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**Disability and Employment Policy:  
Current College Students with Disabilities  
Offer Suggestions for Improving  
Outcomes for Young Adults**

*Speakers:*

Angela Kuhn

Indiana State University

Jeffrey McCaffrey

University of Missouri-Kansas City

Ahmed Salem

Cornell University

Kristen Schiavone

James Madison University

*Moderator:*

Gwen Gillenwater

American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD)

For further information about this policy forum contact:

**Michele Cowen**  
tel (607) 254-8311  
email mtc11@Cornell.edu  
web www.ilr.Cornell.edu/edi

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**The Co-Principal Investigators are:**

**Susanne M. Bruyère**—Director, Employment and Disability Institute, School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Extension Division, Cornell University

**Richard V. Burkhauser**—Sarah Gibson Blanding Professor and Chair, Department of Policy Analysis and Management, College of Human Ecology, Cornell University

**David C. Stapleton**—Director, Cornell University Institute for Policy Research

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## Introduction

### Susanne Bruyère:

I want to welcome all of you here to this event. My name is Susanne Bruyère and I'm from Cornell University, and I'm pleased here to partner, on behalf of Cornell University, with the American Association of Persons with Disabilities, and since we're going to begin with a Cornell University student, Mr. Ahmed Salem, I'm going to let him introduce himself.

[Applause].

## Student Panel

### Ahmed Salem:

Good morning everyone. It's definitely an honor and pleasure to be one of the speakers here today. Before I go on any further and introduce myself, I think Gwen deserves a round of applause. She's the one who...

[Applause].

She gave everyone a round of applause, so I think she deserves that. With that said, my name is Ahmed Salem. I'm a student at Cornell University and I'm also an AAPD intern, so I feel pretty cool, you know, both things that I'm a part of, you know, that I'm a part of this panel today. I am a rising junior at Cornell University in the College of Arts and Sciences. I'm studying government and economics, so most of the views expressed and this speech will be coming from that background, you know, an economics sort of background.

I am interested very much in public policy. I hope to eventually become, you know, a lawyer, an advocate in the courtroom because that's where I love to be, as I found out when I did mock trial in high school, you know, that the courtroom is where I belong. But I would love to be one of those advocates in the future. So this internship is quite amazing.

I have a unique experience when it comes to employment. I came to the United States in the year 2000, and started out high school. I was a freshman. But I came from a totally different country, I'm originally from Egypt. My family however lived in Kuwait for most of their lives so I immigrated from Kuwait in 2000. I went to a very amazing public school, but I went from an old blind school that had about 29 people, all were male because of the education system in Kuwait, to a 2900, you know, people in public school. So the shock was quite impressive.

[Laughter].

Especially for someone who can't really see much, that hasn't really traveled around independently the same way I do now. You know, the confines of the

school when there's 29 blind people, it's a little bit different than when it's 2900 people. So when I came to the United States I did not know any English. I pretty much had to learn my way through the first couple of years. And eventually I like to think that I caught on and learned some English. Though some of my friends tend to dispute that from time to time. But, you know, that's basically where I came from. Different culture, personal sort of what we call disability although I like to call it an inconvenience, but I'll call it disability for the sake of common ground.

And, you know, with that, my background, after sophomore year of high school, everyone was excited they were turning 16, they were getting their driver's license. I couldn't get my driver's license, so I was upset. But I was getting something different, which was my work permit at that time. I was convinced by my friends that I should work for a summer. So I was like, why not?

I got to make some money; the minimum wage in California is \$6.75. That's decent. It's decent for a high schooler to make \$6.75 an hour and little did I know that the service for finding jobs wasn't as easy as wanting to work. You know, it first took me a while to find a job. But eventually I found one. And it was interesting because through my job I worked at the Fresno Superior Courthouse, in the Interpreter Office. People, you know, there were a lot of interpreters and they would get called off to different courtrooms and I was sort of one of the organizers that put on the calendar which interpreter needed to go where. But it was very interesting because through the interaction, you get to see what the barriers, you know, how people act with you as a blind person.

I remember one of the most interesting things is, you know, the first day we show up to work and they're like how did you get here and I'm "look I got here by a bus." I mean, I assume you get these looks, I don't know, but I assume you get these looks -- because I hear the gasps so I assume they have to be associated with some looks and, you know, you're like eventually, you know, people are -- you know, the people were impressed but eventually after two, three weeks, they're not impressed anymore, which I don't know if I was upset or not. But I definitely felt that eventually, you know that you were able to fit in. But one of the barriers that came up in that instance is that how people view you as a person with a disability, what they view you can and cannot do. So to them, to some people traveling from one place to another seemed like a great obstacle, which it might be for someone who hasn't been blind and if, you know if they tried to blindfold themselves and tried to travel, it might be difficult. But for someone that's been blind all their life, that's the way they have been doing things.

So that was my first work experience. And then my second work experience, which is also worth mentioning because it was totally different, was working in a telemarketing firm. And as all of us know working in the private sector is totally different than working the government sector. The private sector is a matter of survival. If you make the calls, if you make the sales, you stay in. If you don't make

the sales, you're out.

So it was a different type of atmosphere. It wasn't like -- you know, the courthouse was nice and all, but I remember showing up three hours late a couple of times and whenever I get to the office, they were excited. It was not -- not that they didn't care, but it's a different setting when you're expected to make a certain amount of sales within a specific amount of time. And it took me a while to convince the employer to hire me because, you know, he's a family friend, so we had this discussion. He was like, you know, I don't know if I could hire you. You know, he was bringing up these little obstacles like -- he's like I don't know if I have the numbers for you in an accessible format, the numbers for you to call. I was like do you have it on a disk? Yeah, I'll put it on my computer. He's like really? Yeah, I use computers.

[Laughter].

That was definitely a challenge. I mean, I'm not going to say I performed above average. I stayed there for a couple of months and then I decided to take -- because I did that at the end of my junior year of high school -- then I decided to take that summer off because the summer before I worked in the courthouse, I decided to take it off the and go visit my extended family back in Egypt, which I think is more interesting than telemarketing.

[Laughter].

But that experience was terrific, working in an environment where it's a matter of survival, working in an environment where they don't care if you're blind, they don't care if what race you are, they care if you make the sales. If you make the sales, you stay. If you don't, you don't: you're not in. So that was my second work experience.

My third sort of type of employment experience was working as a Residential Advisor at Cornell University. I served as Residential Advisor this last year. A lot of it had to do with social skills, but one of the main things they brought up when they employed me was how are you going to -- you know, how are you going to bus the kids when they drink alcohol? How are you going to find out? You don't see the vodka bottles. And it was interesting for me to develop techniques with my other RA's and to show them that I could get around this seeing disability, or inconvenience in my opinion. You know, it was very interesting because in that sector, it was sort of an in between, between a government and a private sector. It wasn't fully where you can, you know, government, you know, you have a -- you know, it's more relaxed. But it wasn't as stringent as a private sector where, you know, you make the sales or you don't type of deal. So it was a very interesting experience to sort of go around my disability and it taught me a lot about what I can do. Because sometimes when you have everyone doubting you -- not everyone, but a lot of people doubting you, it eventually gets to you. But when

you do something that totally disproves all the myths, they sort of -- people get shocked in the process and you yourself start learning that you can do these things. The final work experience is working here on the Hill as an intern and I have to say that it's been a pleasure working in the HELP Committee office, which is where I worked. And it's been an honor to work there. And, you know, in the beginning, it was a little bit different. It was a little bit, you know, difficult trying to explain or to show what I can or cannot do. Though, you know, generally people on the Hill are quite intelligent people, if I may say.

[Laughter].

So they picked up -- I don't mean that the other people weren't smart. But they picked up quite quickly on what I can and cannot do, and they weren't shy to ask if I could do this or if I couldn't do that. So that's been definitely a plus and that's been definitely a pleasure.

After outlining my experience, I would like to go into what I think are the three main points. Because I don't have them written down, I'm going to ask you guys as the audience, I like to do this. I'm going to say what the three headings are and as I go through them, I'll ask what the next one is and see if everyone remembers. So if no one remembers, I may have to cut my speech short and feel bad. So everyone remember. It goes -- I forgot. No. It goes educate, incentivize, seminar training. All right. So educate, incentivize, seminar training. What's the first one?

**The Audience:**

Educate.

**Ahmed Salem:**

Thank you. So the first one is educate, I believe. When I read a statistic that 16% of people with disabilities go to college, I was quite appalled and quite shocked. I don't know how reliable the statistic is and as an Econ major, I also question statistics. What was the confidential interval? What did you guys do there?

But I'm going to assume for the sake of argument that it's reliable and from what I see, I think that's true, from my personal observation, I think that's true. So if 16% of people with disability go to college, I do not anticipate or expect someone in the private sector especially to try to accommodate someone whose level of skill and education is below that of the average. I think that's an unfair expectation. So the number one thing to do is lobby for subsidization of education for people with disabilities.

Have -- and you have to subsidize it, but also encourage people with disabilities to apply to top-notch universities. I think that a lot of us -- or just universities in general. You know, you should go to a university. I mean, a bachelor's degree now is the norm in my opinion, in a lot of cases. I'm not saying that -- there are

great people who just graduate from high school and decide -- or even dropped out of high school. I mean, one of the greatest minds probably of the 20th century never finished high school. But in this day and age with the marketplace advanced in education, that's the first thing that we need to do as a group, whether by establishing our own funds or by lobbying government for them to subsidize our education. Without education subsidies, I think you can basically -- you'll have no employment for people with disabilities. If I was a person hiring someone, I'm not going to hire them just because they're blind. If they don't have a degree to back up what they say, I could get around this and that, if you don't have a degree to prove to me that you can get around these obstacles, then it's unreasonable of you for you to expect me to just trust you because I like you. That's just not how the marketplace works. And I'm sure all of us in here -- or a majority has experienced the marketplace and how employment is. And, you know, with my very limited experience I'm not claiming to be an expert; I personally believe that's how it works. What was the second point?

**The Audience:**  
Incentivize.

**Ahmed Salem:**

Oh, less people remember. That's not good. All right. Incentivize. One of the barrier entrances into the workforce in general -- especially for people with disabilities, I don't know if it's special, but it's through my experience seeing certain people -- is being comfortable not working or being punished for working. What I do I mean by that?

You receive SSDI benefits. I'm not very familiar with how the benefit system works, but you receive those benefits. You decide to stay on them. You receive a good chunk of money and I assume that you can live off of it as an individual. And when you decide to work and you're barely making the same amount, they decide to take it all away from you and on top of that, you are giving up your leisure time, which is also worth money in the marketplace. You are giving up a lot of things. So that's the first mistake the government makes, which is to take away when someone starts working. You tax their money and you take away their benefits. So what do you leave them with?

You don't leave them with much incentive to go out. But the second thing, and this is a plan which I believe should be executed, is that as long as someone with a disability -- with their disability they can work, as like it's something you can work with. It's not like a disability where you can't go find a job if you have that disability. As long as someone has a functioning disability and as long as they have been looking for jobs, I think they should keep their benefits if they can demonstrate that they have been looking for jobs and they have been turned down from jobs. But I believe that there should be a time limit set after which if you do not demonstrate that you have been looking for these jobs or if you do

not demonstrate that you have been; you know, active in pursuing a degree or pursuing something that will place you in the workforce, I believe, and I will go out on a limb and say this, that these benefits should be revoked. Of course there are certain humane things, and this is -- things and this is a general suggestion, this is not a case-by-case basis, something that everyone has to look at. But as a general policy situation, I know if someone just depends on these benefits and does not want to go out into the workplace; we're going to have a problem, we're going to have a big problem. And unless we do not force them, but give them that final push which makes them choose work over leisure because those two things sort of come against each other, that they won't do it. And I think whether a disability or not, I think that that's something that the government should seriously set.

What was the final point?

**The Audience:**  
Seminar training.

**Ahmed Salem:**  
And this is what I personally think should be employed, which is I think that private corporations, especially big corporations, and I know a lot of people are not big fans of big corporations, I think specifically big corporations because they have the resources, should go out to people in the education field and should sort of do the research. It can be done to show the importance of having people with disabilities in the workforce, to show what people with disabilities can contribute and those corporations, as we have had heard, Verizon, all these corporations will go out and when you show them the importance of it, they will start employing people with disabilities.

And additionally, I think that they should offer mandatory seminar training to their employees because these people work at Verizon for a few years, they make a good chunk of money and go and start their own company. If they understand how a person with a disability can work, they are going to be the future of employees -- yes -- excuse me, future employers. So that is something that I think should be taken into account, this ideal of sort of seminar training in order that the future employers in the United States and hopefully around the world understand the importance of people with disabilities, understand that we can contribute to the workforce and understand that we're a vital part of society that cannot be ignored. With that said, I end my speech. Thank you very much.

[Applause].

**The Audience:**  
Hi, my name is Kristen Schiavone and I I'm a rising senior at James Madison University. As the only person without a known disability, I know a little bit about education, so I'm going to speak from that perspective.

I'm a very intelligent student, but also extremely dyslexic. Because of my intelligence, I was unable to be identified with it until my junior year of high school -- that's right my junior year when my mother finally forced me to complete extensive testing. At that time I was reading at a 7th grade level and spelling at a 5th grade level but still getting A's and B's and honors in classes.

When I was young I would avoid showing my weakness in spelling and reading because I didn't want to be labeled as stupid or less able. I would even fake illness and go to the health room to avoid reading aloud in class. I did such a good job of faking that my third grade teacher suggested that I apply for the magnet middle school. So I took the entrance test and when I only scored average on the test, my teacher made me retake it, claiming that it was not possible that I was only average.

Looking back, I don't know how I even scored average on that test because I could barely read any words on the test. By the end of elementary school, my teachers were beginning to catch on that I wasn't reading and they sent me to a Special Education class twice a week for reading. I hated the class. It made me feel so stupid.

After the first class, I decided that I was going to do everything I could not to ever have to go back there again. So after a short time, I was put back in the regular reading group and I never returned to a Special Ed class. As I progressed in school, I just worked harder and harder to keep afloat. I did very well in all of my classes except for English where I just didn't do the work because I couldn't read. Every time I didn't do an English assignment, my teacher would call home and my mom would read to me and force me to do the assignment.

So my mom got in the habit of reading to me so I could do my work. This system worked so well that in high school I was getting A's and honors in all of my classes. One night my mother was reading to me out of my AP English book and she said, now, how about you read to me this time, and I read a paragraph.

I protested and at that point I was starting to wonder about my own ability to read. So I gave it a try. I read simple words wrong over and over again and my mom said that maybe that's your problem here and maybe we should get some testing done. I agreed finally and that's how I'm here now.

I didn't know or want to know anything about disability until about four years ago. Since my learning disability was identified, my life has changed for the better. We were all asked today to talk about where we gain our expectations from. That question for me is simple. My expectations come from my mother.

Throughout my childhood, she had gone back to school twice to earn a higher degree or certification to progress in her own career. Even now, she's planning to return to school again to earn a Ph.D. She's a clear example that learning is a life

long process and that no one is too old to better themselves. She told me that she will always be proud of me if I do my best. My mother's example taught me very early on in life that settling for anything less than my best was simply not good enough.

We need to ask the same thing of youth with disabilities. Youth with disabilities can achieve if provided equal access. We must realize that one child's best effort might be different from another child's best effort. If we let them settle for less than their best, we are letting them down. For me, my best effort kept me out of Special Education classes and allowed me now to attend a university. But the educational system prevented me from getting the accommodations I needed because I was too smart and hardworking. I was told when I applied for accommodations in my junior year in high school that only if I did not perform so well in school would I would get the accommodations that I needed. I was also unable to get accommodations for the SAT and I'm still battling getting accommodations on the LSAT.

I'm not the only one struggling with this inaccessible system. As the statistic that Ahmed earlier stated, 84% of youth with disabilities do not go to college. 84%. I ask you how an education system can prevent youth from receiving accommodations they need because they work too hard to overcome the challenges? To me, this seems like the system is what's disabling. So I ask policy makers and bureaucrats to create an educational system that urges all youth to do their best.

Since people with disabilities work and learn -- and integrate a higher education system and workforce, it is illogical that they are educated early on in a segregated system. I understand that people with disabilities have come a long way since 16 years ago, but they are still the most unemployed minority group. I charge you; I need you to do something to change this.

I was also asked today to share with you what helps me succeed. That was -- the internships that I participated in, the work experiences that I have had and the mentoring relationships that I have had built have been the largest contributor to my success. Even now as an intern on Capitol Hill, I also work another job. I have had a job since I was about 13 years old pretty much consistently.

In my opinion, people have an intrinsic need to work and denying that contributes to a victim mentality. Youth with disabilities need to participate in internships if they expect to be looked at as competitive to an employer. I have also learned growing up here in the D.C. area that it is not as much about what you know as who you know or whom you know as I was corrected. This summer I realized the only experience that prepares you for working on Capitol Hill is interning on Capitol Hill.

Being an intern in D.C. has become an institution in this town. If youth with

disabilities are not able to participate in this institution, the only -- they are at a disadvantage when they attempt to enter the workplace. I suggest that we continue funding programs and also increase funding for programs like WRP, which is sponsored by the Department of Labor, Emerging Leaders and both AAPD internships, which are a responsibility stored by Mitsubishi Electric and Microsoft, which afford youth with disabilities the opportunity to intern in both the government sector and the private sector.

These experiences have helped even the playing field for youth with disabilities, and also provide equal access to the workforce. I believe that high expectations, good role models and hard work are absolutely essential for youth with disabilities to succeed.

I would like to close with a quote from Charles Schwab, a dyslexic CEO. He says "Sometimes the business difference is better than better and we all know that youth with disabilities do different without even blinking an eye." I would like to thank you for letting me speak today and please feel free to ask us lots of questions.

[Applause].

**Jeff McCaffrey:**

All right. Well, good morning, everyone. My name is Jeff McCaffrey and I'm honored to be here today. I thank you for having me here as well. Well, my background differs from everyone else up here in that I have only had my quote, unquote disability, for about three and a half years. I was always very physically active and I loved doing manual labor-type jobs, tasks, and sports. Actually in high school I worked in a Miller distribution center in Kansas where I loaded and unloaded. I always had kind of a -- I have a blue color lunch pail kind of attitude, and I love that. I love going, unloading tank trucks and coming home sweaty and exhausted and that was me.

[Laughter].

And I was always a very good athlete in high school, excelled in football and several other sports, did well in academics as well and actually garnered employment in an academy when I was in high school. Unfortunately, when I was there, I had a spinal cord injury in my freshman year which has left me disabled ever since. So being physically disabled severely limits and almost entirely prohibits many types of manual labor and physical activity and that type of stuff, everything of which I was all about.

So when it comes to employment, you know, employment for someone with disabilities, summer-type jobs, part-time jobs, temps, cash-paying jobs basically become out of the picture. You now must rely on your intellect, your communication skills and your personal savvy and some sort of vocational expertise

or experience to find employment. I found a pretty good niche in speaking, speaking to brain and spinal cord injuries and speaking for brain and spinal cord prevention programs to kindergartens to 12th graders about the importance of safety in automobiles as well as speaking for upcoming stem cell research and I have also been learning about financing and investing and I believe this is something I will be able to partake in around the world, in stocks and options and whatnot. So, and I do expect a lot out of myself, and the way I kind of look at it is that I do what I do not because of my disability. I do what I do in spite of my disability. I was motivated even before I was injured and equally motivated now. But in an increasingly competitive global economy, as Ahmed was saying, it's becoming harder for able-bodied individuals and capable bodied individuals to find employment. It's an uphill battle and therefore we must access the know-how to fully have potential. So I would say the two biggest things for people with disabilities are money and education.

So a scenario, for example. He or she finds temp jobs from day-to-day, enough to get by. He or she continues to save up enough money until they can go to college, go to community college, let's say, garner an associate's degree and then find a better job, a more consistent job, pays more. Then garner enough to go to college. Garner a bachelor degree. This whole time, let's say during this whole time they were basically living day-to-day, squeaking their way by. They roll the dice, they don't have health insurance. That's the risk they take being able-bodied and whatnot.

Now, you take that same scenario and place someone with a disability, these options no longer become feasible. You can't go day-to-day and work your way up the ladder without health insurance, without some sort of medical necessity that you need to survive. So that scenario becomes not possible. It's no longer feasible.

And so basically -- I mean, I guess what I'm saying is that when it comes to having disabilities, in particular, all types, not just physical, many types, it comes down to -- I mean, if you don't have some sort of personal finance to fall back on to or some sort of educational background, it becomes immensely difficult to dig yourself out of this hole. Now albeit, it's not possible to become immensely different for individuals, like the statistic you heard, 16% go to college. You know, they basically become a warden of the state, living on SSI, SSDI and Medicare and Medicaid. Instead of being individuals contributing to the society, they become the opposite, basically drawing from society and not by choice, by any means, they are not choosing that lifestyle.

So, the system's kind of backwards. We shell out SSI, SSDI, Medicare and Medicaid and other type of assistance training but don't actually provide that individual the opportunity to become a productive citizen. Like it says in The Bible, you give a man a loaf of bread, you provide him with one meal. You teach him tow to fish, you provide him a meal for a lifetime. It will lead to a far more efficient economy, happier individuals and a far more productive society.

And I would say from a public policy perspective, you know, from like a -- beacon up here on the Hill, where, you know, interning on the Senate Health Committee, working on the public policy team, seeing policy and how it can affect individuals in the community and in the disability community at large, it's interesting because one way or another, whether it's directly or indirectly, legislation might not be crafted out to where it's aimed specifically at the disability, but indirectly it will affect the disability community one way or another.

And that's why, you know, and I have seen just working up on the Hill for this past, you know, eight weeks. I have seen this kind of come up the pipeline and I'm not a public policy expert by any means, and I couldn't really engage the affects for public in general but I can see it from an internal standpoint. And I said, regardless if it has language in it one way or another, it will affect the disability community and that emphasizes more, even more emphatically, why you should be involved in our democratic pick, in our system, which we as citizens, albeit disabled, still need a voice and need that voice to be heard.

I think where I might differ as I said earlier with many of the, many of my friends up here on the panel is that I have had my disability -- I haven't had my disability for my entire life. And as far as being disabled, it's not something that I like at all. It's not something that I take pride in. And as I said, I do what I do not because of my disability, but in spite of it. And, you know, I have been on the other side of the tracks, when I was able-bodied and that's the lifestyle that I want, that I loved and that I continue do strive for every day. There isn't a day that goes by, an hour that goes by, where I don't want to get out of this wheelchair, where I don't want to stand up and walk around, where I don't want to go into the U.S. Armed Forces, back into the Air Force Academy, be an officer. And I think that's where I differ -- in my opinion. I have seen that the grass can be much greener on the other side and that's kind of the side that I would like to get back to and I know obviously that others might feel differently about that. But that's my -- that's my perspective on it and I feel if anybody -- anybody in the disabled community who shares that same feeling, I want to do everything I can to get them to the other side of the tracks, to show them how green the grass can be. And that's how I feel about it. So thank you so much for the opportunity to be here today.

[Applause].

**Angela Kuhn:**

Good afternoon. As Gwen said, my name is Angie Kuhn and thank you very much for allowing me to be here today and thank you all for coming out. I am, as Gwen said, the only information technology on the panel today and I am a little bit older than my fellow panelists, so I offer yet another perspective in the conversation today. I'm currently a senior at Indiana State University. I'm working on my second bachelor's degree in Management Information Systems. I hold a previous degree from Ball State University in geography which I obtained in 2000. In case you

haven't noticed, I am a little person. I have a form called diastrophic dysplasia and I was diagnosed at birth so I have dealt with disability issues for my entire life.

Just a little bit about my family background and myself. My parents, who were averaged height, they were divorced when I was 6 and my mom practically raised my sister and myself. My sister also is a little person. She practically raised her by herself and I have to tell you she is the most encouraging woman that I know in the entire world. She never expected anything less for my sister and me because we had disabilities. She expected us to do the best that we could. She never told us there wasn't anything that we could not do. In fact, she always encouraged us to do whatever we wanted. And when my sister was younger, she wanted to be an astronaut. My mom never told her that she couldn't because she had a disability or because she was 3 foot at the time. She said "Judy, work your hardest, and when you go to school, when you are old enough, maybe they will put little people in space." Obviously that hasn't happened yet, but we're still working on it.

[Laughter].

She also encouraged us to get a great education because that was something she didn't have growing up. She didn't graduate high school. She had my sister when she was very young, so she knew right from the start that we needed a solid educational background because later in life things were going to be difficult for us because we also had a disability. She also led by example. When my sister and I were old enough to go to college, my mom got her GED and she went to college, so it was I, my sister and my mom on the college campus. Because we were loved, my sister is a well respected sought for architect living in England with her husband and 4-year-old son and I'm in the process of getting my bachelor's degree and I'm sitting here on Capitol Hill talking to all of all of you.

My education background... I have been in the system quote, unquote, my whole life, grade school, high school, and college. I had the tests, I had the IEP's and all of the assistive devices, so I'm pretty used to the things like that in the school system. I also had the experience of going with two separate school corporations who viewed my circumstances and my disability in two completely different and opposite ways. The school corporation that I started with and that I ended up finishing with -- they got any anything I needed. They made sure I had the evaluation tests; they made sure I had step stools in the bathroom and the watering fountains. If I needed to leave five minutes early in high school, they made sure they had someone to help me with my books. They were very accommodating and made me feel very included in the high school and grade school environments. During the testing that some disabled students have to go through during the school years, they decided that I should be placed in the Advanced Placement classes. So in the 7th grade I got to take the algebra classes and the advanced literature classes and they put me on the honors diploma in high school. It was my home and I loved it and they made me feel loved and very

included. However, my freshman year, I guess maybe you could call it a bit of rebellion, I decided that I wanted to switch school corporations. So I went to a school corporation that was about 20 miles south of where I was originally from. And it was a complete change. They viewed my disability 180 degrees different than my previous school corporation. When I would get to school in the morning, I would go sit in a room with other disabled students. They didn't encourage us to go interact with our friends. They didn't encourage us to go to the gym in the morning and make new friends. They even said oh, you could eat lunch in here if you want. You don't have to be in the big crowded lunchroom if you don't want to.

My physical education class was in that room. And while the students that were in there definitely needed to be in there because some of the students needed to learn how to transfer into their wheelchairs by themselves and they needed to learn how to get dressed by themselves and I'm not saying it was completely bad in some respects, I didn't need to be in there. I needed to be in my classrooms with students who I guess you could say be all I could be with, and they made me feel very excluded and I started to repress myself. And I didn't hang out with my friends anymore and I didn't go to the movies and I didn't go on dates anymore. And I changed completely. Well, two years was enough of that. I moved and I went back to my old school. And it was like I had never left. Angie, you know, anything changed? What do you need? What could we do?

They got me my extension so that I could get my license and I could drive my car. I started going to the dances again. I started dating again. I went to the prom and I had an amazing senior year.

They even got me back into my -- I have to back up just a little bit. Also while I was at the other school corporation, they got me out of the Advanced Placement classes. They didn't encourage me to take the advanced Spanish and the advanced math and the advanced government and literature. They made me think that I could do better if I was in the regular classes. Oh, Angie, why take the advanced classes and make C's when you can take the classes with everybody else and make A's? It will be great.

So what teenager is going to not say okay if they're not being just given that little extra, you know, you can do it. They're going to take the easy way out. They really are and I did. But like I said, my old school corporation when moved home, they got me back into my advanced classes. I didn't get the honors diploma however because I was out of the program two years. However, nonetheless, I did get into my first choice college which was Ball State and I continued to excel. Once I established my major, my professors were so impressed with me that they allowed me to skip all the training that comes along with the first semester. They threw me right into the sharks and let me go.

[Laughter].

I was a teaching assistant for a year and it was one of the funniest and most educational things I have ever experienced in my life. I was also an independent field coordinator for a field study trip that the University went on the following summer and I ended up doing an internship at a travel agency. And it was an amazing experience and everybody was very accommodating. However, after graduation, this is where things took a turn. The job search was so difficult for me. I looked for a year and a half to find a job in my area of study. I wanted to be a travel agent. I applied everywhere in my hometown, applied in my state's capital of Indianapolis and I could not get a job. I would get numerous calls on my resume, "Oh, Angie, this is a great resume, we would love you to come in and interview for a position in our company." However, as soon as I walked in, the interview was over. I was more than qualified and I knew that. But they didn't like the package that the qualifications came in. At the time I didn't know that I had options to seek out any kind of discrimination action. And experiencing discrimination in the workplace is one of the hardest things that I have ever had to deal with. My whole life, I have grown up, you know, with friends and family who have been nothing but loving and supporting and encouraging and to actually, you know, I had to -- I guess you could say -- had to come face to face with being a disabled American, it was very shocking.

Yes I was -- I always knew I was different and I had to figure out different ways of doing things, but I have never been treated like I was anything less than human. It was very shocking.

I did finally end up getting a job as a Customer Service Representative for a local company because a friend of the family had put in a good word for me. For everyone again, as Kristen said, it's not always what you know, but it's who you know. And after two and a half years of being yelled at because people didn't get their movies, I decided that was enough and I was capable of so much more. So I went back to school. I thought, you know what, I'm young enough. I'm single, I'm going to do it. I'm just going to go back to school. So I went to -- I started back at Indiana State and I'm pursuing my degree in Management Information Systems right now. One day my best friend sent me an application for an internship and I'm like what's this? She said you should apply for it. I think you would benefit from it. They would benefit from you being there. So I thought why not? The worse they can say is we don't want you. So I applied and got the interview and here I am now.

As far as employment policy, like I said, I'm only an intern up here. I'm not very congressionally oriented.

[Laughter].

But I do have my experiences and that can be enough.

[Laughter].

What I actually want to say first to the youth is you don't let anyone tell you, you can't do anything because you have a disability. And in the same respect, parents and teachers and friends and especially employers, don't ever discourage someone from doing something they are passionate about, and yes I said passionate. Some people don't think people with disabilities can be passionate. But trust me, we are passionate people.

[Laughter].

So be encouraging, not discouraging. Also, the youth of America have got to know their disability rights history. Before I came out here this summer, I didn't know Justin Dart from a Dodge Dart.

[Laughter].

And since I have learned that he was an amazing man and he had accomplished so much and, Yoshiko, you are an amazing woman and I thank you for all that you and Justin have done for us. I didn't know about the amazing protests that encouraged things to get accomplished. I knew there was an ADA. I didn't know when it was signed but we as a community, we have got to know these things. It all goes back to education. The more you know, the better armed you are because this is a fight. And if you're not prepared, you are just going to end up as another casualty.

In closing, I would like to say that this internship and this city have changed my life forever. And I have decided to stay in the area and look for a job. So that if you're hiring, Andy, see me afterwards.

[Laughter].

[Applause].

### Questions from the Audience

**Gwen Gillenwater:**

Aren't they amazing?

[Applause].

I have truly enjoyed the four -- the four interns and I got together the other night at AAPD. This was after they worked very hard in their various internships. And for two and a half hours, we sat there and not only did they, you know, practice their presentations, but the healthy debate that went on amongst them, you know, I sat there and listened. You know, I didn't have anything to say.

I will tell you that this group has truly bonded together. I want to recognize the other interns that are in the audience. I see Maggie Sheets who's one of our

Congressional interns. Stand up, Maggie.

[Applause].

Maggie is a student at American University and she's having a great summer as well. She's also working with the HELP Committee now. And general, I mentioned her, Jennifer Morris.

[Applause].

This is Ms. Dynamite; Representative Connors will never be the same.

[Laughter].

Are there any others?

I don't see anybody else. Oh, Elizabeth Goby, she is working in Senator Kerry's office and I have to say this; You haven't told me yet, but I understand she's been asked to stay on in his district office. She's a student at Harvard University.

[Applause].

[Cheers].

And she's going to go to Texas to take part in the, what meet is it? She's a swimmer. Part of the nationals.

Okay. So, we have got something else. They informed me the other night, they intend us to get back together from time to time. Scarlese, who is another one of our congressional interns, has invited us all to his wedding. We're not sure exactly when that's going to be. And Jeff has assured us that at a future reunion, he's going to have one at 1600 Pennsylvania. Okay, so looking forward to that reunion.

[Laughter].

So we want to open it up now to questions from the audience. You can ask an individual panelist or the whole group.

Andy?

**Andy Imparato:**

I just had a question. First of all, I thought you all did an extraordinary job. You did better than most professional policy workers. So you should really be proud of yourselves. The question that I have is for Jeff. Jeff, I want to really commend you for having the courage to say what you said at the end of your presentation because it's not really politically correct to say that in a disability movement. I think you reflect probably more of the disability population than we realize. And

I guess one question I have for you is, what advice do you have for organizations like AAPD and so many of the other organizations here of how we can reach out and make common cause with folks who are very interested in a cure, but who are necessarily against what we are trying to accomplish? Just if you have any advice for us.

**Jeff McCaffrey:**

I mean, yeah, I would say -- yeah, because I do come from a different perspective. And it's -- I mean, when first President Bush signed the ADA in 1990, that was a historic moment and that was huge and it's been 16 years since. And I think we need to continually evolve that. But at the same time, I think we need to not have this either/or ultimate tell, this dichotomy. You know, disabled and able-bodied.

Look back to prior to April 12, 1955, Polio was rampant in this country. Kids who got it were quote, unquote disabled. Well, we found a vaccine for polio. We no longer have polio because of that. I think there are ways in which we can harness our resources to not just, you know, make better lives for people, but for individuals with disabilities. And I mean, the way I look at it, I'm not a parent, but I want to try and look at it from a maternal standpoint, I guess, maternal standpoint. I couldn't have imagined going up to a couple expecting a child and saying to them, do you wish that your child has a severe mental or physical disability upon being born? I just couldn't imagine a married couple saying yes, I do hope they have a severe mental or physical disability.

I believe they want their child to have an eventful, happy, promising life and I don't think any parent would wish a severe mental or physical disability upon their child. And that's the perspective I come at and I want to do everything I can to make those parents and their hopes and dreams for their children and everyone for that matter to look, you know, fulfilling and happier. We want to give our children in the future the best quality of life possible and the best opportunities at it as possible and that's why I view it in that light.

And so I hope that is somewhat --

**Gwen Gillenwater:**

Thank you, Jeff. We appreciate that. Questions? Mark, in the back.

**Male Audience Member:**

Thank you. Let me take Andy's question one step further. Everyone has said how much you folks bonded together. Talk about what you learned from each other. You all have different abilities and different disabilities. One of the things that I ran into over the years is learning from a lot of other people that had different experiences. So tell me what each one of you has learned about abilities or disabilities that you didn't know.

**Gwen Gillenwater:**

That's a good point and I'm going let you all go down the line. Ahmed, you want to start?

**Ahmed Salem:**

Sure. What I have learned is that the world of people with disabilities is pretty interesting.

[Laughter].

Now, let me expand on my answer.

[Laughter].

But I learned that -- because even though I'm blind, I still had, you know, this whole like oh, like I can't imagine what someone in a wheelchair would feel like or I think if I were to choose a disability, I probably wouldn't want to be blind and wouldn't want to be in a wheelchair. I'm going to admit, I had that -- I mean, I didn't outright say that but it was sort down, an unconscious attitude and just seeing people, Beth and Jeff, you know, one of them -- Jeff made it to The New York Times. In The Boston Globe. I didn't make anywhere.

[Laughter].

But I learned that really there is a lot of potential and power within the disability community. Whether you love your disability, you're proud of it, like a lot of us, whether you're displeased with your disability and hate it like a lot of us, you still have a lot of power, whether you're doing things because of or in spite of your disability, I think you have a lot of power and learn a lot from people. I really learned that one of the other thing just off the record, people with disabilities can party pretty hard.

[Laughter].

**Gwen Gillenwater:**

What he did gain was the reputation as the best comic intern.

[Laughter].

**Kristen Schiavone:**

I came to D.C. this summer thinking I already knew a bit about being an intern in D.C. because I was lucky enough to be an intern for the Department of Labor last summer and I didn't think I was going to learn that much and I have learned way more than I would have ever expected. I realized from my roommates and from the other people in the program that being -- first of all, being a youth and all the changes that youth go through is an awkward time. And you feel marginalized

even if you aren't and being a youth with a disability just adds another layer to that awkwardness. But we learned so much from each other. And being -- in the process of learning from them, I realized how much I didn't know. And I was always sort of embarrassed of my ignorance and I think that's very important for us to realize that even within the disability community, we like to be -- we like to think we're so aware and so sensitive, but I think ignorance runs extremely deep not just in the general population, but in the population of people with disabilities. I mean, as a person with a disability, I know about my disability but I don't know that much about any others. I think we have responsibility to educate ourselves about all disabilities. And I have had learned so much from Maggie and from General and from my other roommate Haley.

I think also there is an emotional piece -- I have two more things to say. There is an emotional piece for youth with a disability. At this time in our life whether it's acquired or we have had it our entire lives, there is a lot of things we have to sort through. We have had a lot of discussions preparing for this panel about whether we would rig the world of disability if we could. That's something that's still being debated within the disability community and our personal feelings about our own disability are getting tossed around now that we are finding our place in the world and there are a lot of emotional things you have to go through being a youth with a disability because, I mean, you do feel people's looks and when you tell someone -- I mean, as a person with a hidden disability, I have seen it from the perspective of, you know, flying under the radar and when you tell someone I have a disability, the way that they look at you changes, and with that comes an emotional reaction that as we age, we need to work with. And being able to talk with other youth and learn from them, I think is really amazing.

And it just made me realize how many special people we have out there who have out there who have disabilities and how we can use each other as resources in the future and I think it's really exciting we have made it this long.

**Jeff McCaffrey:**

Well, I personally want to thank my good friend Ahmed for not disclosing the details of our event.

[Laughter].

And indeed it has been fun.

[Laughter].

**Gwen Gillenwater:**

Let's stop there, Jeff.

**Jeff McCaffrey:**

No, it's been a remarkable experience. In our normal environments back

home, we're not around a bunch of people with disabilities, but we're around able-bodied, you know, we're a minority throughout America. So whenever there's a coalition of us all together, yeah, it puts into perspective your own disability and how you view others and I'd say the one thing I would take away the most is I'm just in awe of what these individuals can do. I mean, I thought I was kind of a go-getter and now I come out here, and it's like I have to pick up my self-esteem off the floor, and Beth a double major at Harvard and thinking about going to Georgetown Law -- [laughter] -- No, I mean, it's impressive what these individuals can do. And whether they do it because of their disability or in spite of their disability, they are out there doing it and it's been nothing short of second to none. I'm impressed with every one of these individuals. So...

**Angela Kuhn:**

I would also like to remind my colleague, Mr. McCaffrey that we do have pictures that will be burned. Just kidding. Honestly, when I first did the internship, I was worried about coming up here. I wasn't worried about the city, the job; I was worried about living with two strange women that I had never met before. But I tell you that I have made the most amazing friends I have ever had. And I think the thing that I have actually learned the most besides a different political reference and, you know, how things work in the Senate and the House, is to be empowered. I never in a million years would have considered doing anything with disability advocacy before I came out here. But these people that I have been living with for the last two months have just made me feel so empowered to make a change and to have a voice and to do something that's going to further the youth with disabilities in America. It's almost mind boggling how much I have learned and grown since I have been here and I tell you, these people make me feel a lot younger, so that always helps too. Because I'm old.

[Laughter].

**Gwen Gillenwater:**

Maggie?

**Maggie Sheets:**

Yeah, I wanted to make a comment as well because coming out here from Michigan, I go to school out here at American University, but this is the first time I have come up here. But I had an amazing experience out here in the Senate. I'm working with the HELP Committee and it's been really awesome. And I have enjoyed it immensely and I have learned so much from everybody out here. And I think everybody has empowered me and everybody else so much and I just want to thank everybody for that and I'm just incredibly grateful. And it just makes me so happy that I was able to participate in something like this because it's such a good experience. Although I have had a disability all my life, I have also looked at it from the outside because I was diagnosed with epilepsy in November of 2004. And in that way, having another disability put on, it gives me both ends of the

perspective, so I see as Jeff saw that it is -- I mean, it's just an interesting way of looking at things. So, yeah, it's different. I mean, but I have to look at it in the positive and you have to think, well, you have this opportunity now and you can look at it negatively, but you can always look at it positively and say there is hope and there's so much things that you can do and you can be happy and there's so much that I can do with my life. And I'm really happy. Thank you.

[Applause].

**Gwen Gillenwater:**

Maggie wants to have her own organization.

**Maggie Sheets:**

Yeah, I do.

**Gwen Gillenwater:**

She says she's going to be CEO.

**Female Audience Member:**

Everybody's been talking about this amazing experience that you have had this summer. My question for each of you would be based on this amazing experience. What are you going to do to pay it forward for the next person?

**Ahmed Salem:**

To pay it forward for the next person?

**Gwen Gillenwater:**

Let's skip you here, Ahmed.

**Ahmed Salem:**

I almost didn't get the question.

**Gwen Gillenwater:**

Do you understand what pay it forward meanings?

**Ahmed Salem:**

No, I'm sorry my Arabic is getting in the way.

**Kristen Schiavone:**

What are you going to do to benefit the future generation?

**Ahmed Salem:**

Oh, come on. Yeah, first grade English. No.

The future generation, to be honest, I have not thought about that. I am still 20

years old. I do not think about the future generation.

[Laughter].

**Female Audience Member:**

Not necessary think next generation, but like, you know, for the next person -- yeah, the next group of interns or the next --

**Ahmed Salem:**

What am I going to do to make it okay?

**Female Audience Member:**

Or when you go back to your community, the next person that you meet that hasn't had the life experiences that you have had, how are you going to pay it forward to them? What are you going to do to help the other students at Cornell students? You may want to talk to the Cornell students about awareness.

**Ahmed Salem:**

Oh, sure. Okay. So basically I'm going to take this experience and interning in the Senate on the HELP Committee -- I'm a co-president and my fellow co-president who is an amazing person, is better than I am and passionate, and she might be in the room, that's why I'm saying this --

[Laughter].

Are you in the room?

**Female Audience Member:**

Yeah.

**Ahmed Salem:**

All right. So her name is Sharon. She's an amazing person.

But I think I'm going to use this experience to basically -- this experience to reinforce what I thought before because I think my awareness is lacking. I wrote my essay about a program that was an insanely new idea. I don't know if it's possible to do, but an idea that Congress should subsidize awareness programs in colleges and universities for all students because I think awareness is the key and I'm going to take what I learn about everyone's disability, I'm going to take what I learned and I will try to apply that and continue the path of raising awareness. Because I'm not, to be honest, I'm not interested in the field of disability advocacy. I'm not going to be a disability rights lawyer. That's just something I don't see myself doing. However, I see myself changing the world and impacting it through raising awareness about myself, my own disability and my fellow interns and their disabilities because I learned so much that I did not know, and I'm not just saying

that to be cliché. I really didn't know much about disabilities even though I'm the president of the disabilities at my school. So I hope that answered your question and I apologize for not understanding your question. I'll pass the wand.

**Kristen Schiavone:**

Okay. I'm a person who probably planned my entire life 10 or 20 years in the future. The first thing when I go back to James Madison University, it's not necessarily a disability specific, but since my focus is on education, I want better education opportunities for all youth. So when I go back to James Madison, one of the big issues is in Harrisonburg. It's a very small town in Virginia and the university sort of overshadows the town and there's this big issue of the people who live in a town, especially the youth, sort of feeling lesser than the university and there are a lot of, a large percentage of the youth in Harrisonburg don't go to college. And also at James Madison, it just so happens, has a teacher's college and it happen to have a very amazing teachers program and there's lots of education majors who are seeking classroom experience. So what I want to do is I want to combine these two and I want to work with the Harrisonburg community to create an after-school program or even like a weekend program to help prepare juniors and seniors in high school for college.

And -- because for me, I grew up in a fairly financial affluent area, and I probably wouldn't have known what to do if everyone around me in my extremely competitive high school wasn't doing what you were supposed to do to go to college, if I hadn't been practicing essay writing and hadn't been taking essay prep courses. I mean, most people can't afford essay prep courses and the way the kids got in college in my school is they did well on the SAT's and they did well because they took SAT prep courses. And so what I wanted to do is provide for the youth in Harrisonburg the things that were provide for me by my family and my school. So I want to start a program working with the education majors at James Madison and go through an entire process of them preparing for the SATs by teaching a course. We'll do vocabulary. We'll send them home with vocabulary flash cards. Then we'll schedule them all to take the SAT at the same time. Something James' really good at is fund-raising, so I want to team up with the clubs and fund-raisers at JMU and be able to fund raise for the testing tools for these kids. After they have taken the SAT and hopefully done well on it, better than what they would have done without the help, I want to bring in English majors and have them work with the kids on writing essays and even edit because if your parent didn't go to college, who are you going to have to edit your essays? And if you don't have a crisp, well-written essay, what college is going to take you?

So work with them on essay writing. And have the financial aid people come in and give lectures on this is how you apply for financial aid and even walk the kids through the process because what 16-year-old can figure out these forms? Mine [forms] are extremely challenging. So I want to walk them through every single step of the process. And my hope is that if this program succeeds, it can serve as a

model for other small college towns where the university overshadows the town.

And, I mean, my hope for these kids is that they will learn from this experience and go on and teach other people. That's what I want to do in the immediate future. After graduation, I'm applying for Teach for America. I want to be an educated college person and I think to truly succeed in education policy, you have to work in the classroom. It doesn't make a lot of sense that a lot of people creating policy for schools have never been in the classroom. So I want to serve in the classroom and then go to grad school and then maybe come back here or work in the department and create effective educational policy.

**Gwen Gillenwater:**

Very good.

**Jeff McCaffrey:**

What I would do for the next generation of AAPD interns, first off, give them heads up of where the good happy hours are... No, seriously. I would say what I would do is availability, making yourself available to individuals who want to know about it. You know, I mean, I'll talk to a lot of people, how you're doing this? How you're doing that?

And you know, I'll just flat out tell it to them, walk them through it and write out instructions, literally a how-to. And just by making yourself available, lending out your information, and letting me know when you need help on this, more often than not, people will take you up on it and say how do you do this? How do you contact your vocational rehab office? How do you know which one to go to?

Just being a reference, being a source in which they can turn to for information to find out where they go, how they go about approaching this, and I think that comes down to making yourself available and being informed oneself, that way you can pass it along to other people so that they know how to apply for the AAPD program and as Andy talked about, and Angela talked about, her friend said hey, here's a program, and when people talk to me how did you get this awesome internship on the Hill, I got it through AAPD. Oh, that's great. It's just a matter of dispersing the information and just by doing that, you are empowering individuals to be able to go out and figure out thousand they can pursue more productive opportunities.

**Angela Kuhn:**

I, unlike Kristen, I don't have a 10-year plan.

[Laughter].

Gosh. As far as like the next class of AAPD interns, my advice to them would be take advantage of every opportunity you are given, participate in things like this. Go on the little behind the scene Smithsonian tours that we have been able to do,

do everything you can while you're here because it goes by so fast.

As far as me personally, like said, I never thought about staying in D.C. or working in disability advocacy. I thought I'm going to take care of myself and go on with my life. But there's just so many opportunities out here and I want to stay out here. And like I told Gwen, I don't want to be painted into an IT box; I don't want to design web pages for the rest of my life. I want to make my voice heard; I wanted to have a voice. I want to get involved with making changes. And I just get really excited when I think about it because like I said, I never in a million years would have thought I wanted to do stuff like this but I do. And I want to stay -- well, I'm going to stay. There's no doubt about it.

Gosh, this has just been an overwhelming experience and I can't express enough how much it has just changed my life. Like I said, like students with disabilities, youth with disabilities, you've got to take advantage of everything you can. And like Jeff said, make yourself known. When you're in these networking environments, don't be afraid to walk up to someone and say, hey, my name is Angie and I'm an intern. I want to stay, do you have advice on where I can apply for a job. I'd love to hear and it I'd love to make a difference. You have got to come out of your shell a little bit. But I don't think any of us in the program have had trouble coming out of our shells. I think we're all pretty much shellless.

[Laughter].

**Gwen Gillenwater:**

This is a unique group. What can I say? We'll start with you this time.

**Male Audience Member:**

It's great to be here. Thank you for the invitation. And I have like two questions to Ahmed, Kristen, Jeff and Angie. The first one, like at this moment, like as a person, what is your dream?

Like, I mean, who would you like to become or what would you like to achieve, I mean, like ideally?

I mean, it's always like difficult question, but I really want to ask you this. And second one is of course some places we encountered difficulties. What keeps you going? Sometimes we're down. What keeps you going, your motivation, your energy? What is your major source of inspiration?

**Gwen Gillenwater:**

Angie, you want to start?

**Angela Kuhn:**

As far as my major source of inspiration, because, yeah, I may come off as chirpy and happy but there are times when I come home and I just want to lay in bed and cry because I have had a horrible day, like I'm sure we have all experienced. But I

like to surround myself with friends and family who are like I said encouraging. I don't like to surround myself with negative people. I try to avoid those people who just complain and gripe all the time about, you know, the traffic was bad or it's too hot or my boss was a jerk to me today. Yeah, I'm sure we all have those opinions, but people who gripe and complain constantly...No, I don't want it. I don't have anything to do with it because that brings you down. That brings your mood down and makes you feel like yeah, it is crappy out here, you know, and so I try to stay away from that.

[Laughter].

As far as whom I want to be...I don't want people to say, oh, Angie Kuhn, I know her, and she did that. But I want to be like oh, she is changed. This is how it used to be but now it's different but I can do this now because somebody made a difference. I don't care if people know who I am, I don't care if people know my name or know where I came from. I just want to be able to say someone made a difference and now I can do this when I couldn't and that's who I want to be.

**Male Audience Member:**

But what sort of difference?

**Angie Kuhn:**

Just like maybe differences in, you know, golly --

**Male Audience Member:**

Like what was your dream? The difference?

**Angela Kuhn:**

Yeah, maybe someone who has, you know, has a disability and has gone through the school systems and they weren't able to get the assistive devices that they needed or the testing that they needed because of a backwards office, because, I mean, not to put down anything that I have ever experienced with my Voc Rehab.

But you get some pretty shady characters in those offices -- [laughter] -- and my mom and I have had to jump through hoops to get things done, and that's not how it should be because it totally discourages people from wanting to go to college or learn to drive a car and things like that. So, you know, if someone could say, ma'am, you know, this policy changed and I didn't have to jump through hoops to get this done because someone made a difference, I want to be one of those people that makes a difference. Did that help?

**Male Audience Member**

Yeah.

**Gwen Gillenwater:**

Jeff?

**Jeff McCaffrey:**

As far as obstacles go, mine, that's a given every day, from the time you get out of bed in the morning until the end of the day when you climb back into bed. Whether it's inaccessible streets or sidewalks or this or that, speaking from my perspective, I'm sure each and every one of these individuals up here can shed light, but it's every day you're faced with obstacles and you learn to just face that adversity and accommodate and adjust accordingly and that's just kind of the way it is. And obviously it starts to eat away at you, but, you know, you got to keep trucking and I think what keeps me going is -- you know, it's like what the senator said, the audacity is hope. You got to have the audacity to hope. The grass looks greener on the other side and that keeps me going. And as far as what I want to do, I got to say Jeff, I got to do one thing right now, get rid of my paralysis and -- if God came down right now and said I can do one thing for you right now, I would say reverse my paralysis and let me get back into the service and let me have my troops.

**Kristen Schiavone:**

I guess where I get my strength from; I just don't see any other options. I mean, what else could we do? Crawl back under our covers and say I'm not going to come out today?

I don't see that as an option. I don't see any other options than doing the best that I can and doing everything that I can. I see so many problems out there and so many inequities and if I'm not going to do it, who is? So why not?

And my dreams... Working on the Hill has made me really; really wish someday to be a member. I look around -- a member of Congress -- and I look around and I see these people walking through the halls and I think maybe this is something I that could do, that I could be good at.

I really want to be able to have the influence to make things better for people, not just people with disabilities and not just in the field of education. I want to make, I want to make the world better and I don't know exactly how that's going to come together or where I'm going to be in 20 years, but I just know that when I die, I want people to be able to say that their lives were better because of me.

**Gwen Gillenwater:**

Very good. Senator, thank you.

[Laughter].

**Ahmed Salem:**

All right. I'm sorry; the question was main source of motivation and your dream person?

**Gwen Gillenwater:**

Who you want to be?

**Ahmed Salem:**

Oh, I was going to say I want to be Andy Imparato.

[Laughter].

So my main source of inspiration, number one, God. I believe in the existence of God and that

power, believing the ultimate power gives me a lot of hope, gives me a lot of faith. I already take faith when I, you know, walk around not seeing anything or anyone and that's a leap of faith that I take, that God exists and gives me a lot of hope. And I think that is an important integral of life. The second source is my mother. That woman is amazing. I haven't seen her for months so I might get a little emotional. But she's the best woman -- you guys are all awesome too. But like she's the best.

[Laughter].

She's just the best woman on the face of the planet, she knows where it's at. She knows how to motivate. She knows when to, you know, give a little smack and reminder.

[Laughter].

And she just knows how to do it. And she raised five of us; she raised us really, really well. So I just -- I'm going to see her in two days, so I'm not that emotional.

[Laughter].

Yeah, so that's... Now, the person I would like to be if I had the opportunity? This is kind of a -- I would like to be Chief Justice John Marshall, the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. For two reasons: one, he established Judicial Supremacy and I think that's awesome.

[Laughter].

And two, he was qualified and I pick him now, I'm not partisan anymore. But -- no, the second real reason is I think he's established real core principles. I want to be someone in that capacity, establishing the real core principles for the movement forward. He established the principles which kept the Supreme Court alive, which kept the best document in the world after the holy books alive, which kept what I feel is the document that should be protected under all circumstances, which kept the document, even though I came here only six years ago, I could feel that I'm a part of this country because of the document, the constitution. He kept it alive and that's someone who I would love. Someone like that is someone I would aspire towards and someone I would love to be like. Yep, with that, I end my remarks. I have nothing funny to say this time.

[Laughter].

Thank you.

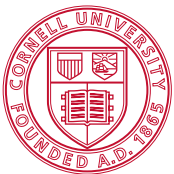
**Gwen Gillenwater:**

I think we will probably close on that. We have got our future city Chief Justice, our future Congress person, someone who's going to be in the 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, and the sister to the future of first little person astronaut. Okay.

[Laughter].

So I want to thank you all for being here. We just really want to give all of the accolades we can to this group of interns. They have just been really, really great, wonderful and I hope you all have gotten something out of their presentations this morning. It was wonderful.

[Applause].



## Cornell University

For more information about the Rehabilitation  
Research and Training Center on Employment  
Policy for Persons with Disabilities contact:

Susanne M. Bruy re  
Employment and Disability Institute  
Cornell University  
201 ILR Extension Building  
Ithaca, New York 14853-3901

Tel	607.255.7727
Fax	607.255.2763
TTY	607.255.2891
Email	<a href="mailto:smb23@cornell.edu">smb23@cornell.edu</a>
Web	<a href="http://www.edi.cornell.edu">www.edi.cornell.edu</a>