

## People with Disabilities

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### ***Opening music***

Theory. Practice. Discourse. Research. Insights. Dialogue.

### ***WGVU's Jennifer Moss:***

You're listening to Tilting the Earth's Praxis, a weekly discussion of important issues that impact civil society. With host Salvatore Alaimo.

### ***President George H.W. Bush – at signing of Americans With Disabilities Act***

So many dedicated organizations for people with disabilities who gave their time and their strength. And perhaps most of all, everyone out there and others across the breadth of this nation are 43 million Americans with disabilities. You have made this happen. All of you have made this happen. Every man, woman and child with a disability can now pass through once closed doors into a bright new era of equality, independence and freedom. And as I look around at all these joyous faces, I remember clearly how many years of dedicated commitment have gone into making this historic new Civil Rights Act a reality. It's been the work of a true coalition, a strong and inspiring coalition of people who have shared both a dream and a passionate determination to make that dream come true. And it's been a coalition in the finest spirit, joining of Democrats and Republicans of the legislative and the executive branches of federal and state agencies are public officials and private citizens. People with disabilities and without this historic act is the world's first comprehensive declaration of equality for people with disabilities. The first.

### ***Salvatore Alaimo***

Welcome to Tilting the Earth's practice. Our topic this week is People with Disabilities. Our esteemed guests are Maria Town. The President and CEO of the American Association of People with Disabilities. Prior to her role at APD, she was the director of the City of Houston Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities and also former senior associate director in the Obama White House Office of Public Engagement. Maria, thank you for being on our show and welcome.

### ***Maria Town***

Thank you for having me. Happy to be here.

### ***Salvatore Alaimo***

Our Grand Valley alumni for this episode is Jeannette Johnson. She is the director of communications at Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc. And Jeanette got her bachelor's degree in public and nonprofit administration and in full transparency. She is a former student of mine. Welcome, JJ.

### ***Jeanette Johnson (through interpreter)***

Thank you for having me here today.

### **Salvatore Alaimo**

We also have an interpreter to help us with our show and enable us to have this conversation today. And I want to acknowledge our interpreter and thank her as well. So we just heard the audio of former President George H.W. Bush talking about the signing of ADA going all the way back to 1990. And he often cited that as one of the most proudest moments of his presidency. Maria, I want to turn to you first and give us the lay of the land or the macro level context. Where how far have we gone in the last 33 years? What strides have we made? And what are the current conditions in this country for people with disabilities?

### **Maria Town**

Well, I could spend, you know, weeks answering this question, so there's a lot to say. The, the ADA, when it was passed in 1990 was and continues to be a really big deal because it created a right to public accommodation for people with disabilities, and many other countries do not have the same kind of level of rights. And importantly, the definition of disability is very broad, so it defines disability as any mental or physical condition that impacts an activity of daily living. And one of the things that is the reality of being disabled in the United States today is that the ADA has not been fully implemented, nor enforced as much as it should be. And oftentimes a critique of the ADA is that it is what we call it, an unfunded mandate. So, we create these rules, but there wasn't funding attached to them. And so you still have businesses, organizations, schools, universities that don't create accessibility, who don't create inclusion. And it's it's very hard for disabled people to fight back. Now, importantly, I want to note that there's been a lot of progress since the idea was passed. We saw the Olmstead decision, which was a Supreme Court decision in 1999, that said that you could not forcibly institutionalize disabled people. And it built that. The reason that that Supreme Court decision exists is because the ADA existed before it. Right. We have seen things like the 21st Century Video and Telecommunications Act, which establishes a right to accessible, accessible information for all people with disabilities. And we've seen and I'm interested in J.J.'s thoughts on this like huge advancements in the availability of apps and content because of that law and also the, and he's constantly under attack and constantly we are seeing threats that try to minimize the scope that try to limit people with disabilities ability to enforce our own rights. And, actually, there was a series of Supreme Court decisions after the ADA was passed that tried to limit the scope of who counted as disabled. There were a number of lawsuits, particularly from people who have nonphysical disabilities like diabetes or cancer. And the courts basically said you're not disabled enough to be covered by this law. And I like to think of it as the band getting back together, like literally, uh, you know, in 2008, the same many of the same senators and representatives who championed the ADA in 1990 came together and introduced the ADA Amendments Act, which actually broadened the definition of disability even further so that as many people as possible could benefit from the protections of the ADA. And they basically told the Supreme Court, this was not our intent, right? This is not meant to be this is meant to be a transformative piece of civil rights legislation and not something that is limited in scope. And so, we saw that

happening. And today, just recently, there was good news out of the Supreme Court, which you can really say these days. They sided with a deaf student who sued a school under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. And he was able to receive access to sign language interpretation and continued education through the idea, and he was able to receive monetary damages through the ADA. And this is a big deal. I mean, all of this is important said yes. Well, the pride and that gives people with disabilities and even more tools to advance our rights beyond this sort of policy based progress. I think, you know, when the idea was passed and this continues in many ways, but I think the primary way that Americans understood disability was mobility impairments like I have sensory disabilities like JJ has. And today I think we have a much more nuanced understanding of disability. We're seeing more people identify with mental health and psychiatric disabilities, with COVID. We're seeing millions of people who are becoming disabled because of long COVID. And we're also understanding that just like no one has one identity, typically people don't have one disability, right? Like I have cerebral palsy and I also have other chronic health and cognitive disabilities. And so, folks are often multiple disabled. And as we also learn more about things like the social determinants of health and the ways that poverty and disability often go hand-in-hand, I think there's a greater recognition that disability is, can be sort of socially constructed. So, I'll stop there.

### ***Salvatore Alaimo***

Well, clearly there's a lot to unpack there and we'll do our best to try to unpack some of that in the next 30 to 40 minutes. But, um, uh, Maria did say she'd like to hear JJ your perspective on that. And I I'm with her. I want to hear it, too. What progress do you see being made? What obstacles still exist? And you could use examples specific from your work if you like.

### ***Jeanette Johnson (through interpreter)***

Absolutely. So as a deaf person, I see the ADA as being a landmark legislation that really improved access, where for the first time businesses that are not educational institution, but public businesses were required to provide communication access. So finally, deaf people could go and have meetings with their doctors, with their lawyers, with other professional services. Now, we did have a law prior to the ADA called Section 504. So if an organization or institution got federal funding, they had to be accessible. But those who did not qualify or receive federal funding didn't have to provide that access to deaf people at large or to people. So the ADA has really opened doors substantially. However, at the same time, there is certain language in there, such as reasonable who define reasonable. Who defines that? What is reasonable? Who decides that? So, for example, if people go to a movie and they want to watch a movie, they're required to get a device that sits in their cupholder that they have to navigate and adjust. It's greasy because people have touched it. My hands are greasy because I'm eating my popcorn. Why don't we just have open captioned films? So, it is inclusive. And they say while hearing people say they don't want to see captions, I want to have my own experience watching that movie. And so are we really prioritizing this, their own personal experience and dismissing ours. So, we're not quite there yet with the idea. I think we are still considered second class citizens when you look at those situations.

Maria mentioned the caption The telecommunication legislation that came in. And that did change things for us. Netflix and other streaming programs were required to have captioning. However, we do see people fight against it and we do see oppression of our language and minimizing of our language. So let me give you an example in a streaming video. If a song is playing or music is playing, they don't caption that necessarily. And so, that's not full access and not having the same experience, the same immersion experience as my counterparts who can hear. It becomes patchwork. To comply with the legislation as opposed to approach it as accessibility and inclusivity. Now I do work for the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, and I don't, I'm not speaking on behalf of my employer. But what I do encounter is there's a lot of misunderstanding around interpreters, and people think the interpreters here to help the deaf person. No, the interpreter is here so that we can all communicate. The interpreter's here for every single party. Right, right. Sal's pointing at himself. Right, you know, the interpreter is an ASL and English interpreter, and it's a very rigorous and complex job and it requires a lot of knowledge around both languages, both cultures. And so often, um, people will then think, assume, oh, you must know a lot about this deaf person's life. You must, are you with this deaf person every day? Are you their support person or their companion? And no, they have an education. There are high standards in place. And so there's a lot of public education that has to happen around the role of the interpreter and what they're actually here for.

### **Salvatore Alaimo**

So that the signing of the ADA was touted by the president and by many as a victory. Only because of the advocacy of tens of millions of people with disabilities in this country. So going back to you, Maria, I know that your organization has an advocacy function. Can you give us a sort of a summary of some of the hot topics that you're engaged in advocating for right now on behalf and for people with disabilities?

### **Maria Town**

Absolutely. And I want to give us a little bit of historical context around the area and the advocacy focused on this area, because it's actually central to my organization's founding. So historically, people with disabilities were not only segregated from broader society, we were segregated from one another. You had, you know, homes and institutions for people who were blind, people who were deaf, people with intellectual disabilities. And you also had organizations that focused on disability specific experiences. And these organizations still exist. They are vitally important. But separating us from one another is a way of separating us from our collective power as a community. And one of the reasons that the advocacy for the ADA was so important is because you had the National Association of the Deaf, the National Federation of the Blind, you know, the spinal cord injury organizations. You had all of these organizations coming together and demanding collective access and collective rights as disabled people. And so APD, the American Association of People with Disabilities, was actually founded in 1995 to continue building that collective political and economic power of this cross disability community. And so the advocacy that we do, we, we attempt it's very hard to span the experiences of the very diverse disability community. And focus on issues that impact everyone. Importantly, a lot of what we do is actually

you learn from other organizations about the way the nuances that they apply to particular issues. So, for example, when we work on issues like broadband, Internet access for disabled people, one of the points we have to include is that speeds have to be high enough to allow for video communication for deaf people who rely on sign language interpreters. Right? We can't just say we need subsidized broadband. That's not enough. We need high speed subsidized broadband in order to create equal communication access. One of the major issues that we have been focused on recently is voting. People with disabilities are one of the largest voting blocs in the United States, and yet we continue to experience a seven percentage point participation gap from non-disabled voters. And that is because of a variety of reasons that start at voter outreach and registration and education and kind of end past the ballot box. But two things like ballot sharing and signature verification. And so what we have been trying to promote is greater availability of accessible voting options that are so that people have more choices when they're trying to determine how, when, where and why to vote. I do not want to hear another story of people who are denied the right to vote because their polling place did not hook up the accessible machine. That's happened to me. I have a mobility impairment. I used to live in Texas. If anyone knows about voting in Texas, the ballots are really long. And I needed to sit at the accessible machine. And what the lady told me was, just stare. You'll be fine, right? And even things like. Voter ID requirements. Many disabled people do not have valid or up to date licenses because we don't drive. And that can be due to the nature of our disabilities or because a significant number of people with disabilities are also older adults who are also less likely to have up to date IDs. And so change in status state run ID requirements. There's been a major priority outside of voting. We have been pushing significantly for the expansion of home and community based services so that people with disabilities know are no longer forced into institutions. We are trying to change what we call the institutional bias in our health care system. So right now, if any of us needed long term care, it's easier to get your insurance to pay for it in a nursing home than it is to get them to pay for care in your own home. And particularly with the COVID pandemic, what we're seeing in congregate settings, whether that's a nursing home, a group home, a state psychiatric facility, is that the virus spreads rapidly and that people receive a kind of lower standard of care. And the last thing that I want to point out is we do a lot of advocacy around technology. And when you think about an issue like autonomous vehicles are autonomous vehicles have a huge potential to expand opportunities for people with disabilities. But, only if the vehicles are designed to be accessible in the first place. Right? And so we work a lot with folks with all kinds of disabilities to talk to original equipment manufacturers, to say, here's the here's the rider interface that you need to be accessible for people using sign language, for people who have speech disabilities and for people who are using wheelchairs. And that's really exciting work because we can't just be focused on sort of existing accessibility issues. We have to also look towards the future, because one of the things that frustrates me a lot about the ADA is that no one predicted we would all be walking around with supercomputers in our pockets just ten years later. So there are some huge gaps in tech accessibility requirements that we're trying to fill rapidly.

**Salvatore Alaimo**

You know, it seems you made a good point earlier, Maria, when you said the legislation is there, but, you know, it's not good unless it's enforced. Right? There's just these are just documents and words. And we know that legislation, while if it is enforced over the long term, can impact changing a behavior. But I don't think we can ultimately legislate hearts and minds. So, my question is around the issue of stigma. Are we making any progress in getting the people of this country to understand what people with disabilities can do? And what we owe them as members of our civil society to enable them to flourish and prosper as human beings, as citizens. So, we'll go but we'll go to you, J.J., first, and then we'll go we'll come back to Maria. What can you say about stigma? Is still there in your work? What are you seeing and what, if anything, can we do to try to improve that?

***Jeanette Johnson (through interpreter)***

I think that's a great question. Thank you. We definitely see that there is a strong stigma against deaf people in particular, but people with disabilities all across the board. I think often people think there's a cognitive or an intellectual attachment with being deaf. They think that because I don't hear, I can't read, I can't write it, can't do other things. And really, it's about access. If we would give deaf children the opportunity to acquire education in an accessible format, it would have a whole different impact. And that's a whole different conversation we can talk about in our in the workplace. Often deaf people are frustrated by not having access to interpreters in the workplace and people trying to say the back and get the, the cheapest interpreter and you get what you pay for. If you're paying for someone who's not certified, you're going to get low quality. If you want to have clear access and a good quality interpretation, then you have to pay for it. And then people cry undue hardship, right? But they don't look at the really overall budget that they have. They're looking at that individual's budget. Right. And they say it's too expensive to hire deaf people because of the cost of interpreters as opposed to what that brings to your entire company. And we do have companies like video relay services where deaf people can make phone calls and. There are other. So then deaf people become pigeonholed for working for, say, a B or S company, deaf organizations or even the organization like I work for because we know that it will be accessible there. And so that becomes another barrier as opposed to looking and saying, you know, we can give you a video phone, we can give you these things. And there is a cost that goes along with that. But what they don't really, they completely miss is that deaf people, once given access to information and communication is set in place, they can really, really richly benefit your company. You know, we have a lot of experience with working with people like ourselves and communicating. And so I think that's a big stigma across the board, is that because we speak to different languages, people often make some assumptions like they may say the interpreter is helping the deaf person and a lot of times the spotlight is placed on the interpreter. And really it's not the interpreters information. A presentation isn't great because of the interpreter, it's because of the deaf person that they're giving the information. And often that's missed. And then if you have an interpreter that does not have the same level of skill. And the way that interpreter works is attached to the deaf person. Oh, they're simple, they can't thinking complex thoughts. They are very smart. And really those errors can come from the

interpreter. So that's another stigma that people really attach those two things. And we need allies like you, Sal, to really help educate the public, to break those to us.

### **Salvatore Alaimo**

Thank you. Well, Maria, what would you like to add to that on this topic of stigma and what we can or should do about it?

### **Maria Town**

So I do think that we've made significant progress on addressing stigma. There are widely available representations of disability that exist now, but honestly, like I couldn't have dreamed of even ten years ago, you know, I'm thinking of like Jillian Mercado, right, who is a woman with muscular dystrophy who's on "The L Word." I'm thinking of Lolo Spencer. I'm thinking of. Comedian Maysoon Zayid or disabled performers like Lachi. Like I just. There are so many more opportunities for disabled people to see themselves reflected than there were even in their recent history. And I know, Jay, I'm going to assume that like we are, we you know, I think that about you a few years older than you. But, you know, for the longest time, the disabled people who I could think of in the public eye were Marlee Matlin, Stevie Wonder, and like maybe a couple of other folks. But that that's it. And, you know, I had like how in color as as an as a role model and. Unfortunately, part of the stigma of disability is not just about the disability itself, it's also the stigma around the idea that we have to overcome disabilities. And I think you have a lot of people who will say things to someone like myself and say, oh, but Maria, I don't see you as disabled. And what is that? A competition. Somebody that's who I hate. Right. And I'm. And so what we also have, I think still today, even in my job as the president and CEO of the American Association of People with Disabilities, even though you can't read my bio without saying the word disability maybe five times, I still get told in presentations. Shouldn't you be saying a different word? Isn't disability a bad word? Isn't it a negative word? And I have to say, no, it's not. Disability is an identity that you can claim that you can be proud of. It is a community. And honestly, disability is the language of rights. It's not the Americans with Special Needs Act by. It's not the Americans with unique abilities. It is the American Americans with Disabilities Act. And said to J's point, you know, go into an employer and say, you know, hello, employer. I have some unique needs. And employers go, wow, but you write because you meet me, it's not protected by federal civil rights. You have to say, I have a disability and I need it. I need an accommodation. And so I think we've made a lot of progress, but I want to see a kind of future where people know that they can say the word disability and not feel bad about it. And I think, you know, to be honest, being disabled can be really hard sometimes and occasionally. That's not about access barriers for me. There are times when my body will not cooperate, when I am in pain or where I cannot get out of bed. That's not easy. But because of my own pride around disability, I know that it doesn't make my life worth less. Or inherently. Does it? It doesn't make my life not worth living. Right. My, my life is amazing and in part because of my disability. So yeah, I think I have a lot further to go, but we've come a long way.

### **Salvatore Alaimo**

I think you made an excellent point about the use of the word disability, and I immediately thought if we shy away from that term, are we simply refusing to acknowledge something that's important and attached to the identity of people? But also, are we being counterproductive to the ongoing advocacy we're trying to do? What do you think, JJ?

***Jeanette Johnson (through interpreter)***

Yeah. It's interesting that you mention that, Sal, because a lot of the controversy around the word deaf specifically there is controversy. There are people that say deaf has a negative connotation to it. But we as deaf people are proud of being deaf. We see it as something to be proud of, and I think that's parallel with the word disability. There are many people that, you know, yes, we have a disability and we're proud of who we are and the barriers that we face come from outside. They come from society itself. I mean, yes, there are some physical barriers that we have internally or that are our own, but a lot of the barriers we experience are from outside, whether that be the perception of who deaf people are or the way that people process things. So, you know, I think if we could change that, they would make great improvements for the lives of people living as deaf and people with disabilities.

***Salvatore Alaimo***

And in hearing both of you, I'm getting the sense that sort of embedded in this overall advocacy effort, it's important for people who have disabilities to be comfortable talking about them. So what can we do to make people with disabilities more comfortable about expressing their identity and expressing the pride that you have, J.J., and that you Maria have understanding there may be some challenges and obstacles, but this is something that can be spoken openly in a forum like this. Can, can we, can we do better with that?

***Maria Town***

Yeah, I, um. Sal, in a higher ed setting. I'll talk about my experience when I was a university student. You know, I worked with the Office of Disability Services, and everyone in that office was wonderful. They were very supportive. But the culture of the office was that if I saw another student waiting, I wasn't supposed to engage with them about their disability at all. I wasn't supposed to talk with them about their disability when I saw them on the campus. You know, there wasn't necessarily a way for us to connect with one another around our shared experiences as disabled people. And I think one of the things that can really help to get people talking about their experiences and really understanding disability as an identity. It's actually creating more spaces for disability community to exist. And I want to be clear, this is a little bit tricky. Because of our history of segregation. Right? Because we were placed in these homes and institutions. I think that's those are experiences where we are forced to be together, where there is not personal agency in choosing who we could be around. But when you create opportunities for disabled people to choose to come together on our own terms, that can be incredibly powerful. And one example is, is something like the Netflix movie Crip Camp, right? Which is kind of the back story of how we got the Rehabilitation Act and the ADA. You know, because people with disabilities, different disabilities all went to a job for young people with disabilities, but they found relationships with one another that persisted over time and ultimately started a revolution. And so maybe that's why



folks that want us to get together because they know we went start some revolutionary stuff. But I think we need more opportunities.

**Salvatore Alaimo**

So maybe there's a fear of strength in numbers.

**Maria Town**

(Laughing) Exactly. J.J., what do you think?

**Jeanette Johnson (through interpreter)**

Yeah. Yeah. You know, it's so interesting because many of us as deaf people. We don't consider ourselves as disabled, so we deliberately segregate ourself from the disabled community because we consider self a cultural and linguistic minority. But we reluctantly accept the ADA because that's where rights come in. Right. At the same time, I think it's about increasing awareness that deaf people, we are different. And we do need to really collaborate with the disability community at large, you know, like Maria said and you know, creating that space where we can have the conversations and unpack and come together and brainstorm ideas on how we approach society at large and have that conversation. I think one important part that sometimes people are afraid of acknowledging or reluctant to acknowledge. Is anybody can become disabled at any point in your life. And I think that is something that people when a really start makes people question their own morality. Right. You know, and does that mean as soon as something they become disabled, they see themselves as a deficit or defective or something. And it's no, you're not broken. It's just something a part of you doesn't work. You're just different now. But today we have resources. We have a lot of things in place that you can continue to move with your life just with some different tools, right? And so that thinking of how we perceive disability and how we perceive ourselves if we perceive disability at large is broken. Then that's where the difference comes at, right? And you're not broken.

**Salvatore Alaimo**

Yes. And you're inspiring another thought here that. I would hope, because this show is all about connecting topics to civil society. I would hope that those who do not have disabilities do not need to then have one, to then have the empathy for people who do have disabilities. We as citizens should not have to wait till something happens directly to us for then for that to trigger the empathy gene, gene in our brain, to say, oh, well, maybe we should pay more attention to this, or maybe we should advocate, maybe we should have more X accessibility. Maybe we should reduce stigma and understand that in spite of these disabilities, these people can do amazing things and impact that same civil society. So I hope that advocacy in education continues so we can have that empathy and understand that we are a collective group of people. It's not us and them and that we need to have empathy for everyone. So I want to I want to segway now into diversity, equity, inclusion, because you can't go to the home page of a website of a government agency, nonprofit corporation, university or college or organization of any kind without them touting their work in the DEI space. And it seems to me. But I'd love to get your comments. That there's a continuum that goes like this. On one end of the continuum, the organization is very serious about DEI to the point where it's embedded

in the culture. It has the top down leadership supporting it, it's budgeted for it. It models the behavior. And then on the other end of the continuum is we do this for window dressing. We just want to appear as if we care about DEI. But it's not in our strategic plan. We haven't thought it through. We don't budget it. We don't model the behavior. We just don't want to be the odd man out, not engaging in it, and we don't want to look bad. And then there's everybody in between that continuum. So my question is. Where do people with disabilities fall into the DEI discussion? Because I keep seeing the discussions gravitate more towards other categories. What can you say about that? We'll start with you, Maria.

***Maria Town***

So, Sal, I think your observation is right. Also, frequently, disability is not considered a part of broader DEI efforts. And I think a lot of times when disability is integrated into DEI programs or efforts, it's a relatively new addition. And so the kind of people and entities responsible for executing on an organization's DEI goals are having to, you know, fly the plane while that's being built. You know, so sometimes the disability inclusion is a little clunky. Oftentimes we see a lot of employers when they create disability employee resource groups, therefore disabled people and our families. And it's interesting because we don't see that dynamic in other affinity groups or in employee resource groups like really, it's typically focused on, you know, folks who actually had the identity themselves. So it's interesting to see the different ways that disability isn't credit in these efforts when we are included at all. And to go back to my earlier point, sometimes when disability is included in DEI efforts, they don't use the word disability. They use "all abilities". They use "unique abilities." And so folks are beginning on a very different starting point than I think they are for other groups. With all that being said, I want to make sure that I know that disability is present in every single community. And so if you are doing well, even if you haven't sort of specifically called out disability in your work, you are still impacting disabled people because communities of color are more likely to experience disability. Women are disabled at higher rates than men. To say that people are more likely to be LGBTQIA plus and more specifically more likely to be trans. And so, I don't understand how you can have a DEI initiative and not integrate aspects of accessibility and disability inclusion into all of your communities efforts in order to really be authentic.

***Salvatore Alaimo***

J.J. What do you think about that?

***Jeanette Johnson (through interpreter)***

I think we need to expand DEI to de DEIAB diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging. Because often I think, as Maria mentioned, when we think about diversity, the first thing people think about are other groups. And if we're really talking about diversity, we have to look at all the diverse people on the spectrum that includes people with disabilities and their multiple identities. Because what is accessible for one person may not be accessible for someone else. So, for example, access for deaf people is completely different than access for people who are blind. So if you think about the community at large, that's when you will really reflect true diversity. And if we create a safe

environment where people feel like they belong, people can really participate and contribute. That really will sustain the diversity, piece. That's where, you know, everybody is sitting at the table and everybody has an opportunity to share their ideas. And we're all working together to advance the society, to advance our professions. We have a lot to offer. But we often are missed. When you think about LGBTQIA, I think about racialized people. If you really even those groups haven't necessarily included disabled people as part of their process and it is an afterthought. So if you start with that mindset of we want to include everybody, you're going to have a rich experience of really representing so many ideas at the table.

***Maria Town***

Just to build on that too. I also think we as disability organizations need to do a much better job of committing to racial equity and justice, gender justice and inclusion of LGBTQIA people in our work. You know, I think one of the issues with like the fight for the ADA is that it was primarily led by white, cisgender, straight people. And there have been major issues within the disability community itself around centering the experiences of disabled people of color and other multiple marginalized disabled people. And so, I really think it goes both ways. And if we are truly committed to. DEIAB or D, We'll always going to be learning because as we kind of work to include engage and really center more people in our in our efforts, things are going to need to change and shifts and we have to be willing to adapt as our understanding of belonging becomes more nuanced.

***Salvatore Alaimo***

I think that's a great, great point to close and gives us some future direction on what all of us can do for people with disabilities in this country. We can all make this a better nation, a better civil society. If we put time and attention and reduced stigma and become more aware and educated, informed and think about what we can do to make this a better place for all of us. So I want to thank Maria Town, the president and CEO of the American Association of People with Disabilities, and Jeanette Johnson, the Director of Communications at Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf. Thank you for being on Tilting the IRS's praxis. I want to close here by before I say goodbye by thanking both of you for the incredibly important work you are doing. The two of you are making a tremendous difference in the lives of people, and we have a lot of work to do as a society, but we can't get it done without people like you. And I just want to express my personal appreciation for the work that both of you do.

***Jeanette Johnson (through interpreter)***

Thank you.

***Maria Town***

Thank you.

***Closing music***

***WGVU's Jennifer Moss***

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**Closing music fades.**