

Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation
2019 Fall Conference
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Onsite CART Captioning

Third General Session
8:01 a.m. 9:16 a.m

>> STEVE WOODERSON: If everybody would take their seat, we'll get going.

>> ALAN McCLAIN: My name is Alan McClain, and current president of CSAVR. On behalf of the executive committee of CSAVR -- this mic is a little bit loud. On behalf of executive committee, and the staff of CSAVR, I want to welcome everybody here to the conference.

If you're -- some of us have been here since Saturday and have picked up some things at the leadership forum and it's been a great couple of days of that, and after I told somebody after the first or second hour, I said it's already worth the trip, I've probably gained all -- some really important knowledge and I can go back to Arkansas and work on that.

I can only imagine what we have left to pick up, great nuggets that we can use in our roles in our states. So thank you for your commitment to being here over the next few days. Glad you're here and so happens that our past president of CSAVR, Mr. Robert Doyle is from Florida and our current president elect, Allison Flanagan from the State of Florida, so I appreciate them hosing us here today. Allison will give you a few words of welcome

>> ALLISON FLANAGAN: Good morning. How's that humidity?

Ladies, there's nothing you can do. You're going to have frizzy hair all week. I want to welcome you to Florida. I could stand up here and tell you about how many miles of beaches we have and we're the happiest place on earth but I think everybody knows that about Florida. I often get asked specific questions about my agency so I thought I would share a little bit how the Florida general agency is set up.

And first I want my Florida staff to have to stand up. Yep. Y'all going to have to get up. Please make sure you reach out to these folks. Since it's here in Florida, they were able to come, but usually if it's out of state they don't get the pleasure.

Make sure you connect with them so they've got those supports and services out there they can reach out to you.

Here in the Florida agency, we have 884 full-time positions that are given to us by the legislature. You know how that goes.

However, whether you take all of our contract positions that we have, we have almost 1200 individuals that we employ across the State of Florida.

Florida actually is hybrid system and I think we're the only state that does this.

So we have a contract with service source, that is providing the VR. They're not doing any of the nondelegable duties. We have 16 service sources and we have our service source staff here as well. You can raise -- there you are.

This enables us to service more people across the state. It works well. They're treated just like VR staff and they even have VR e-mails, so it works. It's a good collaboration.

We have 96 offices across the state and 16 of those are private offices. Our annual budget's around \$40,000, we have 335 employment service providers and all 335 of those have been approved to provide preemployment transition services. So we're quite proud of that, as well. We are organized

under the Florida department of education and lately that's been a really good thing because there's a lot of conversation here in Florida about education and career and technical education and the governor's been putting a lot of money towards that so we're excited about where our students with disabilities and our adults fit into that career pathway and it's really been a good conversation since we've had a new governor come into place.

So I want to welcome y'all here to Florida. Robert are you going to say -- Robert's going to do a little welcome, too, but enjoy. Try to stay a little cool.

Actually, I feel like 80 degrees is cool. We welcome y'all, hope you have a great conference.

>> ROBERT DOYLE: Good mornings to everyone as well. As Allison has extended a welcome, I do the same. She's talked about the division of voc rehab, I'll share about the division of blind services.

We are currently the largest blind agency in the union and we currently have 300 plus employees when you include our contractors, about a 58 million dollar budget. We serve individuals from birth to earth as I like to say.

Our legislature has blessed us with the ability to serve babies, children, including the transition, preemployment transition services as well as our adult programs.

We have 18 offices across the state of Florida, which includes our residential rehab facility in Daytona Beach, located on a 40 acre flat lot of land that we share with some of our CRPs serves 30,000 individuals across the State of Florida and 12,000, almost 13,000 individuals through our bureau of client services.

I like to think we have one of the better business enterprises. At least one of the more aggressive ones. I see Joel over there smiling. Might be a little bit of competition there.

But we really do a good program led by a good leadership and our business enterprise manager, Bill Findley, who will be joins us a little bit later on.

We have been working with trying to get into more of these military installations and just really pushing the priority, so I've been in Florida for a little bit over six years, serving in this agency.

And by far it's really been a good experience for us. As Allison talked about our leadership, we have been blessed to have a good group of folks who are inclusive of both the vision of voc rehab and the division of blind services as we're doing our planning and initiatives and giving us an opportunity to look at those pathways and different things.

So it is a great opportunity. We work really well with our core partners in the state, looking at different ways we can expand our opportunities for people with disabilities.

So again, as Allison talked about, there's a lot you can talk about with Florida. We really are the sunshine state. It may not look like it today, but hope fly before the week is over you get is a chance to see some of the beautiful sunshine in the State of Florida, so we want to welcome you and hope you enjoy your stay in Florida.

>> STEVE WOODERSON: Thank you Robert and Allison. It's just been a pleasure serving with these folks. It's also a pleasure for me to get to work with the staff of CSAVR and I hope Steve will get a chance to recognize the CSAVR staff but what I want to do is introduce you Steve Wooderson to you, who will take over the introductions from here. But you really have a dedicated staff at CSAVR that work tirelessly to keep us being the lead and so many of the discussions that are going on and you'll hear more about that later. With that I'll introduce Steve Wooderson.

>> STEVE WOODERSON: Good morning, CSAVR. I hope most of you are happier this morning than I am. For those of you that Allison just reminded me that I need to be depressed because my chiefs lost last night. Also these gentlemen have vacated premises, but I notice that when Allison said something about hair frizz, everyone looked to the three gentlemen up here. I bet y'all were concerned about that. Welcome to the fall conference. We've got great registration. Came in a little bit later this year than usual, but we're right at the 300 count, got a great program for us all this week and thrilled that you're

here and able to have the opportunity for dialogue over the next couple days and dig into the issues that we are really faced with here post WIOA.

And I honestly don't want to take much time this morning. I want to devote as much time as possible to the commissioner's comments but I really kind of struggled this morning. Usually I do a Washington update, but I really want to take a moment and say thank you. There's really my message this morning. I want to say thank you because five years post WIOA, three almost four years post initiating vision 2020 initiative, it's been really evident, even more so in the last six months, since our last conference, as we as staff have had an opportunity to be around the country and interact with you and listen to you, how exciting it is that we are not just responding to WIOA.

I mean, first couple years that was what we were doing, reacting and responding right? But we really now are leading and leaning into the future.

Those first couple years weren't easy. We're still dealing with challenges, but more than anything we see that our folks across the country are creating opportunities that they're looking for ways to be more innovative, to initiate more partnerships and new programs. That has become more and more evident the longer that we are into post WIOA days.

So I want to say thank you. Thank you for the opportunity that you provided us, your staff, to be able to tell your story on the hill, to be able to engage with you across the country and really listen and participate in what you all are doing. It is an absolute joy for us to be in that role.

I -- many of you have been involved in our leadership forum and in the director's forum yesterday so you've heard, in more detail some of the activities that we've been about, but particularly in the last six months, your staff has really been focused on the fourth of the four principles of vision 2020 and that is related to partnerships, where we have been involved since last spring, identifying existing partnerships, identifying partnerships that need to be reestablished or reenergized and they're looking for new types of partnerships and relationships that possibly in the past we've not been as engaged in and we felt like you felt like there was a need for us to really look for more opportunities to participate in relationship building and partnerships.

I'm really pleased to say that as we stand here today, within the last few weeks, your staff has been involved in about a dozen and a half specific partnerships where we have sat down one on one with a number of organizations, federal administration belt way advocacy groups and looking for common activities, common principles, common initiatives and priorities that we could identify specific actions and follow up with.

We've accomplished that, although there are many others that we still wish to reach out to and want to expand that net. Our focus has been in identifying those initiatives that, at the federal level, as we engage in those, that improve and access, that you have greater access to those partnerships at the state level.

Many of those we've already been able to put some of those activities into place and will be continuing to do that. You know, we are in the fall of 2019. The one year anniversary is coming up in just a few months and as we look forward to vision 2020 and beyond, you'll be considerably more ramping up of what is next. Where is it we'll be heading in the future. And it's your future, our future that is on the cusp.

We're really excited about the things you're doing in the field, we're honored to have a staff to be part of that and be able to tell your story.

So that's my message this morning. Thank you. Thank you very much for what you're doing and looking forward to hearing many of those activities over the course of the next two or three days.

I do have a few announcements that I want to make before I introduce our new state directors and then our commissioner. Want to say thank you again to GWU. Are you in the room? Thank you Maureen for once again being our steward of the CRCs and I believe Theresa has a sign out on the table for you to register for your CRCs.

For those that have participated in the leadership forum this year, this is the first time we've been able to offer CRCs for that activity as well. Maureen thank you for continuing to help us with that.

We are primarily on the third floor throughout the conference. I believe tomorrow we have a couple sessions on the third floor but basically today we are here and then some of our concurrent sessions will be on the floor above us.

So this year we're doing something a little bit different. We'll see how it goes. We have a lot of proposals that came in, that we just didn't have enough time to fit them all into general and concurrent session.

So tomorrow afternoon, I think it's 1:45 to 2:45 if I recall, we have four -- and I'm putting air quotes here, round table sessions that are going on.

Now, they're not going to be small little round tables. Well they may be round tables, I don't know, but the intent behind this is for us to have opportunity to move about, if you so choose. We've asked the moderators of these round tables at about 30 minutes in -- it's an hour session -- to just remind folks that if they would like to move to one of the other tables, they're encouraged to do so.

We would ask you to do that with intent. You would move quickly from one to the other. Depending upon how the discussions are going with the round table, it may be that the facilitators will restate their objective and engage you in conversation during the second half of that, but the sent is for there to be dialogue. It's not just a stand up presentation. It's a chance to exchange ideas that are being discussed at the round tables.

So some call this speed dating, Cathy west everyone Evans, but it's going to be a larger group than when you typically think of a round table. We want to give this a shot. See how it works. If it works we'll continue doing it. But we're really excited about the dialogues that are going to be going on at the round tables. We want you to fully invest in those and if you're interested being able to move from one to the other during that one-hour session.

We -- the directors were in the director's forum yesterday giving a very brief overview of potential proposed changes to the CSAVR constitution and operations manual.

I want to mention this to the large group because there is a great deal of conversation going on regarding this and want to be sure that even though you may not be a director, many of you here, because of your engagement with a particular constituency or particular interest in one of the committees, so just to give you a flavor, during a business meeting, even if you're not a director, if you want to participate in this, be aware of what we're thinking at this moment.

Dacia Johnson with share a summary of some of the proposed changes to our constitution and operations manual.

The probably most significant part of that is looking at how we structure our committees directly with the thought in mind of membership and participant engagement.

One of the concerns or tunes that we're really looking for is how do we reach into all of our interest areas, and then be able to ensure that your interests are adequately represented in the variety of things that we do.

So we'll be looking at how we establish some operating committees, and then the other committees as we have typically looked at, how do we take the passion and the engagement of those specific interests with specific constituencies and ensure they are well represented, the work that we do, but that we also continue the work of CSAVR.

We expect there will be opportunities for further networking. We're trying to avoid words like learning communities because it conjures up ideas that maybe we're not quite clear how folks might interpret that, but I want to ensure you that our intent is to engage all who have an interest in particular areas as it relates to the work that we do.

Be a part of that conversation. We expect then that between this fall conference and spring, that we will engage our directors in considerable more conversation, that there will be executive committee in

January that we hope will tie down some of those and then eventually, this will be brought to a vote before the entire membership in the spring to be implemented later. So be a part of those conversations, hear what's being done so that you can have your questions or concerns addressed. Dad gum humidity, maybe that's what it is. I don't know. I want to say a special thank you to the Florida staff, Allison and Robert for those of us that have been helping at the registration table, the work they do is so important so the others can attend to the details.

This last six months as I mentioned has been a pretty fast moving for staff. I probably say that every time we get together. But this one has taken on, at least last month has taken on a specific flavor for a couple reasons.

One is I was out during some of this time. Rita was out. Between Rita and I, we have three new knees. So the rest of the staff have had to pick up where some of us have been trying to get back up on our feet literally.

But beyond that, there has just been a great detail of engagement with everything from hill to the administration to working with our advocacy and community organizations on the hill and the rest of our professional organizations as well.

So I want to take a moment and say from my heart to our staff, Rita, thank you for the work that you've done in the last six months. I know that you've been as active as any point in the past, and engaging with our partners on the hill and our partnerships.

Kathy, we had an incredible net conference just a couple months ago in Baltimore, your work, greatly appreciate that.

John we've been through a period of looking for some new partnerships. New engagement and John has been taking the lead on many of that -- many of those activities.

And been on the road more in the last six months John probably in the entire time you've been with CSAVR.

And Theresa for keeping the wheel moving 6789 also want to give a shout out to Danielle, so appreciative of her and Ron vessel as he comes around representing CSAVR with WINTAC. So if you don't mind take a moment and let's acknowledge the work of the staff. And then without overstating it, Alan, you and the officers, as always -- where did you go?

I looked over there, thought that was Alan for a moment. Thank you and the officers for the work you're doing and the guidance and vision that you provide. So thank you.

It's really -- I would say one of the greatest pleasures for me to be able to introduce and announce our new directors since the spring meeting.

We've got ten on this list, 11 because Keith are you in the room? Were you acting before? Have you been appointed since April?

I don't want to make it look like you were an add on at the end. I'm not sure if Keith was still acting in the spring or not so let me acknowledge Keith first from Oregon general, congratulations, Keith, thank you.

And then the other ten, I know Mary Ann is not here, they were intending to be here, but I think they had some scheduling issues and were not able to attend.

Kristin, Colorado combined, where are you? There you are? Welcome.

Renee Patrick, are you here from Illinois?

Hadn't seen Renee, all right. She was appointed in the last few months.

Shannon, I know you're here, Pennsylvania combined, Shannon, where are you? Right in the back thank you. Shannon Austin.

New Mexico general, Diane Brown, Diane?

All right.

I just learned this morning that Nicky harper got caught up in a -- I guess travel issue. Nicky is not here but she's been appointed to Wyoming combined. Happy to have you as well.

Natasha, Minnesota blind, all right. There you are, congratulations.

South Carolina blind, Darlene Graham, Darlene? All right.

And Dee you have about what, seven days under your belt now? Congratulations.

Any of you seasoned directors have questions about how to run operations, go to Dee cause she got it figured out in the last week or so.

And then effective today, Karen Carol from New Jersey general. Is Karen here? I didn't -- yeah, but the effective day was today so congratulations and welcome new state directors. We want to take a moment and recognize you during our coffee break so if you will be sure and hang out around the coffee pot, as many of us as possible want to shake your hands.

This is a big moment for me. It's a big moment for us, I think. As a professional community. It is just an absolute honor for me to be able to introduce you to -- many of you don't need for him to be introduced, but he deserves to be introduced, our new commissioner, Mark Schultz. You know that Mark was nominated back in 2018, spent 500 days on the block waiting for his confirmation to come through and was finally appointed in August of this past year.

Because he didn't have enough work to do as commissioner, the secretary decided that, well let's just add another hat to his portfolio, and in the last 12 to -- about 12 days I think he's been serving also as the acting assistant secretary, I believe officially the term is delegated the duties of the assistant secretary to the office of special education rehabilitate active services within the department of education.

We know he came as a deputy commissioner to the Nebraska commissioner of education and before that, assistant commissioner of the Nebraska vocational rehabilitation program.

The vision 2020 initiative was started during Mark's term, probably while he was president elect, so much of what we're doing today, vision 2020, he and the other officers at the time had that vision to be able to think forward and look at the future of the public vocational rehabilitation program.

He was also our representative for a while in the work force information technology steering committee and providing good input into the opportunities and challenges that we experience as state agencies, and working with our core partners in exchanging data.

And prior to that, Mark came out of independent living movement where he served as the director of assistant technology partnerships, was it the league of human dignity? Oh center for independent living in Nebraska.

He is a fanatical Huskers fan, but we'll excuse you for that. All the credentials that Mark may have, I think the most important thing we need ton is that he's a friend. He's a visionary leader and our commissioner and we look forward to hearing from you Schultz.

>> MARK SCHULTZ: Thank you. It's going to take me a little while for the computer to start up again. I didn't know Steve was going to talk for that lodge so. I have a few thank yous I want to start out with this morning. Particularly I want to thank you, and President Trump for the nomination in having the confidence that I could do this job. Never thought as a small town kid from Nebraska, living literally one block from the tracks in a family of ten living on food stamps that I would ever be in this position. But I really believe this is the hand of opportunity and I think I was able to live that story and that dream. So I appreciate that opportunity.

I'd also like to thank Carol Dobak for the last two plus years serving as the acting commissioner as well as the acting and now currently as the acting deputy commissioner of RSA, so I want to thank her for her leadership and if you would please give her a round of applause.

So I would also like to, if RSA staff could stand? .

So I want to thank you because I came in and had a whole different perception about RSA staff and as I've come to know them they're a very dedicated committee and they're awesome and I just want to thank them for their patience with me over the last eight to ten weeks and learning all the nuances and processes, procedures and acronyms that I need to know to make a difference.

Unfortunately now I have a whole set of acronyms that I need to learn and understand in my new role, but I want to thank you for that. Thank you.

So Steve mentioned, it's been 500 days. I'm finally glad to be here. And people ask me how could you wait for 500 days, how did you have the patience?

So I want to tell you a little story, and I brought a prop. If you've heard me speak before I know people have heard me tell a couple jokes so if I don't have this prop you probably won't believe this is actually true.

But I was looking when I was nominated, first thing I did in the morning I got up and I was looking for my nomination and story and I got the paper and of course it wasn't on the front page. Didn't make the front page news, there's too much Nebraska football to talk about for me to make the front page.

So I'm going through this page by page. Finally, I see my picture. And there's a story about state Ed official named to federal post and nice article,

But then what I realized is I opened up the entire page and it was on the obituary page. So there's nothing like waking up, seeing your picture on the obituary page to make you grateful for every day that comes next, right?

So the fact I have 500 extra days was not a problem for me. I was just glad to have them. So last thing I just want to thank all of you that supported me through this process. 500 days is a lot of time. I thought I was handling it well, but with all the uncertainty, there is a lot of stress there.

For those of you when reached out and told me to hang there, I wanted to thank you for that support.

So thank you everyone.

So everybody's asked me what's my vision? I have one and I'm going to share that in a minute but I think I'm going to go back and look at the history.

We all know it's the hundredth anniversary in 2020, it started, with a veterans program and expanded that to Americans with disabilities. That was passed June 2, 1920, so June 2, 2020 is going to be the hundredth anniversary,

I don't know how many of you knew that actual date but that was one of the first things RSA staff researched for me. So I'm hoping that we can have some kind of seen the or series of events leading up to the culmination of that on June 2 and celebrating the hundredth anniversary of the VR program.

If you look over the course of the last hundred years a lot of changes have put VR at the center of many things in policy for people with disabilities.

If you look at section 508 of the rehab act, that was its first legislation for people with disabilities. That led to the persons with disabilities act. But we were is there first.

If you look at section 508 and technology, that was enacting similar standards for software, and telecommunications to ensure accessibility. So we've been there a lot of times, have initiated that change and been responsible for seeing that change in other programs and systems, so VR has been the catalyst for that.

So a couple weeks ago, we had all staff, RSA retreat and we challenged staff to start looking at a number of things but started with the history, and Jerry Elliott, is Jerry here in the room?

So we asked Jerry Elliott to share the history of the program and talk about some of the major milestones within VR over the last hundred years. It was a very fascinating and enlightening presentation and one which we hope that at some point in the future we'll be able to record and put on line for everyone because its really refreshing to see how we've been at the beginning of things and the impact we've had over time in the program.

It really makes you proud to be a part of this program. So there was something he quoted. And I believe it came from the publication around the 50th anniversary of the program which would have been 1969. So I'm going to read this to you, it starts out:

Over this period of time, the program has reinvented itself numerous times to meet the employment needs and challenges faced by persons with disabilities and commands of public policy. The basic

premise of the program has remained constant, the program has adapted itself to make use of new and effective modalities to empower individuals with disability, particularly those with significant disabilities to achieve high quality employment outcomes to which they aspire and choose.

Remember, that was written 50 years ago about the program and I think it's still true today. We really haven't changed much, even though many things have changed about how we get there.

So here we are with WIOA and once again looking at change. So if you look at the thing we're responsible for, pre-employment transition for students in their decision making as they explore careers. WIOA, creates an effective work force that includes individuals with disabilities.

We're challenged with competitive integrated employment and quality employment. So not just about any job. We're about helping people maximize their potential. That's what we're about and that's what we were talking about 50 years ago. It's now our turn, our obligation, to become part of that ever-changing fabric of the VR program and start leading the changes that bring us to the next 100 years.

So my vision really takes us back to the future. So the very thing that we talked about 50 years ago is still true today, that we must lead. So if you want to sum up my vision in one word it's lead.

So we lead with our values. We need to lead proactively and we need to lead as a role model for change. So how do we do that? What do I need?

So first we need to lead with our values. And this is something as a state director of a VR program I felt was very important so that we had common values across all staff. And I say that's true for us across the country, as well.

So we lead with respect, integrity and leadership. Those are the values that I find important to me and I hope you find important as well. Applied to our work with each other, with our partners and with those we serve, individuals with disabilities and businesses.

So what -- we respect and value each other's input. We lead with integrity by demonstrating fairness, respect, and responsiveness in our actions and communications. And through leadership. And that's kind of an odd one because when I say we lead, there's also a value of leadership.

And I think we have to have that value in place if we are truly to lead and that's that we foster an environment that encourages creative problem solving, collaboration and team work.

And when I talk about leading proactively, we need to take the lead on managing the message, and that's why I'm glad Steve mentioned vision 2020.

I really appreciate CSAVR role and getting the message out there, increasing the program and elevating the discussion for people where disabilities.

There are a number of things going on that we want to build off, within RSA. We want to align with what we do with that message. And particularly on the hundredth anniversary, that gives us a opportunity start talking about employment for people with disabilities.

There are a number of initiatives that are going on within this administration. Jobs are a key thing. We need to make sure that employment for people with disabilities is at every table where that discussion is happening.

In leading proactively we need to be ready for reauthorization. So we don't know if that's actually going to happen. We're hearing mixed messages and if that happens it will be in 2020.

It's an opportune time for us to start being proactive. And looking at what it is we need in terms of the reauthorization and proactively saying here are the changes we would like to see in place.

So an opportunity for us to base that on our experience, but also to base it on input. So the last -- yesterday I spent some time with a leadership forum as well as with the SRC in talking about the issues they have now but also what kinds of things we need to do for the future in preparation.

So we'll be moving forward on the reauthorization process proactively and you'll hear more about that we need to lead as a role model. So Steve mentioned about the partnerships in vision 2020 and what's being done there by CSAVR. We're doing the same thing within RSA.

So obviously under WIOA we have partners that are required. And we have a partners council or partners -- I think it is a council right?

Where we meet regularly and the partners talk about joint guidance and other support that they can provide to state so that we're all on the same page around implementation of WIOA.

So that's going on at the federal level. There are other things I'm starting to do in terms of reaching out to partners within other agencies that have interests in employment for people with disabilities. So ODEP, NACL for example are one we need to look at. More importantly I need to integrate our mission and purpose into their priorities.

So if we can leverage some of their funds and support and attention to the issues we have, we're all going to benefit from that. Individuals with disabilities will benefit. So hopefully over this next year as part of the hundredth anniversary celebration we'll be able to talk about some of those new partnerships that we're creating at the federal level.

I think the other thing we're trying to do is that role model, looking at -- because we all have limited resources, looking at how we increase our own efficiencies and effectiveness so recently we issued guidance -- well not actually guidance, but a decision we made in the maintenance of penalties and the reserve we created by withholding some of the funding and providing that at the end, reserving funds back for potential maintenance if ever penalties.

So what we look at is by eliminating that reserve, increasing our efficiency by eliminating one grand notification, which creates less of a burden for our staff but also for you at the state level, so it's one less notification that you have to process.

So it seems somewhat minor, but I think even making that change was important to show that we're starting to look at all our processes so we can become more efficient and effective and better serve you, as well.

The best example that I have about leading as a role model is the rethink VR process that's been going on, so again I want to give Carol, for, in her role as acting commissioner and being open to that concept and that collaboration with CSAVR and looking at how we could rethink VR and how we could rethink what we're doing at RSA and do things differently in response to the issues of the day.

I'll talk more about that on Wednesday when we have the session, but I think what rethink VR does is it allows us to build our credibility as partners. So by laying out a plan of how we're going to do that, and how we might explore revisions, changes, directions, processes, et cetera, I think is a valuable way for us to start ticking off a list of things and showing you we're serious about those things. You can hold us accountable for those changes.

By doing so I think we'll be more credible as partners as we look to the future. But we really need to address those current issues because I don't think we can do so and start thinking practically unless we take care of the problems of the day so that's going to be our mantra I think over the next couple months.

The other thing, looking back over history and where we are today, in that same document in 1969, it talked about some of the issues as they envisioned what they need to work on in the future. So at the 50th anniversary, 50 years ago, here were the things still critical and important to them:

Healthcare changes, Social Security, the need for partnering with other agencies, and the lack of funds to serve everyone. We could have done that yesterday or today, right? So how do we make sure, if those were the issues of 50 years ago and we're still having the same issues today, how do we lead so we actually start making a difference?

So I don't know that I have the answer to that. But I think what I can share is RSA's commitment to leading that will start to move us in that direction. So I already talked about how we're eliminating the maintenance of -- or penalty reserve. I think we also can start to do some other things.

What we're looking at and I'm going to share some things with you that we have in motion and a lot of things, to credit staff, were initiated even before I came in to the role of commissioner of RSA. So I just get the benefit of being able to share those with you.

So we're starting to examine how we can improve the monitoring process. And that's a part of the rethink VR plan. And while we know compliance is a requirement, what we keep hearing over and over is it needs to have value. That process needs to have value to the states.

So we want to emphasize the support that's available so we can help you improve the quality of programs and services at the state level. So some of the things we're doing is we need to address the back log of the monitoring reports. We've made a commitment to move forward all the 2018 monitoring reports to complete those and get them out by the end of this year. I'm happy to say we're on target to do that.

Staff have been working very hard to get those done and I'm trying not to be a bottle neck because I have to review those and get those moved forward, too, so I appreciate what staff are doing there. For those that were conducted for FY2019, we want to have those completed by the end of March 2020. So that puts us in a position of monitoring for FY2020. We're not going to monitor as many states and we are going to do focus monitoring.

So working with fewer states and right now we're envisions six states, to allow for more timely response in terms of the monitoring reports, but also the support to those programs that need help.

So that's going to be our approach as we move forward. We also are using that process to start examining the monitoring process itself.

So what can we learn? How can we improve the effectiveness of that monitoring so that it has value to you as a state, but also to all states as you look to the direction that we would like to see within those policies, procedures in terms of compliance with rules and regulations, but also the innovative and creative things going on across the country.

So taking what we learn and then also trying to align those findings on how we can make a difference with the technical assistance that we provide, because we want to move all programs, particularly in the hundredth anniversary, to quality management decisions that lead to quality employment.

So we're going to try to rethink or monitoring and our technical assistance that leads us there so that when we look at the program, when others outside look at the program, they see nothing but quality across the country. And that's where we need to be.

So the other thing we're doing is looking at increasing flexibilities. And this is the moment in time that I probably let a lot to believe I was going to have a major announcement. So in some ways I regret that and apologize and it's due to my I'm sure you heard about clearance processes and there are many in place and people review things before they can go public.

So what I didn't -- I think things were pretty much in the works by the time I suggested in Maine that -- a month ago that we would have some type of announcement today.

However, what I didn't anticipate was the president's executive order, 13891 promoting the rule of law from improved agency guidance documents. So what we were issuing was guidance. And that executive order talks about trans partner see in terms of that. And through the administrative procedures act requires that we provide public notice of proposed regulations so allow for public comments on those regulations. We haven't been able to move through that process.

However, those of you that know me know that I'm trying to work on something that allows us to at least give you some information. So there -- there's a statement I can read to you today around preemployment transition services and this also applies to prior approval.

So what I can share with you that the department has explored the flexibilities and reserve funds for preemployment services, and also for prior flexibilities and it's our intent to publish those flexibilities in the near future. What I can share with you is preemployment transition services, it will be soon but not as soon as prior approval.

So prior approval, I was hoping to be able to share something today. We've been working on that and I would say I've really been impressed with the administration and the support that they've provided because even as late as midnight last night, we were still trying to figure out a way that I could share with you what's been going on.

And so I kind of want to check my phone right now and see if I've got approval yet, but, so what I can tell you is prior approval, I'm hoping to have the word on that very, very soon. And knowing -- so I can't tell you a date but I would just suggest that I know this conference doesn't end until noon on Wednesday. So I remain hopeful. So that's the best I can do for you on those two topics and so stay tuned around prior approval.

The other things we're doing and I know timeliness of responses has been an issue, because there have been a lot of things in the works. We have a lot of things staff have been working on, I'll mention a few of those in a second.

So what I'm doing is working with the administration to explore some other options for how do we move forward operational clarifications much quicker and in a more timely fashion because you need to know how to operate your programs.

I needed to know that when I was a state director and I know you're frustrated when you can't get a clear answer around some things. So I believe there's an opportunity, if we can separate out those things which need clarification, which are really instructions from us to you in terms of operating our program and not necessarily new policy, that we can perhaps use a modified clearance process to facilitate and expedite those kind of clarification. That would speed up the process on the other end if we can separate those things out by allowing staff who are somewhat overwhelmed by all the things they need to clear, more time focus on the things we need to implement policy.

The other thing I would like to do is make sure we have a more systematic process in terms of how we issue those clarifications, but then support them. So if we make a change or we provide something out there in terms of clarifying -- give you an example, cancellation fees, and how you can charge or whether you can charge those off and to where, within your budget.

Then we follow that up with a webinar or technical assistance to help you integrate that in into your day-to-day operations. We want to make sure there is a full understanding of that before we move on to another policy change or clarification in another area. So that would be my intent to help you in terms of facilitating because I know as a director, if everything came at once, we were having a difficult time feeling overwhelmed, and also having difficulty helping staff integrate that into day to day decisions.

So we're going to try to control that a little bit. I'm not trying to hold back anything but I think that would help you in terms of facilitating these kind of changes as we go forward.

So the areas that we are working on and what staff have made a lot of progress in and we hope to be, hopefully, really seeing information soon, are around cancellation fees, section 5111 ineligibility, eligibility. And we have a frequently asked question guidance coming out hopefully at some point and we've been working on post employment services and 911 reporting.

So if we can have those things considered clarifications for operational purposes, we hope that we can move those forward fairly quickly.

So the biggest issue that we're facing and what I brought up at the meetings yesterday, is around competitive integrated employment. I think you've all heard that right?

So several of you shared examples in your states of what you're doing and problems you're facing in implementing that, and it was one of the things made very clear to me when I came into the position that my charge was to fix the issue.

I don't know what that fix is. I'm in listening mode right now. And I've been there ten weeks and I know this issue has been waiting for 500 days and I keep telling people when they ask me, how soon are you going to have a decision, what I tell them is I'm going to take whatever time is necessary to make sure

we're making the best decision for people with disabilities. So right now I'm listening to everyone and anyone that wants to talk to me about competitive integrated employment.

I'm trying to be respectful and follow the values that I laid out. We're being open. I'm asking difficult questions and I'm trying to gain a greater understanding of all the issues around competitive integrated employment. So hopefully, I'd like to -- I know there is an urgency around this, but the more clarification we can provide and the sooner the better, we will be doing that.

So that becomes -- that has my attention and is one of my priorities right now. So we're working on that.

What I have gained from the discussions and meetings we've had is there is a common vision. Because every one of the groups that I meet with, regardless of which side of the coin you're on, on this issue, values employment for people with disabilities. They know what it can do to change someone's life. And we've also agreed that it maximizes -- that maximizing the potential of individuals with disabilities is our primary goal as well.

Is regardless of the issue and what we talk about in terms of whether it's competitive or integrated, those are two things which we can settle on, that employment is valuable and that in every case, we want to look to maximize the potential of that individual in that employment opportunity, to maximize your abilities, skills, strengths in performing the functions of that job in create ago career path for that individual.

So if we can have that as the goal we'll figure out how we get there and have a common vision for getting there and that's what I'm working on with those groups now.

So I'm going to go ahead and I'll summarize right now because I -- cutting it a little short because I was hoping I had announcements to make and go into detail about that.

So what I would say is, in summary, you're all part of VR's history. So it's our turn now to take on the challenges that are before us. And they're not much different than what we were 50 years ago. So that means we have to do a better job in terms of our strategies, the activities, the things that we change, that we take on, our partnerships, that we become innovative and creative in how we do this so 50 years from now we're not talking about the same issues any more. That we've resolved those and are dealing with things that, as we plan for the future, that we envisioned and that we're being proactive about addressing throws.

History has seen VR as a catalyst for change and so now we must also lead. We must be the catalysts, and again as I said we need to lead by our values, we need to lead by addressing issues practically and we need to lead by being a role model.

So my charge to you is to lead that change in your state. To take those things back and to integrate that into the things that you're doing through the activities, your strategies, to your practice, to your work with individuals with disabilities and businesses every day so that you, we all, can be a part of making the difference, that sets the stage for the next hundred years.

I'm excited to be a part of this. I'm excited to help you with leading that change for the future and I just want to thank you for that opportunity and thank you for your support. So thank you everyone.

Thank you commissioner. He's open for a few moments to take a few questions, if there are some burning ones. How could I have guessed Dan fryer would be the first one -- could somebody help run -- Robert's going to help run a mic and Dan, we'll be right there. Robert and John it looks like are going to help run mics.

Coming your way, Dan.

I'm not sure I should let him ask this question. But I'm going to anyway. I'm just kidding, Dan.

Good morning commissioner and thank you for what was refreshing and positive and coherent presentation of your vision for the future and I think it's something with which we all can concur. As in my new role as director of services for the blind in New Hampshire, you indicated that you're on a listening tour and I don't know when I'll have an opportunity to engage with you directly, so I want to say this:

From one blind person, from one agency director who has led in two states, integrated competitive employment as it was originally envisioned, had a spirit behind it that suggested that people who are employed deserved to be well paid and part of a broader community that represented full integration into their lives.

Jobs that were significant and had advancement opportunities, and jobs that reflected being part of our broader world.

There may have been omissions or failure to consider unintended consequences, but I'm not sure that's true. What I think is actually true is this:

There have been a misunderstanding of what employment is and I think we have to be candid with ourselves as we evaluate what employment is.

Employment is going to work and doing something constructive for reasonable consideration and pay that allows us to live our lives and participate on broad terms.

I don't want people, a small majority of people to be disadvantaged by a revision of a policy that had that vision in mind. I want us to consider what employment truly is, and if it is not employment, in fact, then we find policies that govern effective engagement with situations that are not employment.

But integrated competitive employment is an intuitive understanding that I think we all have and I urge you in your deliberations to retain the spirit and genuine understanding of what we know integrated competitive employment truly is.

I think it is VR's legacy and I hope you will do your part to make sure that it sustains and flourishes, thank you very much.

Thank you Dan.

>> FEMALE SPEAKER: As you consider the flexibilities, we need to elevate our worker. What elements or principles do you consider part of that process?

>> MARK SCHULTZ: Okay. That's going to take me a minute to think through, so that's -- there isn't much I can actually disclose at this point until we are able to publish that and go public with the information. So I mean we've considered, I've had input from many people. As a director I understand the issues I had in implementing both services so I'm trying to resolve things that I knew were problems for me that would help facilitate services to people and students about disabilities, so that's all I can share with you right now.

So I wanted to share two initiatives that we're doing in Alaska to bring it to the national level. One has to do with youth exiting the foster care system. Within the department of labor where we reside, the commissioner and irregular working to address that by partnering with the office of children services to do a better job with all of our existing funding within the state to address that. I think that it's fair to say that many of them are exiting to couches, going from one couch to another.

So at-risk youth exiting the foster care system, many of them have disabilities, cognitive or whatever, so I want to just put that out there, at the national level.

Second is our senior population. We're an aging state, Alaska, baby boomer state. Quite frankly, I think as a country we're a baby-boomer country.

So the value of senior employment, so with advancing states which is another national organization, we want to address the value of senior employment. Seniors are living longer. They're healthy. They either

want to work so they have that social engagement or they have to work because they haven't saved enough for retirement.

The old saying I've heard is I became poor the day I retired. So many of those seniors do have some form of disability. So the senior community employment program is, I think, an area that we need to attend to. So I just put that out there for you within RSA to be thinking about that.

The assistant secretary for ACL, Lance Robertson and I have been talking about that. So in your circle think of this conversation.

>> MARK SCHULTZ: Thank you. I think what we're going to work with is identifying those things that are going on across the country because I need those examples when I talk to others, particularly at the federal level about the partnerships we have with the states, so that will help me. So thank you.

>> MALE SPEAKER: Joe Xavier, California, thank you for being here and again congratulations on your employment. We couldn't be more pleased to have you here.

As you get into the work that's before you and you've talked about partnerships and I know how you personally believe in them, one thing that I would like for you to take into account is that the partnerships with the state should not just be I bake the cookie, it's oatmeal raisin, I hope you like it cause we can't do anything else.

Let's have a conversation beforehand. Should we be baking cookies or brownies or something else and if we do, what might that look like? I think rethink is a great first step in that conversation but it is one step and there are many other pieces, whether it's clarifying information, setting policy, developing programming, whatever have you, just ask you to bring the states in to up front into that meaningful conversation where we can help shape, educate and then form that effort.

>> MARK SCHULTZ: Joe I would just like to say I think that's what's great about the whole rethink VR process. That's been a very collaborative process as it's moved forward and I think that's a model for what we do in the future, as well.

One more question? Anybody?

>> MARK SCHULTZ: Okay. Thank you -- oh, one more.

>> STEVE WOODERSON: Almost. One more, hang in there.

>> FEMALE SPEAKER: I can't let you get away. Just first of all congratulations. We are really thrilled to have you as our commissioner.

In your role also as acting assistant secretary, are you looking at any opportunities to bring the VR program and special ed together because I know you're aware that one of the things that we really need to strengthen is that partnership, so I know you can't share the details of the pre-ETs flexibility, but I think that's a different part of it, developing that strong relationship.

>> MARK SCHULTZ: So I guess if you want to talk to Lindy, she can share with you some of the things that happened in Nebraska.

As deputy commissioner I had several programs within my area. One was special education, career and adult education and some of the federal title programs which really deal with the at-risk populations. One of my goals was bringing them together and talk about how we can collaborate effectively across those programs, to not duplicate our services and make sure we were maximizing the opportunities for individuals across all those programs.

I'm going to try to do the same thing at the federal level. So this provides a unique opportunity for me to get that message there. One of the things that I feel very strongly about is the discussion about employment needs to happen very early. And when I say very early, it's talking about employment and helping parents understand that when a child is born with a disability, they should have an expectation that they're going to have the same opportunities and experiences that any child would have, as they grow up, so that --

And I have to say, I haven't seen shared that message with OSEP yet, I've only been in the job seven -- not even that. I've been in the office one week while I was acting and I think for the first half of that, most of the people were still getting used to that idea.

But we'll start to have those kind of discussions and look for the opportunities we can to improve and increase collaboration between the programs.

>> FEMALE SPEAKER: Thank you.

>> MARK SCHULTZ: Thank you all.

>> STEVE WOODERSON: It's been said how excited we are for you to be in your role and the passion and commitment you have and being the champ I don't know for the VR program.

I think as exciting as anything is to hear your vision, as it literally relates to one word and that's leadership. Lead on VR, and the passion that's there and the enthusiasm that we have in our commissioner and looking forward to maximizing the time that you have in your role and seeing change.

A couple words I heard were very soon and not as soon. But we're looking forward for something soon, how's that? So next on the agenda, first of all, will the new directors that were identified a few moments ago, would you stand or otherwise be recognized so we can see you once again?

Those that are new directors once again, thank you very very much. All right.

Dog these people or shake their hands and welcome them so we assure during the break we've acknowledged who you are.

So our next activity is a break and that will go until 9:50 or so. Be back here in this room, seated and ready to rock and roll for our second general session highlighting business partnerships right here at ten o'clock in the morning.

Have a good break. We'll see you in a few moments. Thank You.