would like all of you to

answer this simple question: How many of you in this room at this very moment are registered to vote?

That's impressive.

Now, I think the most important thing is that if you look at the numbers, if you look at the numbers in New Hampshire alone, if you look at the numbers in New Hampshire alone, the facts are these: That if you go through John Carrie won the 2004 New Hampshire primary with about 84,000 votes. There are about 33,000 Democrats with disabilities in New Hampshire. And there are another 54,000 independent voters with disabilities in New Hampshire. If you add that up, there are more votes in New Hampshire than the winner of the Democratic primary.

And that same equation applies in all the early caucuses and pry mares in the Presidential campaign. -- primaries in the Presidential campaign.

So if we -- those of us who have disabilities -- if we in our families, just those of us with disabilities, but if we take those of us with disabilities and our families vote, we can impact every single primary. Every single primary.

[Applause.]

>> I found it fascinating that -- and the questions of asking the candidates, the implication was that we're not effective. I found that fascinating. It was a negative question.

Why aren't we more effective? How can we be more effective?

And the response from each of the two was: By what you're doing today.

The real answer is: Get out and vote. That's the real answer.

[Applause.]

>> And if you get out and vote, if you get out and vote, and people know you're voting, you'll have an impact. And they will come to you. They will ask you for your input. They will ask can you for your support.

You will be effective. But if you don't vote, they don't care.

Why? Because it's obvious you don't care.

If you vote, it implies you care.

We in the disability community have not been that effective. And we haven't been because we don't get organized and get committed and get out there and make a difference when it counts. And that's the day of the vote.

So I would hope -- I would hope, that in 2008 our commitment is that we organize and vote. Our commitment is that we organize here in New Hampshire. And we participate but we really organize to get out the vote. And that we have an impact. And that everybody knows that the disability community made a difference here in New Hampshire.

[Applause.]

>> And that we do it in Iowa. And that we do it in South Carolina. And that we do it in Nevada.

So that -- so that in every election people recognize that when we say there are 54 million Americans, 54 million of us with disabilities, that they recognize that they have to deal with us.

When we talk about our issues, the ADA Restoration, we talk about housing, when we talk about healthcare, we talk about all of the different issues that are important to us. Then they realize that they have to do something about it.

That we're not begging. We don't have to beg.

Our issues are real. It's just like other people, other groups. They go to those groups. And they say they are going to do X. Why? Because they are voting blocks. They know that they make a difference in election campaigns.

It's the same thing with us. It's easy to do. Just your willingness to be involved, your willingness to be here today, made a difference with Hillary Clinton. Your willingness to be here today made a difference with Biden. It will make a difference with Dodd and the other candidates who are here today.

But it's only the beginning. What really counts is Election Day. Getting out the vote. Your vote.

All of you registered you said. That is only part of it. You've got to go out and actually vote. And you've got to take your loved ones with you to vote.

And if you get out there and you vote and you take your loved ones with you to vote, then the candidates are going to come to us asking us what we want, what we need, what makes a difference to us to make our life better. To do what's right for us. When we talk about these issues, they will want to know what matters. To make these issues real.

I can remember when I was suicidal. I can remember when I had my difficulties. And people didn't care, including my family.

It is time for us to stand up. It is time for us to demand that we have the dignity that we deserve.

It is time for us to demand that we have the jobs that we should have. It is time for us to demand the respect that we deserve.

But we can only do that, we can only do that, when we fulfill our responsibility and our responsibility either as Democrats or Republicans, our responsibility, our responsibility is not only to register. Our responsibility is not only to be at a social function like this. Our responsibility is to vote. Is to vote.

Is to not only vote ourselves. But to get our families

to vote. But it's to vote. And be effective in that vote.
Thank you very, very much.

[Applause.]

>>TED KENNEDY, JR.: Thank you very much, Tony Coelho. Let's give Tony another hand. We are so lucky to have people like Tony. I'm proud to serve with him on the Board of AAPD. We're so -- we're so fortunate to have people like knee who can talk from personal experience -- like Tony who can talk from personal experience and understand because of his experience as a legislator what we need to do as a movement. So thank you very much, Tony, for coming to share your wisdom with us.

[Applause.]

>>TED KENNEDY, JR.: We have another candidate with us today. Senator Chris Dodd from Connecticut.

applause.

>>TED KENNEDY, JR.: I'm a Connecticut resident. And I was kind of hoping that I was going to be asked to introduce him today. But I have the pleasure actually of introducing his sister, Carolyn, who will then, in turn, introduce her brother Senator Dodd. And Carolyn Dodd is again the sister of Senator Dodd. She's had her own impressive career in public service. As a teacher. Over 40 years as a teacher. Many of those years as a special education teacher for children with learning disabilities and visual impairments. But in addition to her teaching career, she's also had a long history of activism in the disability community. She's president of the Hartford Chapter of the federation of the blind. She serves on the Connecticut Board of Education and services for the blind. And the Connecticut state rehabilitation Council. So she is -- she knows intimately as does Senator Dodd the importance of these issues. She's also -- she was one of the key figures in working closely with her brother in passing the Help America Vote Act. So ensuring that she --

[Applause.]

>>TED KENNEDY, JR.: Ensuring that she and others with visual impairments have the right to vote independently. So Carolyn, would you come up here, please and introduce your brother, Senator Dodd. Senator Dodd, welcome to New Hampshire.

[Applause.]

>> Hello, everyone.

>>THE AUDIENCE: Hello.

>> What a great pleasure this is to follow a wonderful Kennedy whose family has done so many outstanding things to promote our rights, our independence and to ensure the dignity and the civil rights of our community. Thank you so much for that.

And I think we all owe him a great hand again.

[Applause.]

>> However, today, it's my great pleasure to introduce a man whose done so many significant things for the disabled community. He has certainly co-authored and worked tirelessly to see to it that the Help America Vote Act comes to fruition.

He has also done so much to ensure that students have access to materials for textbooks either in Braille or in electronic form so those of you who do not read print can have access to our materials in school.

[Applause.]

>> It's a great thing. So I really have to say that what I love to say most about my brother is his gentleness. In fact, my mother always called him her gentle soul.

And I can illustrate this by a letter that he received last spring from a student friend of his that he went to high school at Georgetown prep in Maryland. And the letter stated his memory of Chris when he first went to Georgetown prep when Chris was then president of the yard there, which is president of the student Council.

This fellow was quite disabled. He had a great deal of difficulty walking. And Chris became his mentor and friend. And helped him through the difficult times that one has in adolescence of adjusting to school. And he never forgot that.

And I think that really says it all about Chris's gentle spirit. And generous nature toward those of us who, perhaps, need an extra hand or a leg up.

So without further ado, it's my great pleasure to introduce my wonderful brother, Chris Dodd. And thank you so much.

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR CHRIS DODD: Now, if I had any sense at all I would say thank you and sit down after that introduction. It doesn't get any better than having your sister, my younger sister now I say along the way. Being one of six children I've learned my place here in terms of the pecking order in the family. But I'm deeply, deeply honored that Carolyn is not only here today but out in campaigning in Iowa as well as New Hampshire for me along with other siblings as well and truly honored that she's here "Waking the Sleeping Giant" the national forum for equality and opportunity in the country. And let me share also as Carolyn has my deep thanks to Ted Kennedy for his work here and his family's work. I have no greater honor than to sit next to the Senior Center for Massachusetts on the health education employment labor committee on the United States Senate have for 26 years no greater champion, no greater fighter for people with disabilities and for all Americans in Senator Ted Kennedy. And his son carries that tradition on. And so it's a great honor to be here with him today here in talking about these critically important issues. I thank you all of you. Let me

underscore, as well, my good friend Tony who I had the pleasure serving with in Congress who has been an inspiration and to underscore his points I heard as I came in the room I heard the importance of participating in this process. Of choosing nominees for the primary process here in New Hampshire the caucus process in Iowa. Being involved in the campaigns and the electoral process of our country. I'm going to touch on this point in a minute here talking as my sister and Ted did about the help Americans vote act and the critical role that people in this room and not in this room played in watching that piece of legislation become law and the threats we face in challenges by those who wanted to water down or eliminate the provisions under HAVA which specifically deal with the disability community. So it's a great honor to be with you today. My sister Carolyn - - the only reason I'm standing here today is because of my sister Carolyn. Being the fifth of sixth the children. Teasing earlier about being her older brother, I am responsible or my presence is responsible strictly because my sister Carolyn actually prayed for a little brother. And so I am here only because I had an older sister who prayed I might arrive here.

And back in those days when I was born in the spring of 1944 frankly Roosevelt was still -- Franklin Roosevelt was still President of the United States. And of course the doctor we delivered me in Connecticut I was born with a kaul. Those of you in the medical profession know this is a thin veil of skin it's supposed to be very good luck if you're born with a caul. And the doctor turned to my mother and he said: Grace, this young man may grow up to be President of the United States. And my mother said. And what's the matter with Roosevelt the? so Carolyn and my date and age perspective.

Let me tell you a little bit about Carolyn here. I want to -- because as a brother I'm entitled at this podium to be proud of my sister. As we all are in our family here. Carolyn's life is involved some 40 years as a teacher. Some 20 years in the public school system of Connecticut in the inner city Hartford. But before that helped provide the American month sorry teaching at the Whitney school in Connecticut going back to the late 1950s and done a remarkable job over the jobs of incorporating month sorry techniques in public education. Spent a year of Mexico working with disability children in that country using Montessori techniques. Has really been an inspiration to the other five of us in the family. But grew up in an era quite frankly had it not been for my parents determined my sister Carolyn would get the opportunity to reach all of her God given potentials and abilities here and fought every day to see that she would have that chance. Too many of the people in my sister's generation didn't get those opportunities. Not because their parents didn't want to

fight hard enough. It was very difficult access. The -- to access the kind of opportunities that should have been available. So for those of you today, understand there are people like my parents who raised all of us in our household to believe that my sister, Carolyn, could do anything that anybody else could do. If given the opportunity to do it. And that's how I was raised.

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR CHRIS DODD: That's how I was raised. So we had a life long educational experience in our family about the importance of these issues. And seeing to it that every human being given the opportunity to reach all of the potentials that the good Lord has given them. So I'm deeply honored given that Carolyn is here today to introduce me. Let me take a few minutes if I can and share with you some general thoughts about these important issues. When I was first elected to Congress in 1974 along with Tom Harkin I might add we arrived in Congress on the same day of January 1975. And I've been proud on the very first day that the Americans With Disabilities Act was introduced I became a co-sponsor that day of the Americans with disability act. I didn't wait around to see if other people were going to join or not.

And the very first piece of legislation some 33 years ago that I got involved in was public law in '94 142 and for those of you who know the legislative history you know what that is and that's the education of all children's act of the United States. And one of the first things I did by calling up and using the old influence of being in public office is I discovered that if you were a state department foreign service officer and blind, you didn't get a chance to be in that job here. It was discrimination against serving as a foreign policy or a foreign policy officer in the state department.

I just began to think of what my sister could have done if she was a foreign service officer in the state department. And as a result of pushing back in 1975 and '76, we changed the regulations in the state department. And today there are foreign service officers who are blind who are serving all over the world. Because you fight and you push back and you make a difference every single day. Along the way.

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR CHRIS DODD: Obviously look here. You have a wonderful opportunity in this audience and throughout the state and country to make a difference in this debate we're having in the country, again about the inclusiveness of our society. And with this forum and of course the primary this winter here in New Hampshire. So today I want to spend a few minutes about talking about opportunity in my view for every single American, how we can lift up and help produce results for those with

disabilities. And the workplace, in our healthcare system. In our communities in every aspect of American life.

Each and every candidate in this Presidential race brings I believe a particular set of values and experiences to the tasks that are before them. Not only as a candidate. But those of us that prevail in this as President of the United States.

So I wanted to share with you some of mine. To give you some idea of why I'm doing this, why I'm a candidate and why I believe I think I'm the right candidate at the right time to get the results we're all looking for.

I suspect that if I ask each and every one of you in the audience here today what you cared most about, most about not only in the upcoming election but also what you wanted to see done in our country, it wouldn't be getting healthcare done as important as it is and I don't minimize it. It wouldn't be getting out of Iraq as important as that is and something I hope we're going to do sooner rather than later as critical as that is, I would add. I suspect if I ask each and every one of you what's the single most important issue to you I suspect you would say it's your family, your children. The kind of world that the next generation is going to grow up in. What are we going to do on our watch to see to it as a generation that the coming generation will have greater opportunities and more abilities to achieve all of their potentials.

My daughter Grace, I'm a rather late bloomer in the father business here. I have a six year old and a two year old. I tease audiences I'm the only candidate for the presidency that gets mail from AARP and diaper services I have a broad interests in terms of constituent interest. But my daughter Grace was born on September 13th, 2001 in fact Jack see was on the way to the hospital that morning after I had already gone to work and as a result of seeing the smoke plume out of the -- turned the car around she delayed the delivery of grace for two days. Instead of being born on September 11th in Arlington Virginia she arrived on the afternoon of September 13th. When I picked her up on the afternoon as my first born I did what every parent or grandparent has done through the ages I looked at my daughter and asked a very simple question:

What kind of a world, what kind of a country is she going to grow up in. The world had just changed forever, for all of us. 48 hours earlier. And I wanted to make sure that my child was going to have all of the opportunities and all of the dreams fulfilled, all of the hopes and aspirations that she might have to reach all of her potential, as well.

Would she grow up in a world where every American share the same opportunities that she might have. Or would she live in America that fails to live up to those promises. I feel a deep sense of responsibility as a father and as an American.

And I'm sure all of you do to do everything we possibly can during this moment of time that you and I get to make this difference. For our country and the world in which we live in.

It comes deep inside as I said earlier. My father was a prosecutor at the Nuremberg trials in Germany. He raised his family talking about among many things the medical experimentations that the Nazis performed on people with disabilities in Germany those 13 years as he prosecuted those defendants. Around our dining room and kitchen table he raised his six children to understand the lessons of history. How in moments of time well educated so-called cultured people can do disastrous things and violent things to their fellow human beings. And that each generation bore a responsibility to stand up and to push back and to fight back. No victory is won forever. Each and every generation has to stand up and fight harder and harder to see to it that these rights and obligations that we bear as human beings will be defended.

I would offer the Peace Corps served in Latin America and then in the National Guard and army reserves and again watching people with disabilities and different opportunities in nations where the opportunities medically didn't exist for so many people and how you could grow up stigma advertised in a rural mountain community in the Dominican Republic because of a disability and what life would be like if you bore those scars and how you would treat it by a community. I believe all of us can make a difference through service and leadership. Service and leadership I'm proud to have had because I was challenged by leadership in this country at a time different than this when leadership actually asked each and every one of us to be a part of things larger than ourselves. I authored and passed when I arrived in the Senate the family and medical leave act. I don't know if there are people in this room today who have been able to take advantage of that. But I'm prouder of this maybe than -- more than anything else that 50 million Americans today don't have to choose between the job they need and the family they love when a crisis arrives in their families. That's the kind of leadership I think America needs and wants as we face these crises.

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR CHRIS DODD: I want you to know it never would have happened despite the seven years and three Presidents and two vetoes to make that happen. What you probably don't know is it was a mother of a severely disabled child that I met in St. Bridget's in Connecticut where I live who was the inspiration of that legislation. Watching -- born on May 27th the same day as I watching her grow up with disabilities that she was born with watch people avoid her or even touching her in church on Sundays inspired me to do something when I heard her family was having

to struggle with an income where jobs were at risk all the time as they tried to take care of this child of theirs. I was determined that whatever else I can do in Congress I was going to make a difference so families didn't have to make that choice about having to lose the job when they want to take care of a loved one.

Issues we've been talking about and discussing today are personal. They reach deep into my family and my experience as a young adult. And as a member of the United States Congress over the past quarter of a century.

I haven't learned about them through a briefing quite candidly or a meeting in my office but through friends and acquaintances and families and my own sister. As you've heard, Carolyn is legally blind. A proud member of the national federation of employment she won an employment discrimination lawsuit more than a dozen years ago I will never forget as long as I live that lawyer from Denver flying across the country on a moment's notice to walk into the school Board of Hartford, Connecticut and say you're not going to fire a talented gifted teacher because she has a disability. Because she's blind. She's a good teacher. She can make a difference. And because we have advocates today, she didn't lose that job. Carolyn reminds all of us certainly her family that the disabled community isn't homogenous at all.

That each of us have different needs and face varying barriers to opportunity in our country. That's why I'm so proud to stand before you today and say that I have consistently supported appropriations related to the disabled community. Funding critical programs for education, employment to Social Security, housing and transition to work programs. My sister in many ways the inspiration in our family is behind another piece of legislation which you've already mentioned here and that is of course help America vote.

I'm so proud to stand here today to tell you I worked to ensure new voting protections for those with disabilities are included in the final legislation. By the way, I see jibing Dickinson here. This -- Jim did so much. This guy made a difference beyond belief. This is a fighter. I want to tell you. We didn't quit on this legislation. I thank you immensely for your leadership here to make a difference to see to it that reforms and our voting process would be safer and more secure and more transparent and accessible. And validating procedures for Federal elections across our country.

We were able to provide funding to enable states and localities to upgrade antiquated voting systems and we required them to ensure broader access I might add so that those with disabilities could vote privately independently and without discrimination.

What an outrage in the 21st Century that people like myself would have to go into a voting booth and have someone assist them in casting a ballot in this day and age the right that's most important for us. My civil rights hero --

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR CHRIS DODD: One of my great civil rights hero John Lewis called the HAVA bill the most important voting rights law since the voting rights of 1965. We need to ensure vigorous enforcement of HAVA's accessibility requirements provide voter verified paper ballot and record and fund new accessibility technologies. That's why I introduced the voter act, if you will, which includes these kinds of provisions. And I've made restoring the Constitution, by the way, one of the center pieces of my campaign. I believe you can't defend America if you don't stand up and defend the Constitution of the United States. Which is under assault by some of these people.

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR CHRIS DODD: That's why I'm very proud that we -- what we did with HAVA. And after the disastrous elections of 2000, in which tens of thousands Americans were of course disenfranchised changing I believe the outcome of that election HAVA said that every American, every single person in our country should be guaranteed the right to exercise the most fundamental of all of our rights the right to cast a ballot and have it counted. Because of our law that won't be taken away simply because of their disability. And I'm deeply proud of that accomplishment. But obviously there are many more bridges to cross we all know that. I'm proud to say that everyday Americans with disability act was introduced by Tom a supporter as I said a moment ago. Despite that historic step people with disabilities in our country continue to experience unemployment at a rate above the national average as high as 70%. For people with severe disabilities in our country. In part because, of course, the courts have undermined the Americans With Disabilities Act. That is not my vision, America, and it's not yours.

And that's why as President of the United States I want you to know I would encourage public-private partnerships as they relate to recruitment and hiring and retention of people with disabilities. I would ensure that the tax code in our country encourages employers to provide additional accommodations for disabled applicants and employees. I would strengthen the EEOC's enforcement of ADA and put people in that commission that are going to stand up and fight to see to it that this law is uphold and fought for by the people of this country.

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR CHRIS DODD: Further, I would support efforts to

increase the development and access to assistive and universally designed technologies in our workforce. And I would ensure that the Federal government would become a model employer, by the way, of the disabled, including the White House, including the President's office and the White House of the United States, as well. Above all, -- above all, I would strengthen the ADA by signing the ADA restoration act into law.

This is a bill whose time has come. And I congratulate Tom Harkin and again I'm delighted to be a co-sponsor in that legislation. Another important issue is affordable accessible transportation for people with disabilities especially in rural areas. It is an issue of fairness and necessity and people of this state I think can understand it.

Indeed, one of the key points of my energy plan is to increase access to affordable and convenient mass transit systems that are fully accessible to people with disabilities across all regions of our country. Mass transit that is cheaper to operate because the fuel has grown here at home. Not imported in some of those dangerous areas around the globe.

We all know mass transit saves, of course, a family's money in fuel costs and lowers pollution problems by reducing the number of automobiles on our roads during rush hours. We all know that affordable and convenient mass transit, as well, is essential to ensuring that everyone can take advantage of services and opportunities. It is also in my view the best way to connect those with disabilities to jobs and schools and healthcare facilities. And that's why I can tell you today in this gathering that in a Dodd Administration never will access be an impediment to people with disabilities regardless of where you're from and where you need to go in this country. And this needs to be a priority for all of us. This is a particularly -- this is a particularly important area obviously for those who live in states like New Hampshire who live in states like Iowa who I believe require personalized transportation support services.

Van services and ride share programs. But access isn't just about the geographics.

It's also about the harnessing of the power of the Internet. Which in today's increasingly global economy is absolutely critical that every American can take advantage of. From doing business to obtaining information to remaining competitive in this world, Internet technologies offer an unprecedented ability to perform tasks and employment obligations from home or anywhere else for that matter. That means that those with disabilities have access to jobs, activities and services that might previously have been difficult to take advantage of.

And that's why I will require that Internet technologies

be made fully accessible to people with disabilities. Including the expansion of the wireless network -- including expansion of the wireless network to that location rural or urban will never be an impediment to assessing or using Internet technologies. It's the 21st Century. And it's about time that our disability policy got out of the 20th Century. And I believe we can do it with informed and enlightened thoughts regarding the Internet.

That is also why I have been such a strong supporter of Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. I was one of the Section 508 first authors, lead authors. And I continue to champion the assistive technologies that my sister Carolyn mentioned that ensure that those with disabilities have unfettered access to promising new developments particularly in the area of education.

With idea I won the passage the passage of the instructional accessibility act that many of you are aware of. A bill designed to provide much needed assistance to blind and print disabled students enrolled in our public school systems in this country. As many of you may know, that legislation ensures that blind and print disabled students receive textbooks and other instructional materials in the formats that they receive at the same time, by the way, as their peers. I'll never forget having the testimony of a young child from Guilford Connecticut, a blind child who talked about the difficulties that it was in the delays for her to get the materials. That were not available to her. Because she was totally blind.

And having to wait weeks and months in some cases to be able to get that information and that material.

That one child was the inspiration of that legislation to make sure the accessibility will be there. Ensuring the blind have the same education materials as their peers. It seems like such a simple idea. But without legislation we made it possible and I'm proud of that legislation, as well. And as President I might add my budgets will reflect a fully funded IDEA in this country here. We're going to see that that's part of the budgetary process.

Let me lastly, if I can, lastly here mention healthcare because obviously this is critical, as well.

I have a universal healthcare plan that would make affordable accessible healthcare available to every single person in our country. Part of a nation regardless of that American's job is status, their ability to pay or previous medical conditions I might add. It would require mental health parity as a condition of participation as well as include long term services supports. And to make sure that individuals get the prescription support services and medical devices that they need. Let me mention, by the way, the mental health parity issue. I want to tell Teddy how difficult this issue was and

he'll know what I'm about to say. His brother has one bill on mental health parity and his brother has another in the house you want to talk about an awkward moment having to choose between my colleague that sits on my immediate right and his son that sits in the other chambers and I love his father more than any other member that I serve with but I choose Patrick's bill because it's a bit better.

And those of you who know the difference out here will know what I'm talking about here.

I move my seat a little further away from your father after I made that decision along the way. I happen to believe we have an obligation as I hope all of you do, as well. To help states implement the Olmstead versus the LC Supreme Court decision. And help address the institutional bias and the current Medicaid system which exists. The Olmstead decision which I hope all of you are aware of makes clear that all individuals with disabilities should have the choice to live their lives as full and integrated members of their own communities. And that's the point of that legislation. The Federal government -- the Federal government should ensure that states provide Americans with disabilities the freedom to choose the kind of care that they believe will best enable them to live full, complete and manageable lives.

My administration would support the creation of additional community based options, I might add for those with disabilities while at the same time working to ensure that individuals choosing to live in these settings have the same access to Medicaid as those living in institutions.

Ultimately these issues are about who we are as a nation. Whether we stand for leadership that divides or unites us as a people. That provides real opportunity for all of us in this country. Leadership that sticks our children with a bill or delivers unimportant issues that will improve their lives. All of these matters here and these ideas are critically important.

And you may say or look at them: Well, all of these candidates have a lot of similar ideas and thoughts. What do I bring to this debate and discussion that may be somewhat different?

Over the last 26 years I've understood that no one party, no one individual, no matter how well intentioned, no matter how talented, no matter how great their ideas are can do this alone. We are a nation that doesn't elect a king or queen or dictator on Election Day to be President we choose the leader of our country hopefully that has the ability to bring people together to make a difference for our nation. That's what's been missing too often. We have political leaders spending most of their time trying to convince the country the other side is totally wrong. I think the country is getting sick and tired of it.

They want leadership that knows how to get a job done with the proven ability to get results for our nation.

I understood that from the beginning. When I arrived in the United States Senate 26 years ago the first thing I did was to form a children's caucus because it seemed we had a caucus for every imaginable constituents in our country but one out of four Americans are children. So I reached out to a new Republican and 26 years later that children caucus still operates and functions I thought we needed a child care bill in this country to provide affordable accessible child care I reached out to Orin in Utah we authored the child care development block grant which provided billions of dollars to make accessible affordable child care for families. On family medical leave I did it with -- on autism I did it with Rick Santorum. On premature birth and infant screening I did it on prescription drugs. On every single case it takes leadership that can bring people together. Otherwise these are nothing more than a collection of speeches. And promises that will go unfulfilled. If we don't elect people that can one, win an election by bringing a party and a nation together. And then on January 20th of 2009 can bring our country together. That can reach out to people across the political divide and find the common ground that we all need in order to make our progress as a nation. To reach that more perfect union that the founders of our nation so described in the preamble of the Constitution of the United States.

That becomes our collective responsibility. Yours and mine. When we talk about the greatest generation, it isn't just the leaders, the political leaders of those generations. It's the people whose names no one is ever going to hear of again that sit on those crosses or grave yards in Belgium or France or in some Pacific island that 18 or 19 year old, that individual in a farm community or small town in New Hampshire that reached out during the depression and saved someone's life and family because it made a difference. Our generation is no different in a sense. We bear that same kind of responsibility as a generation to make a difference.

I mentioned earlier that I served in the Peace Corps. In the early 1960s. I've been asked a million times why did I do that? The answer I've given a million times is the same: I was asked by an American President to do something bigger than myself. To make a difference in our country. What a time it was to be alive and to be an American.

To be invited by political leadership in a country. To get involved in things. To get involved in the Civil Rights' Movement, the farm market moves to go to the military go to the Peace Corps. Make a difference. Do something in your own community or town. How good it felt to be an American. To be

proud no matter where you went. People were proud to be associated with us and stand with us. I don't think we've changed at all. I think leadership has. Compare if you will, the challenge given more than a generation and a half ago to a generation with us with a call this President made in the wake of 9/11 instead of asking us to do something larger than ourselves when asked what Americans could do, the answer was to go shopping. What a disgrace. How far we've come in the leadership of our country.

When you go from asking what you can do to make a difference to go shopping. I want to be that kind of leader in our country that invites not only this generation but coming generations to live up to the hopes and aspirations of a great country. We bear that collectively. Not just us standing behind this podium but each and every one of us. So when our time is done my little daughters Grace and Christina that two year old and six year old will not only look to her father but all of us and say at a broken time they made a difference. They got America back on its feet again. They restored moral authority around the globe. That's our collective responsibility. To fight for each other and the future of our country in the world in which we live. Thank you all for listening to me today.

I'm delighted and honored to have been here.

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR CHRIS DODD: Thank you, all.

>>TED KENNEDY, JR.: Thank you. Thank you, Senator Dodd. I know Senator Dodd has to leave in about ten minutes. So we will have time for a few questions. And I just should note as one of the organizers of this event that Senator Dodd was the very first candidate to commit to coming to be with us in New Hampshire.

[Applause.]

>>TED KENNEDY, JR.: Mary Shu from Concord New Hampshire asked: What would you do as President to improve education outcomes for students with disabilities?

>>SENATOR CHRIS DODD: Well, we talked about it some of the it already the 941-142 in how to begin the process. We'll have to go through the no child left behind in the coming days. In fact the chairman of the committee is scheduling these activities. It's going to expire. Let me say to all of you here because I think again it's one of these issues where it's easy to demo going on these issues and people are very hostile to no child left behind. There's criticisms about the law. Certainly the funding aspects are one of the main ones. But also the rigidity of the legislation the lack of providing flexibility and understanding that we should be measuring growth

of children. Not just taking a snapshot in time as to whether or not they are passing some test or turning our elementary and secondary schools into test prep centers.

But I believe we ought to try and reform the law. Not get rid of it all together. I don't want to go back to the time when there was a lack of accountability in our educational system here in seeing to this that every child had an opportunity to have access to the materials, the curriculums, the quality of teachers and others that are necessary for everyone to reach their potential. So the one thing I'm going to insist upon as we go forward with the reform areas in no child left behind is to make sure the children with disabilities are not going to be dropped out of no child left behind. We want to make sure the children with disabilities are going to remain within the framework of NCLB. That's going to be critically important. And I hope you agree with that particular point.

And then we need to make sure as we go through this that the support, the assessments that are being made, the accountability is there, the accommodations are going to be there for children, as well. I love having integrated systems, if you will. Here I spoke at a Head Start Program in Iowa a while or so ago. Where in these early Head Start Programs there's a community of both childrens with disabilities and those without in the same learning environment. And as the teacher said afterwards I was impressed she said could you tell which children were disabled and which were not and you couldn't tell because they are working with the whole system and idea of incorporating people with the process. So first and foremost it's seeing to it that those kind of curriculum based programs, the teachers, again, the assessments, the accommodations are going to be there for children with disabilities. And I would certainly insist upon that. Not only as a member of the Senate dealing with the legislation. But also as President of the United States.

>>TED KENNEDY, JR.: The next question is from Frank Vinsguera of Concord New Hampshire sorry, Frank if I mispronounced your last name. How does your healthcare proposal affect access to people with disabilities who need specialty services and how does it affect out-of-pocket costs.

>>SENATOR CHRIS DODD: Again, I invite all of you here if you're interested looking on the web site where all of the various proposals where health and education and the like are laid out in Chris Dodd.com. I'll try not to belabor the answer to the question.

The plan is a universal plan so it covers all of these issues. We ban any discrimination based on pre-existing conditions which is one of the major issues that people face within the disability community.

And we require that everyone participate and everyone benefits and provides the subsidies for those that would have financially a difficult time reaching that obligation. That's the one significant cost to my had healthcare proposal. We also use the Federal employees health benefit package, if you will, or the structure for this program. It's one of the best, if not the best, in the country.

Every Federal employee already utilizes this program. Every member of Congress does. One of the infuriating moments is to hear members of Congress opposed to any kind of universal healthcare system and then knowing simultaneously that every member of Congress has one of the best healthcare systems in the world. If members of Congress can have it, their constituents should have it, as well, I might add to see we have fairness and consistency in the country here along the way.

But the special needs would be accommodated, as well. And by spreading out of course the risk among those who are healthier, younger and wealthier among those who may be older not as well we can bring down these costs, including things dealing with prescription drugs medical devices and the like so people can have total access to that and this should be bringing down costs and including people in it is critical to it. Again I invite you to take a look at the provisions of the bill looking at some chronic conditions of the bill and how we serve those administrative needs and costs to deal with the overall effectiveness and the overall price of the program.

But again, I come back to the point I tried to make earlier to you. I hear all of these details and these plans are important. But I think every one of us in this room today recognize that come Election Day 2008 and my plan is not to wait until January of 2009. But on healthcare to begin sitting down immediately after the election to bring together the stakeholders on this issue. To work to develop that universal healthcare plan for our nation. Not wait until January. But to start immediately here. And to recognize there will be people here who have very different views than you and I do on this issue. But to begin that process and insist upon some of these basic principles on how we'll have that universal healthcare system that provides for the needs of all Americans regardless of their condition. And that will be a part and obviously very essential as we move forward on this -- in this effort, too.

>>TED KENNEDY, JR.: Thank you, Senator. And before our last question, I just want to let the audience know that at the conclusion of Senator Dodd's remarks, we will be breaking for lunch. And Keith Jones, who is going to be providing us with some entertainment and food for thought will be performing in about 45 minutes or so. So we are going to break for lunch. That will allow Chris Dodd, as well, some chance to meet and

talk with some of you individually.

So Senator Dodd, here is our final question for you:

How can our community be more effective in getting our messages across to candidates for public office?

>>SENATOR CHRIS DODD: Well, this is a great question and one that I don't think we've done as good a job. Part of it this has to be more than just a forum where we talk about these issues in the abstract in a sense. I think it's critically important that people see firsthand conditions and inviting people to come places in forums where these issues exist in a very real way. And not -- that doesn't happen often enough.

I've often encouraged groups to make sure that particularly in the states where people live we have wonderful who come and lobby and do a good job on behalf of these needs in Washington meeting with staffs and talking about legislation. But nothing as effective in my view is actually having a member of Congress or a member of the state Legislature or a member of the City Council actually come where you are in a sense and get to see you, the people you work with, the people you're involved with every single day.

You can have a huge impact on the decision making process. If it's only an intellectual exercise, then too often you're competing with other people who make great causes on various issues. But they fail to see and understand in a very direct way what people go through, the difficulties they face, the problems they have to overcome. And so I strongly encourage in this process not only here today but outside of this, I promise you in most instances my experience has been that people in public office welcome the opportunity to be invited to come somewhere.

Secondly, ask them to do the following: Say we ask you to come and we ask you only to do one thing. We want you to come for a half an hour or an hour. Then we want you to do something you're not often asked to do. We want you to be quiet. Don't give a speech. Just listen. Just listen.

Listen. Just listen to what I'm saying. And I think what you find, again, that the reaction here where people can actually learn something and sit down and actually go through what the issues are, how important they are, what a difference they can make, you can have an incredible impact leaving an indelible impression in the mind of the eye of someone who might otherwise -- you're here at a meeting a schedule Tony will tell you you got your first meeting somebody shows up it's 10:00 o'clock people are coming in right and left. You try to be patient give them the time turn them over to a staff individual. Nothing succeeds like back in that state, back in that District, in that representative area where you serve. And having someone come and spend a morning, spend a day and understand what these

issues are and how important they can be.
That's the most effective tool I know to engage people.

And then I want to underscore what Tony has said. I want to underscore what Tony has said. Unfortunately the disability community has the largest% age of eligible voters who don't participate in our elections in this country it's the single largest percentage of eligibility voters as a group. That's got to change here. It isn't just enough to gather and complain. We've got to get up and talk and make choices about people who understand these issues, who care about them deeply. Speeches are wonderful. Great to hear. Like anybody else, show me the background. Show me where you've done a difference. Show me where you made a difference. Tell me where you stood up in the past to fight on behalf of people and the concerns they have. You must demand that. And you start developing a record and a history where people not only give a good talk about things but also demonstrate throughout their lives and careers how important these issues are and then people understand the value of it and fight for legislation like HAVA there are people out there who object you have people who stood at this podium today that I had to fight with to get HAVA passed that objected that the disability community was going to make sure we had access and ability.

Jim will tell you he sat with me day after day to fight with the legislation and the difficulty we had in convincing some people of the importance of making sure every person had the right to cast a ballot in this country to do so rightly and independently. And I will never, ever, ever give up on the determination if that's a part of the process in this country. That's about as fundamental as it gets. Thank you. Thank you all, everybody. I appreciate it.

[Applause.]

>>SENATOR CHRIS DODD: My assistant Carolyn said you owe me one I didn't tell them about the tricks you played on me like the snow you put down my back.

[Laughter.]

(Lunch)

>>TED KENNEDY, JR.: Ladies and gentlemen, I hope you're enjoying your lunch and good company here today. How has the program gone so far? What would you say?

[Applause.]

>>TED KENNEDY, JR.: I would have to agree. I think this forum is meeting and exceeding our every expectation. And this afternoon will be no different. And, by the way, I do think it's terrific. I'm taking off my moderator hat here for a second. And when -- to greet -- when the candidates come and when they leave to go up and thank them for taking the time to come here. I think that all of us should go and to the extent

it gets a little crowded over there, I understand. But just introduce yourself and thank them. I think that that is another way that I think voters with disabilities can improve our situation.

Okay. So here is what we're going to do now: We have Congressman Kucinich coming at 2. He's going to be here at 2. And in the meanwhile, one sec . . .

[Background talking.]

>>TED KENNEDY, JR.: All right, everybody. I'm sorry for that mix-up. I was trying to find the official bio of Keith Jones, who is going to entertain us. And I'm embarrassed to say I couldn't find it. But I did remember reading about it. And learning about it.

And I would like to introduce Keith. He can introduce himself certainly when he comes up here. But he's a writer. He's a rapper. He's a musician. He's a political activist. He's a median. What else are you, Keith? He's a great American. Please welcome, Keith Jones.

[Music].

>>KEITH JONES: Yeah, they told me to go to the right of the podium. Can you hear me?

>>THE AUDIENCE: Yes.

>>KEITH JONES: I'm glad you can. Because now I can hear myself. So if I said anything that can be used against me in You Tube . . .

How is this? Hello? Can everybody see me?

>>THE AUDIENCE: Yes.

[Applause.]

>>KEITH JONES: Well, hello, everyone. My bio said poof. So I'm going to give you a little bit of -- this is a little brief history of who I am. And then we'll get into it. I don't know how long. How long do I have?

>>TED KENNEDY, JR.: You have about 20 minutes.

>>KEITH JONES: Okay. I have 20 minutes. Oh, I don't know if they know what they just said.

[Laughter.]

>>TED KENNEDY, JR.: You're coming back on this afternoon.

>>KEITH JONES: So I'm coming back on this afternoon. So I won't tell you all of the juicy tidbits until later on. That will keep you here.

As you know, my name is Keith Jones. I'm a community activist, a disability rights activist because as you can see, my disability is that I'm just devastatingly sexy.

[Laughter.]

>>KEITH JONES: That tends to get in the way of parking and, you know, things like that. Hotel accommodations. The bathroom doesn't seem to fit my ego. So I kind of turn sideways when I go in.

So what I was asked to do is I was asked to quote entertain unquote and leave you with food for thought. So I live in Massachusetts. So I'm down -- I'm Downstate. All the way down through southern New Hampshire. Known as Boston.

And -- thank you. There you go. All right.

And what I saw today, I saw a lot of politicians doing their thing. And actually, we have to be very happy that Presidential candidates actually are paying attention to us. If we remember 2004 when they were like: Oh, that's so nice. That's so sweet. What's your name again? And then they pat you on the head and run away.

And with that I mean I was in Boston at the Democratic national convention. And we were in the Democratic caucus. And they were like: We're going to have the disability caucus. And we got all excited and we were like: Yeah, we are going to talk about our issues. And they came in and just started handing out parking tickets and handicap placards and saying thank you we'll see you at the he poll but they forgot to tell us we didn't get to the poll because there was no ramp. They said are you going to vote? Sure, if I can get the hell in there. You know, if I could reach the level, that would really be nice.

And it just struck me how, you know, when you think about disability, people are like: Oh my God. How do you do it? It's just -- oh --

(Switching writers, please refresh your browser until captions restart.)

(Switched writers at 12:40 p.m. CST)

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