



Transcript of Conference Call Presentation

Looking Forward: Sustaining School-to-Work Principles

presented by

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Presidential Task Force on the Employment of Adults with Disabilities

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Richard Horne: I am Richard Horne, Senior Policy Advisor with the Presidential Task Force on Employment of Adults with Disabilities. I'm going to talk about the task force, some of the work that we're doing, the history of the Task Force, and some of the accomplishments we have made to date.

I also want to talk with you about a national policy summit that we're holding here in Washington in June. Some of the questions that we are dealing with at that summit were on the flyer disseminated by NTA in preparation for this conference call. Finally, I'd like to give you a sense of the view of the future from the perspective of the work that we're doing here at the Task Force. I don't often get an opportunity to do a call like this, talking to people from across the country, so it's a real pleasure and an honor to be with you.

If you know a lot about the task force, some of this will be redundant and so I apologize for that. Before I get started, I just want to give you our web site address. I often forget to do that and so I'll do that right now. It's www.dol.gov, that's the main web site for the Department of Labor. If you scroll down the home page, you'll see a link to the Presidential Task Force on Employment of Adults with Disabilities, which has a lot of information about the work that we are doing as well as a lot of resources and other information you may find useful.

So, why do we have a Task Force? I get that question a lot. I think that many of you on the phone are

probably very familiar with the problems related to the multiple and significant barriers that people with disabilities face in terms of employment, particularly young people with disabilities. I'm certain that all of you certainly recognize that this is probably the best of economic times and employment opportunities in the history of our nation. We have the lowest unemployment rate in thirty years. Last month it was at three point nine (3.9%) percent. The economy has created millions and millions of new jobs, spurring the kinds of investment and income development unheard of in recent history. We also know that for many people this wonderful economic expansion and opportunity created by the Clinton and Gore Administration hasn't necessarily reached the people with disabilities who face many barriers to employment. Certainly we know that there is a system — we look at our federal system from that perspective— with many uncoordinated programs and benefits that are often contradictory. We certainly know the problems with outdated stereotypes and attitudes. We certainly know that for many people with disabilities that they are unaware of their own rights and the types of accommodations and supports that they need in order to be successful at work. And often, if you look at some of our federal policy systems, they discourage and often penalizes attempts by people with disabilities to return to work. Our social security or health care system, and oftentimes housing, food stamps, et cetera,

force people to say “I can’t work” in order to keep their government benefits. That’s what we call the policy disconnect and inconsistency in our programs.

We also know that when we begin to look at our current programs at the federal level and we spend over four hundred billion dollars a year on programs related to supporting people with disabilities and very few, less than twenty-five (25%) percent, of that money goes to employment, most of it goes to public benefits and support. We have a very uncoordinated system.

And if you can imagine for a moment, how a young person or young adult with a disability accesses our current system, they see many pieces of a puzzle that are spread out all over the place where you may have, for example, vocational rehabilitation at one end, education at another, health care in the middle, technology somewhere off to the side, and social security, our current one-stop career center system, our school-to-work system, supported employment services, transportation, small business opportunities spread out all over the place. These are all pieces of a puzzle that aren’t very well connected and certainly aren’t designed to be consumer driven and consumer directed. Certainly, our goal is to make all of those pieces fit together in an aligned system with the consumer at the center, with the consumer having the ability to direct the supports that are necessary for their economic sufficiency, employment, and independent living. That’s really what we are looking at.

We are certainly looking at an unemployment rate among people with the most significant disabilities hovering around seventy (70%) or seventy-five (75%) percent. And we know that a lot of people with disabilities want to work but aren’t working. That’s the challenge that was laid out before us when President Clinton signed the executive order establishing the

Presidential Task Force on Employment of Adults with Disabilities. In that executive order, which really reads like a strategic plan for increasing employment, we recognized that no one agency at the federal level or any level has the sole responsibility for addressing some of these significant problems; that it’s really going to take the work of all of these agencies working in a coordinated fashion to open up opportunities, promote best practices, make the systematic and policy changes that are necessary to change our current employment picture. We also recognized that you just can’t tweak one end of the system. You can’t change the health care system, which to me is one of the most significant barriers to employment, without having an effect on other pieces of the puzzle — whether it’s vocational rehabilitation, employment and training programs, or any other programs. Certainly if we don’t open up and increase accessibility to transportation, all of the efforts that we try to do to make employment a reality won’t happen. Same thing for housing and I think most of you who are out there working in your local communities know that.

So, the President established the Task Force in March of 1998. We have been around for two years. We are different — One of the frequent questions I get is how are we different than the President’s Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities? And the difference is quite simple. The Task Force is a time-limited, federal interagency task force. It was established to develop a coordinated and aggressive national policy to increase the employment rate of people with disabilities to that of the general population. And we’re to have that strategy in place by July of 2002, which is the tenth anniversary of the implementation of the employment provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act. So, we’re a time-limited group. We’re a policy group.

The President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, as you may know, has been around for many decades. They are doing wonderful work in the areas of promoting employment, establishing the necessary networks with business and employers, testing models and putting out models, disseminating information. They sponsor the Job Accommodation Network and many other excellent programs. So, we're a different shop. The Committee is part of the Task Force. Tony Coelho, the Chair of the President's Committee serves as the Vice-Chair of the Task Force.

The Task Force is chaired by Secretary of Labor, Alexis Herman. There are a total of eighteen cabinet level and other agencies that are represented on the Task Force. And I think that this is the most significant difference in what it takes to make this kind of work happen. It's really when you have that top level administrative leadership and guidance, do these efforts happen. When it's really put at the top of the agenda of all of these federal agencies and you've got secretaries and you've got the executive branch and the President and the Vice President saying, "Yes, this matters to me, yes, this is important," that you begin to see, I think, some of the changes that we have experienced in our brief two years.

Briefly, serving on the Task Force are the Department of Education, the Department of Health and Human Services, Transportation, the Small Business Administration, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the Social Security Administration, the Office of Personnel Management, the Department of Treasury, the Department of Commerce, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Federal Communications Commission, and the Departments of Justice, Agriculture Interior, and of Housing and Urban Development, and the National Council on Disability.

So, as I said earlier, no one agency has the answers. You've got to work in a coordinated manner across all of these agencies, tackling a myriad of problems that can affect opening up employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Our mandate is quite broad, it's quite aggressive. We are really in development of putting this national strategy together. We constantly say here at the Task Force that our work is evolutionary. We certainly work very hard at making our recommendations and ideas known to the Administration and putting in strategies to make them happen.

We are organized around a series of committees, subcommittees, and working groups in order to tackle that strategic checklist that I mentioned earlier. We have a Committee on Access to Employment and Lifelong Learning. And this Committee deals with issues of housing and transportation, postsecondary education, the one-stop system, access to employment by people with the most significant disabilities, welfare-to-work, and a host of other issues. It's probably the largest of the Committees of the Task Force.

Attached to this Committee is the Subcommittee that I work a lot on and that's our Subcommittee on Expanding Employment Opportunities for Young People with Disabilities where we are looking at the issues of education and training, workforce development, the one-stop system, the Department of Labor's youth opportunity grants, transportation, postsecondary education and training, health care, for young people. We have a Committee on Civil Rights looking at not only what are some of the civil rights policy areas that we need to expand upon, but also the issue of how do we begin to coordinate among agencies and strengthen the enforcement of the civil rights statutes that are already in place.

We have a Committee on the Federal Government

as the Model Employer. I think one of the more interesting aspects of our executive order was the fact that it wasn't the Clinton Administration saying to private employers "You have to do this," it was also saying that the federal government, the nation's largest employer, also needs to be a model of employing and promoting in career development for people with disabilities.

We have a Committee on Health Care and Income Support, mainly looking at issues of social security, Medicaid and other income and health care support programs for people with disabilities. We have a Committee on Economic Incentives and Entrepreneurship. Certainly if you look at this economy, most of the jobs and most of the opportunities created in the past eight years had been in the area of small business. And we have a lot to do to increase entrepreneurial opportunities for people with disabilities. And from my perspective, I think this is also an interesting aspect of looking at employment opportunities for young people with disabilities. We certainly see much of that activity happening within school-to-work.

We have a Committee on Statistics. As you know we have huge data collection problems and inconsistencies in how we measure employment in people with disabilities, including the definitional issues. We yet do not have monthly employment statistics that measures the employment rate of people with disabilities. As you know, last month the unemployment rate was three point nine (3.9%) percent. That statistic does not measure the workforce participation of people with disabilities. Our Statistics Committee, led by the Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics here at the Department of Labor, has been charged with coming up with a statistically valid and reliable employment method and to have that in place by 2002.

We also have some cross-cutting workgroups deal-

ing with the issue of technology and diversity. I'm sure you all know how difficult it is just to keep up with this emerging technology and what it portends for the workplace in terms of increasing productivity for all Americans at work. We certainly want to open up that opportunity in terms of communications and computer and assistive technology to people with disabilities. Certainly you may be aware of the addition of section 508 to the Rehabilitation Act, which is very significant. It mandates that all technology purchases by the federal government must be accessible to people with disabilities. And this is going to have a tremendous impact in terms of employment in the federal government. And we're certainly rolling that out now. We also have a cross-cutting workgroup on diversity, looking across multiple issues and multiple barriers regarding people with ethnic and racial diversity in terms of their unique barriers to employment and the strategies that need to be in place to open up those doors.

Some of our accomplishments in the past two years, if you're not familiar with the Task Force, again, I think that, number one, having this recognition at the highest levels of this Administration has made a significant difference in the impact that we have. I have been with the Task Force a little over a year. There are very few venues or avenues where I go where I don't hear something about the Task Force and the work that we are doing.

We have released two reports to the President. In our first report to the President we presented a host of recommendations and directions in terms of budget and other initiatives. Each of our recommendations were accepted and promoted widely by the Clinton-Gore Administration and actions were taken to put into place. And we're very pleased and proud of that record. Certainly, those of you who are famil-

iar with the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999 was the last piece of legislation signed in the last century by President Clinton on December 17th. If you're not familiar with the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act, I'll answer some questions about that if you need it. But certainly this bill has a significant impact on the ability of people with disabilities to return to work or go to work and not have to exchange healthcare or income support programs in order to do that. And we are very interested in how this program will roll out over the next couple of months.

The federal government has taken numerous actions to open up opportunities for people with disabilities in the federal workforce. We released a plan in October by the Office of Personnel Management called "Accessing Opportunity: The Plan for People with Disabilities in the Federal Government." And this is a plan that the President directed all federal agencies to implement to increase the employment of people with disabilities in the federal government. One of the five focus areas of this plan is opening up work-based learning opportunities for young people with disabilities. We are looking at how we can, within that range of work-based learning — which we know is so important to, number one, keeping young people with disabilities in school and it correlates highly with successful employment and post-school outcomes — to how we can use the power of the federal government to open up career awareness and job shadowing and mentorships and internships and all of those good things that you all do at the local level all the time, how we can get the federal government to do that.

We did a lot of work on the issue of mental health and psychiatric disabilities. We held a White House conference last year on that issue. Out of that came a significant series of recommendations. One of those

include increasing and bringing parity in the federal employee health benefits program between medical coverage and mental health coverage. And in January of next year, the federal government, as the world's largest insurer of employees, will have parity between mental health services and medical services in employee benefits plans.

We have significantly increased our investments in assistive technology and expanding access to communication and information technologies and took major initiatives in the area of small business and entrepreneurship. Many of you may have seen that the Small Business Administration, along with the President's Committee and several other agencies, are doing road shows around the country right now to promote small business opportunities through SBA and other federal agencies to people with disabilities. All of that information are on our web site.

We released our second report to the President in December of 1999. It included fourteen major recommendations, all of which have been accepted by the Administration. I want to talk about a few of them that I think are the most significant and relevant to some of the work that you will be doing.

One of them that was accepted by President Clinton and included in his FY2001 budget, which is currently before Congress, was the establishment of an Office on Disability Policy, Evaluation and Technical Assistance within the Department of Labor. This new office will elevate disability issues to the level of the Assistant Secretary to coordinate among all of DOL programs to ensure disability issues are integrated into all DOL programs. It will also foster research and dissemination and technical assistance. We are very excited about this proposal. It's a twenty-three million dollar proposal with significant FTE's to back that up. Currently before Congress it was included in

the Senate mark-up, not in the House mark-up for the FY2001 budget, but we are very hopeful that the promise of this office will come to bear. And this is a significant piece of that coordinated strategy that we have been mandated to do as part of the Task Force. This office will be established in the Department of Labor. The Task Force will continue with work through 2002 because to complete the coordination among all of the federal agencies and to develop the policy directions for employment into the future.

We had two significant recommendations around youth. One was directing the Departments of Education, Labor, Social Security, Health and Human Services, Office of Personnel Management and other agencies to come and produce for the President recommendations for an interagency youth-to-work initiative. Part of this initiative is where our summit that's coming up in June is coming from. We hope to present those recommendations to the President this fall. There is also a recommendation to expand the Healthy and Ready to Work program for young people with chronic health conditions under Title V of the Social Security Act. And I think one of the things that I know Mary hears me talk about this all the time is that if the health care piece isn't at that transition table as we plan transition services and roll them out, we're missing a significant piece of the necessary supports and services that young people need to be successful in independent living and employment. So, we are very, very happy with that.

We intend to be producing in the government a one-stop web site so that people with disabilities and service providers and others can come into the federal government and know where to go in this government in terms of accessing programs that support employment of individuals with disabilities. [*Note: At the time of this conference call, the web site was not yet*

published. However, this web site has since been published and is now available at www.disability.gov.] We hope to roll that web site out this summer. We are doing a lot of activities this July around the tenth anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act, including the torch relay, events here in Washington and across the country. All of the cabinet members who are members of the Task Force will be attending many of these activities across the country in late July. And we are very proud that this Administration will put out a strong and coordinated message of support and praise and celebration for the Americans with Disabilities Act.

In terms of where we are going — and I want to have time to open this up for discussions with you — is to look at sustaining school-to-work principles and other initiatives to align systems that serve people. I believe that what we hear — particularly through town hall meetings on youth issues across this country — we constantly hear from local providers and families and consumers about the lack of coordination and the stovepipe approach to our programs and a lot of the disincentives that are there that don't necessarily promote effective transition for young people with disabilities. I think we have certainly made a lot of progress. There are many more young people with disabilities going into postsecondary education and training than ever before, many more certainly graduating. But when we look at those statistics in comparison with young people without disabilities, we also know that we've got a long way to go. I think that there are some wonderful lessons that have been learned from the work that you have all been doing in school-to-work. I'm very pleased that for many years before I came to the Task Force I was part of the National Transition Alliance working with David and Mary and Janice and a whole host of wonderful people

there to try to promote research-based practices, trying to put into work what works and then working closely with you all at the state and local level where you have to adapt and adopt those practices in order to increase opportunities to include young people with disabilities and the work of all. I think that that's the right message. I think that that's the right direction to go. I continue to strongly believe that when we look at work-based learning and contextual learning and school-based learning and those connecting activities, that still is the right way to go. It still fits very well. But how do we begin to increase these opportunities and move these programs at the local level so that they do reach all young people with disabilities?

One of our concerns about school-to-work is that we haven't reached all of the young people I think that we could have reached. We are particularly concerned, and I think many people are, about the transition of young people with the most significant disabilities, as well as those young people with not-so-obvious disabilities. And we hear a lot from families that they have to negotiate so many mazes once their young person exits from the protections of special education. Or for many families, whose children have not participated in special education but nonetheless do have the kinds of disabilities that would have them be covered under civil rights statutes. We hope within the summit that we're pulling together in July, we have invited one hundred and sixty people from across the country representing employers, foundations, national disability organizations, other national organizations, state programs, local programs, young people themselves and their families, people from the independent living movement and other consumers, researchers, and people doing programs to come and join us in a national dialogue about future directions that our transition policies and programs need to take. And to

advise the Task Force on where we should go in conducting our work over the next few years.

Mary was very kind to kind of put out some questions to you all that I'm very interested in your thoughts about. We put these questions out to the invitees of the summit. And here is what we're looking at: Number one, we hope that the summit will result in a set of concise and specific recommendations, short-term and long-term, that can come back to the Task Force for consideration and movement in the future. That's really what we're looking for. That's why I'm calling the summit a dialogue and not necessarily a conference.

But here are some of the questions we are interested in. We are interested in the barriers that individuals face in making that transition from the perspectives of family and consumers, and we are asking people about that. I think we have got a couple of good ideas but we want to see what our participants think. We want to know how we can improve transition results for all young people with disabilities. How can we increase high school graduation rates for young people with disabilities? I think the graduation rate — and Mary and many of us talk a lot about this in terms of the general education curriculum, the meaning of the exit document, et cetera — but the graduation rate is very important, as well as how do we improve postsecondary participation and completion of young people with disabilities.

How do we connect some of these alternative exit strategies to increasing employment opportunities and lifelong learning? How do we improve access and utilization of health insurance and health care by young people with disabilities? How do we improve that employment rate of young people with disabilities? How do we ensure that young people are prepared to live life as independently as possible? How do we in-

crease the involvement of young people with disabilities and their family members in transitioning to adulthood? What are the tools? What information is needed by young people and their families to help them identify and remove barriers? How can we increase the participation of young people with disabilities and their families in actually shaping community partnerships? So many times I hear, whether it's in school-to-work or youth opportunities or one-stops or youth councils, how do we increase parent participation? And I often look at programs and I say, how are parents and young people with disabilities at that policy table shaping those programs? It's not about the bake sale. It's not about putting the program together and then saying to the community out there, "Here, come and get it." We need to make sure that young people with disabilities and their families are at that policy table, are helping shaping those programs, are meaningfully involved in the design and implementation and evaluation of programs in order to make this work. And we're very interested about how we strengthen this at the community level so that we can have the kinds of results that we are looking for. It's very important.

How can we align programs and services and foster community partnerships to improve outcomes for young people with disabilities? And I say alignment and I say that very strongly and also very cautiously. Most of you certainly know that at the federal level it's very difficult to coordinate funding across streams and across programs. But it is something that we're very interested in thoughts and ideas about.

What comprehensive services should local communities have in place to facilitate the employment and training of young people with disabilities? Those are some of the issues that we are going to be tackling through facilitated dialogue, electronic polling, panel

presentations and small group working sessions for the two days of the summit.

At this point, I'm going to take a breath and, number one, ask you if you have any questions or reactions about the Task Force. And then I'd like to get some of your own personal reflections about some of these questions I have put out.

Michael Vineton (Kansas): This is Michael Vineton from Kansas. And in reading the presidential executive order that created the Task Force, there are two employment programs that were singled out for some special research or some special attention by name, being the Javits-Wagner-O'Day employment programs and the Randolph-Sheppard program. I'm wondering, and I've heard a number of scenarios as to what the politics were and why those got in with special mention, but I'm wondering what's happening and what part of the presidential reports it will be in in terms of research that the Task Force plans to do to comply with that part of the order.

Richard Horne: Sure. Happy to do that. One of the interests, as I said earlier, on the part of our Access Committee are the issues around increasing employment opportunities and options for people with the most significant disabilities. In responding to that specific section of the executive order, we have done some research, funded several organizations, that led up to a national summit and a policy think-tank on increasing opportunities and choice for people with the most significant disabilities. We are actually reviewing the recommendations from that summit which was held in April and actually have a meeting on Thursday with Rebecca Ogle, our Executive Director, to review all those recommendations that have been sent over to the Task Force to consider and to move on.

There will be a report coming out from the Task

Force, probably early this fall, just on employment issues of people with the most significant disabilities. Christopher Button on our staff is the senior policy advisor who has been leading that effort. If you'd like more information about that, you can certainly send me an e-mail and I will be happy to get into more detail with you. I'll give you my e-mail address, it's horne-richard@dol.gov. I hope that answers your question.

Michael Vineton (Kansas): Thank you.

Bill Birch (Michigan): I have a question regarding the one-stop web site that you were giving kind of an overview of. Do you have a communication plan or money to help support so that people know about this web site, so employers can go ahead and collect information from the web site as well as, you know, some of the young people that you are trying to attract?

Richard Horne: The answer to that, of course, is yes and no. What we have done is we have had a meeting at the highest level across many of the federal agencies in terms of, number one, this is going to be a web site just about federal program resources and what ought to be on that web site. What was submitted late last week from that working group was a template for this web site that we are now looking at.

We are designing the web site now within the federal agencies. We hope to have a template of that web site up. Right now it's really who is going to be the host of that web site and there are several agencies right now that are vying for that, so that answers your second question about resources.

Bill Birch (Michigan): Sure.

Richard Horne: Are you familiar with the Access America Web site for seniors? www.seniors.gov

Bill Birch (Michigan): No, I'm not.

Richard Horne: It's very similar to that initiative

that Vice President Gore had initiated many years ago. Again, it's one-stop shopping for older Americans in terms of programs and resources and all of the kinds that they need. As you know, trying to get into federal web sites is like, you know, the Tower of Babylon. You know, you click and drag, you click and drag, and you're going all over the place. We're trying to put all of these things in one web site.

Bill Birch (Michigan): Sure, I think it's an excellent idea.

Richard Horne: And so the roll-out that we will do will certainly be number one among the vast network of disability advocates in groups we all work with in the federal government. We have thousands of people on listserves and web sites and e-mail lists within the federal government. Our employer outreach will certainly be coordinated and conducted through the President's Committee because they have got such vast resources and capacity for doing that. I hope that we'll be able to use the resources of folks like the NTA and some of the good folks that we have got out there who will help promote and link to this web site.

There is another person in my office who has got the responsibility for putting this all together. Our plan has to be in place by the tenth anniversary and some of the celebration stuff that we are doing around July 26th. So, I would keep an eye out on our web site for more information. And, again, you've got my e-mail address. You can certainly e-mail me any other specific questions or suggestions that you may have.

Bill Birch (Michigan): Yeah. I would hope too, that there is some benchmark information on here.

Richard Horne: Oh, that data question, huh?

Bill Birch (Michigan): Right, and some tracking information that employers can use. Because I think, you know, from an employer's perspective I think a

lot of people are less likely to try to pursue new programs like you are trying to promote unless they can kind of see some of the data and see some of the success stories and these kinds of things. I think this would be an excellent tool that, you know, that they could go in and browse and collect the information. It would be a way that, you know, they could — you could sell them on that buy-in.

Richard Horne: Yes, we are looking at building the success side story of this right now. We're also going to pilot some statistical models in the fall through our Statistics Committee to at the employment statistic and rate. And I think that if some of that bears fruit, then I think we can start giving employers some of the hard data that we now lack in order to make this happen. But I don't think that will preclude us from doing some of the success story pieces that we are looking at.

For example, around the issue of employment of people with the most significant disabilities, we are going to be releasing a brochure that highlights success stories of seven young people and people with the most significant disabilities moving into competitive work. And, you know, as just an example, we do know a lot of federal agencies do collect success stories— examples from school-to-work, rehabilitation, and special education. We need to have all of those in a one-stop kind of way so that employers can see that range and that they are a piece of the puzzle.

Bill Birch (Michigan): Yeah. I think that's a critical piece and I'm glad to hear that you are covering those bases. That's great.

Richard Horne: Thank you.

Mary Mack: Another question for Richard?

Bart Chany (Kansas): One question that comes to mind is how difficult it is for certain individuals with disabilities to acquire health insurance, especially, you

know, through employment since many of those people don't have the stamina to work full-time. Is there some sort of program in the process of developing an insurance plan that would be able to cover these people?

Richard Horne: I think it gets very difficult. That's a very controversial and difficult road to go down, as anyone who remembers our health care debate early on. We have focused much more on the federal health insurance programs, Medicaid and Medicare, Social Security, and the federal employee benefits plan. We are looking at other types of insurance options but we are very careful not to get ourselves into a situation of dictating to the private sector health care coverage. I think that's a very, you know, difficult and controversial road to go down.

We have a couple of projects working on this. We are looking at some of the directions in the private health care industry and then looking at that in comparison to where we are going with our federal benefits type program. But that is certainly one very critical area with not very easy solutions.

Michael Vineton (Kansas): Richard, the legislation that was adopted recently — and I don't remember the working title of it — which basically eliminated the substantial gainful activity measure for people who were ages sixty-five to sixty-nine, there was a lot of discussion as that legislation went through on a very fast track about it in some way tweaking the SGA levels that were used for people with disabilities and addressing that. That prompted federal hearings on the issue of what the SGA level should be for people with disabilities and what might need to happen to that area. What's the Task Force's role in that research and what do you expect to come out of all that?

Richard Horne: One is that we did have a lot of recommendations regarding that from our summit

on significant disabilities. Social Security, working with the Task Force, is currently working on a number of ideas around SGA. As you know, it was raised a year but not enough. It did come up in these discussions of the legislation that you mentioned. And although there were some hearings and if you looked at the testimony that Susan Daniels of SSA gave around that and some of the options that Social Security is looking at, you will see the direction were going in. So, I mean, they are looking at some options. Will we get similar legislation this year? No, I don't see that happening. But that does not portend that we won't have some recommendations moving in that direction. But we are also very mindful of some of the work that Social Security is also doing independently as an agency on that issue. I think the bulk of the research on that, in terms of who is spending the most on that, is coming out of the Social Security Administration.

Michael Vineton (Kansas): Thank you.

Mary Mack: Is there another question?

Louise Meyer (Washington, DC): I have a question. Regarding specifically the transitioning and some of the recent — certainly it has been in the news — Medicaid payment and the IDEA for assistive technology in the schools, and apparently there has been some concern by the GAO, the General Accounting Office, over payment for Medicaid services and paying for some of the assistive technology and particularly the case management and the services involved in AT or durable medical equipment or medical services provided to students on IEPs and transition plans. And I didn't know if that would be discussed in the transition summit or if that's on the list of concerns.

Richard Horne: Yes, it's part of the health care questions that we are asking. I think, you know, you

have a challenge — The challenge around transition planning when you are looking at the school and the IEP is who pays for what. The problem frequently encountered is that for these kinds of assistive technology equipment or other technology services that are provided, if the school pays for it, it belongs to the school. If you access it through the Medicare program, then the individual owns it.

Louise Meyer (Washington, DC): Right. But apparently there is some debate now how states are using their federal Medicaid in combination with IDEA for the payment period.

Richard Horne: Yes, there is.

Louise Meyer (Washington, DC): The concern about administrative services regarding that and how the individual school systems, the LEAs, are using this money. And I'm wondering if that is going to be particularly discussed or talked about during the Transition Summit.

Richard Horne: We have several health care and state people who are going to be there — state Medicaid directors, you know, state directors of special education, families, physicians, et cetera. And it is one of the focus areas that we are looking at. I'm going to assume that this is going to come up. I know that it has come up on our subcommittee.

Louise Meyer (Washington, DC): Okay. Thank you.

Mary Mack: Another question?

(No response).

Mary Mack: Perhaps, Richard, you might want to elicit some responses to some of the questions that you had?

Richard Horne: Sure. Just in terms of some of the experiences that you have all had out there implementing school-to-work programs and including young people with disabilities and promoting transi-

tion services, options and programs, if you had an opportunity to tell us what you think we ought to do to improve transition results, what would you — what would you recommend?

Twinkle Morgan (Texas): I'm Twinkle Morgan from Texas. And, in fact, I've got a parent with me on the other line because we are going through this whole process ourselves and we are just getting ready to redo a memorandum of understanding with the agencies. And I'm from the school's perspective. And I know one of the things I know we are required to do is put forth — at the beginning of the school year we send out to all the agencies that may be involved in transitioning the number of students, to kind of give them a heads-up on who is going to be graduating and what handicapping conditions are involved.

What I don't see is the agencies having to come back to us and saying how many of our students they serve or have provided services to. And I would like to see that cross-coordination just to let us know — I mean, we should do follow-ups with our students to find out what happened and did our plan work with transitioning. But I'd like to see the agencies take some accountability also to report back to the school districts that these kids came to the door, this case was closed or it never — or something, some kind of accountability.

Richard Horne: Do you see that coming down from the federal level?

Twinkle Morgan (Texas): I'd like to see it that way because unfortunately, that's the one that guides us. That's the one — I mean, I know the states, we all get to, you know, kind of customize it. But when it goes into federal law, I mean, even the revision of IDEA as a school personnel has supported what we felt like was right to do. And I'm particularly looking in the areas of students with significant disabilities in em-

ployment. You know, it's real loose when we say, oh, they demonstrate employability skills so we can graduate them. So, is this feedback you're asking for after they graduate from high school? After they graduate from high school?

Richard Horne: After —

UNIDENTIFIED: — (inaudible) — report back. Then you'd get — Isn't from the student's end, isn't there a confidentiality issue there?

Twinkle Morgan (Texas): Yeah. But hopefully no, because when we send them to the agencies we don't list names. We just put students A, B, C and D, handicapped condition. Our school district chooses to get releases so we can have that dialogue with the agencies.

UNIDENTIFIED: Even after they have graduated and left the school system?

Twinkle Morgan (Texas): They would write back and say, you know, we had X number of students with learning disabilities from X — you know, from local school district ISD participate in our program. If they wanted to release names, I guess they could get releases but I would just like to see that accountability. Where are they going? What's happening after we spend all this time with our students and we release them?

Richard Horne: I think that there are a couple of things — a couple of comments I would make to that. One is, as you know, the Office of Special Education programs at the U.S. Department of Education was mandated under IDEA to do a series of longitudinal studies crossing a broad implementation of IDEA, including, infant/toddler, early childhood, elementary/middle school, and then what we call the national longitudinal transitional study.

I think that it's also a matter of how we collect this data and what options that we have, number one, to

reduce the burdens on already burdened systems that are already collecting this data and what pieces that we have in there I think is one thing. We certainly do need to look at this accountability piece. I think that's very important.

You know, IDEA has built in very strong accountabilities in terms of access to the general education curriculum and high stakes and high standards assessment and within the transition requirements under IDEA. I guess my question to you would have to balance whether or not we strengthen the process or actually strengthen what actually happens in terms of taking what we do in school and making sure that young people with disabilities exit school and go into lifelong learning, postsecondary education, employment, independent living, and all of those things. I think that's where, particularly as we approach the summit, I think that there's going to be great debate about.

Anyone else want to weigh in on any of the questions about improving transition results or would anybody like to weigh in on systems alignment?

Michael Vineton (Kansas): I have a question, this is Michael Vineton, which might relate to systems alignment. I don't know if that would be a barrier or not, but obviously a number of us are tracking the activities of the Supreme Court very carefully with regard to all of the tenth amendment, eleventh amendment, fourteenth amendment issues that are being looked at with regard to federal programs. We know that the ADA already could certainly be touched by some of those issues. And I believe that the gap in federal mandates — federal funds for IDEA makes it a candidate for upcoming Supreme Court review, if a case makes it that far. My question is: Is the task force looking at trends being established through the judicial branch and responding legislation to attempt to

address those trends? Or if that legislation can't be forthcoming because we're really looking at constitutional amendments here, what is the impact that some of the judicial branch decisions are expected to have on some of the efforts moving forward that you're talking about here?

Richard Horne: Sure. In our second report that was released in December we have an entire chapter devoted to the Supreme Court and the ADA, so it is certainly on our radar screen. I think interestingly enough, if you look at what's currently happening in the appropriations process, when we look at the Labor, HHS and Education appropriations, there is a plan for increasing significantly the part B state formula grants under IDEA. And there are various ideas about how to accelerate that to get to the forty (40%) percent of excess costs that Congress had promised in 1975. So, it would be interesting to see how that may work out given these appropriations are moving.

I still think we have to look at, you know, what happened around all of the unfunded mandates. But, you know, IDEA essentially wasn't included in that legislation. But I still think that there may be an opportunity for the court to take that challenge. We are certainly concerned about the weakening of any aspect of ADA, you know, in terms of whether state programs have to comply with the ADA and federal programs, et cetera. So, it is very much on our agenda.

In terms of legislation recommendations, it is important to know that we are an executive branch federal interagency task force. So, our recommendations are made to the White House. We are not obligated under executive order to report to Congress or make legislative recommendations to Congress. That falls under the National Council for Disability and the White House itself. So, a lot of our ideas and recommendations we will work with the White House in

terms of the White House producing legislative remedies or recommendations around that. So, while we do not have specific charge to write legislation, it goes to the White House and some of those other agencies to work that end of it.

Wendy Blount (Kansas): What recommendations would you have in terms of how we could really bring all the agencies of the state level together and start working on that? I mean, we have all these things going on in Kansas and I know the other states too, but we are not coming to the same tables and talking about all things that we have to serve youth with disabilities and employment outcomes. How could we start bridging that gap?

Richard Horne: I think that's one of the things that we are asking the participants directly about. I have some ideas but at this point — it wouldn't be prudent for me put those out on the table. We certainly do have to look within the federal programs, one, at where are the opportunities that we have within, you know, OMB allowance and legislative allowance that we can pool and share resources. And where do we have the types of categorical funding in streams that actually produce duplication of effort? I frequently say that this isn't a resource problem, it's a resource sharing and resource coordination problem.

I think we need to hear from states, and particularly states that may have some best practices to offer, what they are doing and what kinds of regulatory flexibility or what kinds of program flexibility that they have. I also think that we have to also look at our generic special education and rehabilitation systems and the link to the workforce investment strategy that the Workforce Improvement Act has put forward. We are certainly hopeful that that would be one aspect of what this Office on Disability Policy within DOL, should it be funded, would help investigate. But,

again, we have got to look at where are the models that work, what do the states tell us that work? We are certainly interested in asking that. And then we've got to put some thoughtful consideration behind the federal policy and program to see where those opportunities are, where the redirection has to come, et cetera.

Wendy Blount (Kansas): Are there states that you know that are doing it or have good efforts in this regard?

Nancy Lauria (New York): This is Nancy Lauria from New York. We are working with our State School-to-Work Advisory Council, the Department of Labor, and the State Education Department to come up with suggestions for the local implementation and the youth councils on how to work with school districts to start to address those in the rehabilitation agencies who are just beginning to come up with some recommendations along that line. Because our youth councils are just being formed now. And one of the things we have done is we have put on our State Department of Labor Web Site information about all the different funded programs that are out there, the eligibility information, and the types of services they can provide so that we can see which programs can provide which services that are mandated for youth.

Richard Horne: Do you have that web site?

Nancy Lauria (New York): I do. Hang on, I just have to find it. It's www.labor.state.ny.us.

Richard Horne: Wonderful. It's amazing that we all try to remember our web sites more than we do our own telephone numbers. Are there any other questions that I might be able to answer?

Twinkle Morgan (Texas): Again, this is Twinkle from Texas. I'm going back to the health issue because I know that seems to be a dis-incentive to our

parents to start talking about our students looking at employment issues. And the first thing they'll say is "I don't want to lose benefits." So, I know you're working on it, but —

Richard Horne: And if it's not at the transition planning table, that's where I'm really fearful.

Twinkle Morgan (Texas): Yeah. But they'll start talking about it saying, "But I'm scared about losing my benefits if he works too much or earns a decent living."

Richard Horne: And if you look at some of the things that are happening under the Ticket, we are looking at that benefits counseling piece, I am really interested in how Social Security is going to roll that out to young people in this transition planning process. Those grants are out now. Social Security has released an application announcement for the benefits counseling. HCFA has released the demonstration grants and the buy-in. And the Department of Labor has released the work incentive grants, which is twenty million dollars to help build the capacity of one-stops to serve people with disabilities.

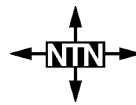
We're hoping to see applications from across the country that are very coordinated around this. There's lots of information about that on our web site. But I absolutely agree with you, we have got to start working early with our families and young people on this very critical question because I don't think it comes up in the process. And as that young person, especially if you get to the cliff at eighteen and re-determination and you get thrown off the system and you lose your Medicare, there are lots of issues there. So, yes, it is one that I can tell you is very near and dear to my heart and one that we are really looking at in terms of the Youth Subcommittee and why, at the summit, we have put the health care question on the table. I hope we get some answers.

Mary Mack: I want to thank you Richard very, very much — and the participants — for participating in today's conference call. The next conference call will be on June 23rd between 1:00 and 2:00 Central Daylight Time. And it will be Leading by Example: Local Partnership Strategies for Building Inclusive School-to-Work Systems with Suzanne Masland from Vermont and Becky Densmore-Stoll still from Illinois.

Thank you very much for participating today. And we'll talk to you next month. Bye.

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