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nTIDE‑Lunch & Learn Webcast

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>> Hello and welcome everybody to national trends in disability employment.

>> Or nTIDE Lunch & Learn.

>> Just a few house keeping items before we begin.

>> This webinar is being recorded.

>> We will post an archive of each webinar each month at our website.

>> This site will also provide copies of the presentations, the speaker's buoys, full transcripts and other valuable resources.

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>> Thanks for joining us.

>> Enjoy today's webinar!

>> ANDREW HOUTENVILLE: This is Andrew Houtenville from the University of New Hampshire welcome to nTIDE Lunch & Learn. Just a couple of tips, actually, there's a new tip. If you have any friends that are interested in this topic, call them now, we'll have a great episode today. E‑mail your friends, texture friends, instant message your friends. Call them, whatever you can. I really think we'll have a great session today. If not, tell them about the session later and they can view a recording. The first tip for Zoom is, you can change your sounds, make sure you have your speakers set right, go to the audio settings and select the speaker system that's being used. If you have a head set, sometimes it resets to a different setting. You also can look at the closed captioning, you can see subtitles or even view the full transcript if you click on the closed caption button. Your screen may look different, may be all different places, but there's a closed caption button on your screen hopefully. A little bit about nTIDE, it occurs at noon eastern time of the first Friday of every month with the release of the nTIDE report. This morning Kessler Foundation released the report, we'll be going over those findings this afternoon.

This is a joint effort of Kessler Foundation, University of New Hampshire and the university centers on disabilities. The first part, we'll go through the numbers, John O'Neill and I will go through the numbers, Denise will provide updates around news related to disability and employment.

We have a guest speaker, we actually have two guest speakers today. Elaine Katz from Kessler Foundation, Elaine has subbed in for John from time to time, and we also have Andy Imperato from the California Disability Rights Center.

We will have more of a round table discussion today. Because it is a big moment, we are now have one year data post the big decline during COVID. The COVID recession. So we kind of have a one year in review, where do we stand. We thought it was time to bring in the heavy hitters, Elaine and Andy, to give us some thoughts about what occurred during the pandemic, what is  ‑‑ we have to look forward in the future. Highly recommend you call your friends and bring them on board.

All right, John, I'll turn it over to you.

>> JOHN O'NEILL: Thank you, Andrew, good day, everybody. As many of you know, the nTIDE report is monthly, as Andrew mentioned, it's a press release with an infographic, we have new infographics that are better than we had before. And it's ‑‑ it's all about the latest employment statistics.

The data is from the jobs report, which is released by the Bureau of Labor Statistics on the first Friday of each month.

Next slide, please.

>> ANDREW HOUTENVILLE: Oops.

>> JOHN O'NEILL: The source of the data is the current population survey, which is the ‑‑ as we all know, it's the official source for the unemployment rate, which the media makes so much of. We don't focus on the unemployment rate because it can go up or down for different reasons. We focus primarily on the employment to population ratio, and also the participation rate, the employment participation rate. The data is on civilians ages 16 to 64 who are not living in institutions. It's been available since 2008 onward, when the Census Bureau added the ‑‑ which is not so new now, but at that time it was new, the six disability questions to the National surveys.

Prior to that, there was really only one disability question, it was a work disability question for the most part. The data is not seasonally adjusted, which is why we compare it to the same month last year.

Now, since COVID, we have adjusted our reporting to comparing month to month. And the reason for that is we needed to see the immediate changes in employment as we move from month to month through the COVID process. It will be interesting, I think, to begin to compare year to year, which we very well may start to do next year ‑‑ next month, I should say, in addition to the month to month change, but that's it, Andrew, back to you.

>> ANDREW HOUTENVILLE: All right, thank you, John.

Let's see. So the numbers, just a little hint, before I go ‑‑ before I get into the numbers.

Our guest speaker, Andy, was heavily involved in the creation of the questions that were included in the C.P.S. and the other data sources, the U.S. part years and years ago, well before 2008, back to the 1950s, I think, Andy and Chris were part of an effort to get the BLS to add calculated ability disability statistics. Without that work, without that executive ‑‑ that executive order, 13078, we wouldn't have these data and Andy was a big part of getting that work started.

All right. So we'll look at the employment to population ratio. This is the percentage of people who are working. And this is actually not a lot ‑‑ it's not full‑time, are they working in the past week. It's usually the second week in the moment that the survey is fielded.

We are going to show up until last month, this is March 2020. And so we see way back to the great recession, the 2008, September 2008 is really at the ‑‑ when the great recession started to hit employment. Although there was some big declines in employment in February, 2008 and August 2008, you can still see when this data series starts that there's a big decline.

And we see the great recession hit. Decline for people with and without disabilities, people without disabilities, you can think about this huge flat period or even a declining period during the early 2010s and we didn't start seeing a pickup until 2016 when the economy started to go into full employment, and you start to hear about the economy heating up. That's when we started to see this gap narrow. Particularly in 2016 and 2017, we see this green line start to approach the blue line, although there's still substantially far apart. And by the time we come to march of last year, just before COVID, the lockdowns, COVID started coming into the U.S. in January, February, and then we had the National lockdown, really starting at this period, there was some softening here perhaps due to international trade issues, there's some softening for people without disabilities. Here's where we were before COVID. Then we see the massive decline after COVID. You see is the enormous decline. For people with disabilities, it wasn't as far down as the great recession bottom, but still percentage‑wise, not percentage‑point wise, percentage‑wise, this was a 17 percentage point jump up 17 percentage change, and this is a 14 percent change.

So percentage point‑wise, people without disabilities were larger, but overall percentage‑wise, people with disabilities were hit harder by the pandemic. We start seeing in May, so this is the lockdown still thriving in many states, and ‑‑ but we are starting to get used to getting protective equipment out, plexiglass, companies back online. So we see May a jump, and then in June, we still see another big jump, particularly for people without disabilities.

And I'm going to run through these. So all the way say to October ‑‑ through the summer and early fall, we see kind of a slow march up for people with disabilities. A slow march up for people without disabilities, people with disabilities start to vacillate in the summer and early fall.

Then we see October, November, we start seeing a line for people without stabilities. This is kind of the ‑‑ without disabilities, this is the time period of the holidays, Super bowl, this is really ‑‑ California in particular was hit hard during this time, started to lock certain things down, and so we see a slowdown and decline of the COVID recovery with the ‑‑ I guess at that point, it was the third jump, the third ‑‑ the third spike in cases.

Then we start seeing a bit of recovery for people with and without disabilities in March, the new data, April is a positive month. For people with disabilities, we have two positive months going on. For people without disabilities, there are four positive months. This is a really good sign for the economy.

Now, there were some ‑‑ in the news this morning, when Elaine and John and Carol Ann at Kessler went through the news, there was some tempering of the news by saying it didn't really meet expectations, they were expecting a lot more jobs added. That being what it was, it was still positive, which is better than a negative.

Let's do some comparisons, though. So this is April. Let's bring in April. So this ‑‑ we are now a year from the lockdown for people with disabilities. We were down to 26.3, now up to 30.7 for people without disabilities, they were at 36‑point ‑‑ 63.2 to 79 ‑‑ 71.9. So this jump for both people with and without disabilities is positive, right? As the economy starts to recover and we learn to ‑‑ how to handle social distancing, masking, plexiglass, all that stuff is in place. So it's positive.

In terms of percentage‑wise, it's ‑‑ people with disabilities are a bit behind people without disabilities in this recovery. So this is the percentage change. So 26.3, as a percentage of 30.2. So people with disabilities have not recovered as much as people without disabilities. People without disabilities, there was a 17.5 percent jump from the bottom of the recession ‑‑ of the COVID recession. If we want to take a look at March. So this is kind of like, well, how are we doing, have we gotten back to where we were before? No. We have not. So in march of 2020, compared to April, this should be 21, sorry, 21, 21. So April 21, we still haven't come to a full recovery. Same for people without disabilities. There hasn't been a return to full recovery. Percentage‑wise, this gap is 17‑point ‑‑ sorry, 4.7 percent difference from this gap, so a decline, still not recovered. For people with disabilities, it's a little closer to being recovered. 2.2 percentage ‑‑ 2.2 percent difference. If you look at this March jump. So there was this March decline. If we looked at that gap, it would be 3.9 percent.

But still, a better than ‑‑ closer to the preCOVID than this mark at minus 4.7.

One thing to notice is that we are still not back, and we never really got back to the post ‑‑ to the ‑‑ just rate at the beginning of the great recession. We have not fully recovered, people without disabilities fully recovered in 2017, 2018, you may say well, were we in the great recession. Recessions are based off of economic growth. So gross domestic product. It takes employment a lot longer to recover than it did economic growth. Economic growth recovered back in 2010. With the great recession.

But employment takes a lot longer to recover. Than economic growth.

So recession are defined in terms of economic growth. All right.

So that's what I've got. We are going to come back to this slide later on when we bring in the bring in Elaine and Andy. I'll turn it over to Denise.

>> DENISE ROZELL: Next slide, Andrew. We always start with a federal policy update. A bunch of this is exactly the same as what I showed you last month. I'll update a little bit. I just want you to know, these are the things going on in Washington right now.

So the American jobs plan, that is what you normally hear in your news as the infrastructure bill, if you want to ‑‑ the infrastructure bill. It's in the house and the Senate, it's ‑‑ this is the Biden plan, it has gone to the house and Senate, they are working on what they can do. There's a Republican alternative, this one is trillions of dollars, the Republican alternative is 5 or 600 billion ‑‑ yeah, billion. So the point is, they're trying to do some talking. The president seems to want at least have the conversations to see if they can find a bipartisan way forward. If he can't, my guess is it will move forward in the house, because there is a majority of Democrats in the house, and it will move forward in the Senate probably through budget reconciliation, but the things that are in there that are of importance for people with disabilities. The big top items we talked about, the permanent money follows the person, spousal impoverishment issues made permanent or nonspousal impoverishment issues, the 4man billion dollars for HCBS, we talked some about that last month. It is a huge increase, and it's getting ‑‑ apparently I was hearing this morning, at least some of the polls we are seeing,‑polling better even than the roads and bridges money, which is really interesting. The ‑‑ it would do away with minimum wage certificates under 14c and provide supports to the states. We had a long conversation about that with you guys about what that might look like, does the money go tow states or providers, does it follow the people, what does that mean? But that's all in there, at least in conversation and negotiation at this point. We hope it stays there. We are working hard to make sure it stays there.

In terms of work force development, again, there were ‑‑ you will probably remember, because we talked about it last time a little bit. Senators Murray and Burr requested comments committee where the lead Democrat and Republican, the lead person asked for comments from the community about what should be in work force development if we are moving forward on a bill. All of those comments were sent in and they are all ‑‑ move further from her mouth. I can do that. Too loud.

So there is ‑‑ those comments are all sent in, they are reviewing all of those and trying to figure out what they're going to do. What they're going to look at in terms of work force on the Senate side. The house is moving forward, moving forward on the WIOA bill. Passed their house apprenticeship bill. We'll see what goes in there. The new news for this month, the Biden administration and the president put out an executive order, which is for federal contractors would receive mine ‑‑ have to pay minimum wage, not that far down, everybody is telling me how to adjust my mic. It's hysterical. In the chat. Okay. There's an executive order that came out that requires federal contractors to pay $15 minimum wage. It also includes in that executive order that is not exempted for people on 14c. In other words, people on 14c, or anyone who holds ‑‑ money on 14c, working for a federal contractor, has to be paid minimum wage, that's $15 minimum wage, that's a big deal too. That's another movement away from 14c, I want you to know it's out there. The conversation is about appropriations are continuing. I don't know that I have much to update there. If you're interested in appropriations, now is the time to be talking to your members, originally we thought they were going to do with regular order. Meaning two go, they'd pass each appropriations bill and go through each house ‑‑ Senate and the house and regular order, the way it's supposed to be, the more they push back and push back on the timing of it, the less likely that's going to happen and the more likely we'll see another continuing resolution. Don't know yet. They are still saying they'll do regular order. Number of things I want you to be aware of, that are out ‑‑ that are out this month, back one, Andrew. There's a brand new g GAO report on subminimum wage. It came out March of 2021. The reason to know this, this report is what members of Congress will be looking at. GAO carries that kind of weight. They did a bunch of interviews with people in the field asking their concerns, what the barriers are, factors influencing transition of people out of 14C into competitive integrated employment. I'm not sure I saw any surprises there, I think it's important to know it is there, because as you're talking to members, this is what they're going to be looking at. It raised employees concerns about earning higher wages and what that does to benefits, it raised issues from the employer's side, you know, what if CIE costs more, will they continue to want to provide 14c. The state resource certainly there was conversation about one of the barriers being you needed additional resources to be able to shift a provider from 14c CIE. I'm not sure I saw anything that was a surprise, but next slide. I want you to have it. Partnership for inclusive apprenticeship has launched their website now. I've been getting e‑mails promise there, sponsored by ODEP at the Department of Labor, and the ‑‑ working with employers and apprenticeship, that's what that is called. To expand inclusive apprenticeship programs, it's a big focus on apprenticeship within and inclusive apprenticeship. That will be a big deal too. We are seeing some legislation go, move along, and I wouldn't be at all surprised if we see that one finalized this year, house and Senate, and they have a new thing on designing inclusive apprenticeship, a guide for recruiting and training apprentices with disability. It addresses recruiting, it addresses inclusive classroom instruction, which is one of the issues, it addresses designing inclusive on the job training. So I thought this was a nice launch for them, and then additionally, you can sign up for a newsletter from them and it gave you a link. We'll definitely be talking more about apprenticeships this year, I think.

Next slide, Andrew. The ‑‑ disability inclusive telework. This is from SEED before, it is a project funded out of ODEP also, this is what the council of state governments, another piece they're done, and it's a really nice website, including a microsite with interactive maps, you can see what inclusive telework in states looks like, what the legislation looks like, what's allowed and not. If there's guidance, a webinar that talks about disability inclusion and government telework programs. Telepolicies, a new blog, they put up. The SEED program, even National Governor's Association all have a bunch of state going on right now on disability employment. If you're going to be working in your state, this is stuff state legislators and policy makers look for. They look to these organizations. To the extent you can share something that came from them with your state policy makers as you try to make part of what we're talking about in the panel, making big change, if you're going to be making big change to bring stuff from these organizations carries a lot of weight. Next one, Andrew.

So let's see. Neurodiversity in the workplace, one from our friends at EARN and another one from PEAT. Both out of it the Department of Labor on neurodiversity in the workplace. It talks about a whole bunch of things, talks about accommodations, but I thought it was interesting that the neurodiversity, they talk about the benefit of it, I like the fact that people are coming at it from that direction because, of course, there are business benefits and business benefits to hiring people with disabilities. At the targeted to people with neurodiversity, there's a podcast PEAT came out with. Those links are here, somebody was asking for links in the chat box, and first of all, these slides are always available afterwards and the links are included in those, we can go back in and I can add some links later, as people are talking later. Next one, Andrew, watching my time. Next one. Slide. There you go. This is a great article. Disability legislation and CRPD. This looks ‑‑ we can talk about CRPD, which the U.S. didn't sign own to, convention on the rights of people with disabilities. This looks ‑‑ literally built a global diabetes. They, database, they ‑‑ database, they couldn't find any place where they prohibiting employment discrimination and built a global database to look at that and looked at all 9 ‑‑ all 193 U.N. member states, and came up with findings, discussed progress and barriers, their comment was there's some progress, but always some clear gaps we need to address. But I just gave you some of the numbers, 62 percent of countries broadly prohibit disability‑based employment, but far fewer indirect discrimination or harassment. Just over the cups guarantee reasonable accommodations, just over half do not pay ‑‑ do not prohibit pay discrimination. But I thought this was great, and it's the first time I've seen anything this comprehensive on employment discrimination internationally. Okay. Next one, Andrew.

Disability. This is incarceration. I've had a number of questions from folks lately beginning to really focus on disability and folks with disabilities who are incarcerated or coming out of incarceration, ex‑offenders, this was was interesting, in criminal justice policy review, looking at VR, in connection with people with disabilities. It looks at RSA data. It's 30,000 inmates, it seemed like a fair sample to me, not a surprise we are seeing inmates with cognitive and physical disabilities with the lowest utilization of vr services, vocational services, but anyway, implications, I thought it was interesting, we are seeing more conversation about this and I'm getting more calls from people wanting to talk about the intersectionallity here. I was excited to see this one. Next one, Andrew. I think I have a couple of announcement things. Yeah, couple of announcement things, this one is an all day meeting from Social Security administration looking at their demos that they have done over the past number of years, really, and 30 researchers, maybe some of you are going to be included in this, on disability and social policy, it's free, talking about what's worked, what hasn't in terms of disability, employment, demo projects from SSA and where are we and what might be we be able to do better. That's a good one. Next one is a webinar, something like that. This one, shame on me, Center for Innovative training in vocational rehabilitation at George Washington university, these are trainings, prerecorded, three, there were three of them in a recent newsletter that I saw, all of them seemed really interesting to the conversations we have. I just gave you links. Go search on the Center for Innovative training, they have other trainings as well, I thought it was great it was free and provided on topics we talk about. That was the reason that was there. The next one the webinar and then I think I'm good. Yeah, the webinar. This is from Jan, the job accommodation network, our friends from PEAT. This one is accessibility and accommodations, how employers and HR professionals can prepare for emerging tech in the workplace, I've done a number of slides over the last several months certainly, certainly during COVID, around AI and XR and what will technology change for people with disabilities in the workplace. This was another example of that. I think JAN tends to be very practical. I thought from a practical standpoint, this might be interesting to people to see what kind of technology they are talking about, what they see coming, and there's a person from Microsoft research, that always makes it really interesting as well. I think that's my last one, Andrew. Let's see, in which case, I'll toss it back to you.

>> ANDREW HOUTENVILLE: Okay. It's back to me. All right, so we are going to talk about the one‑year into the COVID pandemic, and so we are going to have a conversation with reflections on that one year and also what we can think about in terms of the future. I'm glad to introduce Andy Imparato and Elaine Katz from Kessler Foundation. Andy is a national leader in disability employment policy and has many years of working with leading organization, CEO of the American Association of People with Disabilities for years and also the leader of the ‑‑ Denise's group, the association of university centers of excellence on stability, and he also spends time within ‑‑ Professor Harkin, Senator Harkin's office. He's now at the disability rights California, and he is leading the way in a leading state. I'm also happy to have Elaine Katz with us, from Kessler Foundation. Elaine leads their grant‑giving work in the area of employment and disability, and reach ‑‑ offers grants and provides grants to organizations doing cutting edge ‑‑ cutting edge demonstration programs, and it's kind of like an incubator for new ideas, particularly in the area of social innovation. So I'm happy to have Elaine here. She's led our efforts to conduct surveys with the Kessler Foundation survey series which looked at recent college graduates, workers with disabilities and employers, supervisors.

So if you're not familiar with that work, I highly recommend looking into those surveys.

All right. So I'm going to turn it over to Andy, and I think what we'll do is we'll return to the big graph that's kind of informing our discussion today. Again, that should be April 2021. So take it away, Andy.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: Thank you, Andrew, and it's great to be back with so many good friends who I've known and worked with for years on this topic. So just quickly, some of the hats that I wear for the discussion today, as Andrew mentions, I am the Executive Director at Disability Rights California, a statewide legal services organization, federally funded, for people with all types of disabilities in California. We have 290 staff, about 100 lawyers, 26 offices across the state, so it's a big, big legal services operation, and I've been the AD here for about 15 months. I also have lived experience with bipolar disorder which I've been open about throughout my career and since may is mental health month, I thought I would put that in. I'm grateful that I've worked in a lot of environments that are embracing and supportive of me as somebody with lived experience and Disability Rights California has given me a very warm welcome in a challenging 15 months with the pandemic, the wildfires we have here in California and all the challenges that we face as a state.

In February, I was appointed by president Biden to the health equity task force. Tow COVID‑19 task force, which is making recommendations to the president on ways to have more equity in the wake of the pandemic and ways to be more prepared for the next pandemic. We have been focusing our monthly meetings on different topics. The first meeting was on data, so Andrew would have enjoyed it. As would everybody, I think, on this webinar.

The second meeting was on vaccine prioritization and deployment, and the third meeting, which we just had last Friday was on mental health. So there's a lot of good recommendations that we voted on as interim recommendations to try to promote equity and mental health. I had a chance to ask our expert presenters about employment as a social determinant of mental health and the link between mental health and employment, and they all felt there was a very strong link, and it was an important part of talking about mental health equity and health equity. I just put that out there as a frame that we don't always talk about or use when we talk about disability employment, but employment, housing, so many other things, education, often have big impacts on people's health and well‑being. So it's another reason to pay attention to employment as it tends to produce better health outcomes for people who are employed.

So, you know, I just want to briefly touch on some opportunities that I see in this moment, and this is coming from my perspective, I came to Washington in 1993 to work if Senator Harkin and left in 2020 to work for Disability Rights California. I feel like there is an opportunity right now that's not like any opportunity that I experienced during my 26 years in Washington.

It's a combination of a White House that has laid out a vision for the country to build back better and is explicitly saying we don't want to get back to the economy that we had before COVID, but we want to center equity, and they've created a leadership position on the domestic policy council that is focused on equity that is the person in that role is Kathryn layman who has a wonderful history of integrating disability into her work as the chair of the U.S. commission on civil rights and the assistant secretary for civil rights at the U.S. Department of Education, and then Kathryn has worked for her Kim, who was the disability policy director for senator Murray. So to me, that combination of the president with a strong track record on disability, calling on us to build back better, and then two key staff in the domestic policy council who have long histories of leadership, on disability employment and equity, and civil rights, it gives me a lot of hope that this administration is going to make sure that disability is part of the conversations around building back better. If you look at the executive order that the president signed when he created our health equity task force, it specifically called out that disability needs to be talked about as part of the equity conversation.

So my hope is that leadership, at the executive branch level, coupled with an app tight in Congress ‑‑ an appetite in Congress to do bigger, harder things than they've done in recent memory. When I think back to times when we had democratic control of the White House, house and Senate, when bill Clinton came into office, he was trying to rebrand the democratic party as more of a centrist or moderate party. I think when Obama came in, he was trying to get through the economic downturn Andrew showed us the slides for and trying to do it in a way that was bipartisan and ended up having ‑‑ he felt he had to make compromises to get bipartisan votes that made some of the efforts around recovery take longer to bear fruit than they might have if we had been more ambitious.

So all of that to say, I'm not trying to criticize President Clinton or president Obama, we are in a political moment in the United States and globally, where we are having a conversation about equity around structural drivers, of discrimination, and we are trying to do big, hard things that can help reposition the government as being a robust partner to folks who are serious about equity.

To the extent we can have disability employment as part of that conversation, and have all of the intersectional issues for people of color with disabilities, women with disabilities, people with different kinds of disabilities, be part of that conversation, it feels like a once in a generation opportunity for us to actually start to really close the labor force participation gaps between people with and without disabilities. I also just want to mention, Senator Harkin, in his retirement is doing something once a year where we have an international disability employment Summit, it was virtual in December, the Kessler Foundation has been a partner with that from the beginning and I want to acknowledge Elaine Katz and the foundation for their support of those events. I think what Senator Harkin is taking away from these events, we've done four of them now ‑‑ we have done five, but he's taken away that the whole global business community is at a tipping point in how they think about disability employment and think about disability as part of diversity both in terms of their customer, the market, and also in terms of their own employees. And I'm just really inspired by Caroline Casey and her work at the valuable 500, I don't know if she's been on a nTIDE, it would be good to get her for one. She has engage CEO's and has met her goal of 500 CEO's of companies that have 1,000 employees or more, to have a conversation about disability inclusion at the board level.

Now that she has this network of CEO's, including many in the United States, it's definitely a global network, my hope is that higher level folks are going to be having conversations about what is our disability strategy, how are we going to measure success. You know, who do we benchmark ourselves against, and I think there's an opportunity for us to work with those folks in the business community, some of whom are looking at this issue hard for the first time to try to accelerate progress on disability employment. I will stop there, I look forward to the Q&A, and happy to turn it over to Elaine Katz ‑‑ to Elaine Katz.

>> ELAINE KATZ: Okay. Hopefully my video is showing. Thank you, Andy, thank you, everyone, it's great to be here today. It's great to Andy started with positive news, because I'm going to have a positive take on this too. We all know that the pandemic was really, really brutal for individuals with disabilities, we have always seen the last hired is the first hired, we know of the health disparities, what are the opportunities for change that the pandemic has brought along or hastened, so we have seen a lot of organizations that were able to pivot very quickly, they had a diverse culture to begin with, perhaps hiring people with disabilities, and they are able to respond to the crisis. We saw a number of trends in the employment area, saw more flexibility, hybrid working, working from home now is not an accommodation, it tends to be the former. Employers know that people can work from home.

We see skill‑based hiring, looking at what you can do, rather than perhaps what your education is, especially in the tech fields. We have seen skill‑based hiring interviews. There's been less concern about fit. Employers have had to adopt to a whole new culture. So having diversity, having different people employed, they're a little more open to chance, and as Andy's also said, we have a valuable 500 who have seen worldwide interest in diversity. Of course, tech tools, tech tools have leveled the playing field. We have seen working at home, companies helping employees set up home‑based work. There's now a telecom muting, it's not for everybody, but tech tools have a hastened employment for people with disabilities. The real question is, through our grant‑making, we work with a lot of on the ground agencies, what are organizations that work to place people with disabilities going to do, how have they taken advantage of the pandemic and, yes, there are advantages, we all know the downside, there was an advantage, everybody had to halt what they're doing, they had to relook how they think about service delivery. For example, now they'll do hybrid, are they going to concentrate on more fee for service or looking at maybe ‑‑ looking at private pay. This has become a perfect opportunity for organizations who serve people with disabilities to really pivot, look at their service delivery, hone their staffs and training, and it really is essential because last year, in our grant‑making, did a lot locally in New Jersey, we found nonprofits lacked technology, and everybody thinks that lacks technology for the gap we see between people with and without disabilities. We bought a lot of technology for people they serve, the gap was at these agencies, staff of organizations that served disabilities, didn't have the right technology. Didn't know how to go online. There was a lot of training done in the field of that.

Now everybody has been brought up to speed, and it's a question of leadership, looking at what are you going to take advantage of. The culture of work, the way we knew it, has complete changed with COVID. I guess I'll behind at this is an opportunity to contemplate and think about how to move forward and how to Ben fight people with disability ‑‑ benefit people with disabilities and place them in employment. Back to you, Andrew.

>> ANDREW HOUTENVILLE: Thank you, Elaine, I'm going to stay on this, let's stop sharing so people can come on, John and Andy and Denise, if you could all come back on. The viewers can see all of us, John's hiding again, John, you're back on. And so we are just going to have a bit of a round table for the next 15 minutes, and feel free, we'll pay attention to the Q&A part of the session, as well. So, you know, when I look at that chart, and I see the recovery, you know, and I ‑‑ I have some other information that isn't yet publishable, that it's really people with severe disabilities we are talking about, okay. There's some recent data on vaccinations, right, and people with disabilities are catching up, we're just about to release some statistics on vaccinations among people with severe disabilities, and there was a light ‑‑ it improved. The gap between people with and without disabilities was improving. There's still a large number of people with disabilities not getting vaccinated. I'm not sure if this is what is driving the employment numbers we are seeing, people not feeling safe to go back into the workplace, not feeling safer about the vaccine and not feeling safe about going back into the workplace. I think there's a lot to do within the context of COVID itself and how we are doing relative to where we are before the pandemic.

I am hopeful that with a lot of the work from home strategies that are being employed that we have a more flexible workplace and it provides more opportunities in general. There is work being done out of ODEP looking at data to ‑‑ looking at data related to occupation and industries, and industries where people ‑‑ occupations where people can work from home. I want to be sure that people with disabilities are afforded every opportunity for those new types of jobs, those new type of work arrangements and that it opens opportunities rather than lessens them. I think the service delivery and retooling service delivery that Elaine is talking about could play into that. As service organizations realize that there are these new opportunities in the way people organize, that it could be better, it could be a way of working around the 14c issues, with kind of sheltered work type environments, where it could be fragmented more. Those kinds of assembly areas and things could be social distancing has had to come in and force them to have more space and different production processes, and so I'm very hopeful for the future, and as an economist, I see the tax breaks that the previous administration put in, the spending that is being done in terms of the recovery, and also the infrastructure, all of that spending is very positive for the economy as a whole. There's a different view, one is tax cut, one is spending, deficit spending. They're really the same, from a large macro‑ perspective, very large macro‑ perspective, they're very similar. Just about investment, it's about investment in the future. As I see these billions and trillions of dollars going out, I'm hoping that people with disabilities are able to ‑‑ that spending will open opportunities for people with disabilities. With a mine.

>> ELAINE KATZ: I want to add on that, what we have seen locally here, a lot of families don't want their loved ones still going out to work yet, there's still a question of safety in the workplace that's holding people back. The other issue we have seen is there was such job loss of people who held jobs for a long time among people with disabilities that agencies are seeing skill loss, and a reluctance to get back into the workplace of jobs that they held previously. So I think ‑‑ those are ‑‑ things that agencies are dealing with right now and grappling with and overcoming, besides the fact that many are opening more slowly because of like in New Jersey, you couldn't have groups together until recently and the service has dropped off. The question is how are you getting these clients back that are at home with their family. A lot of clients went home, consumers went home. The families don't want to release them back into independence. It's becoming this push/pull when you're trying to get people back to work.

>> ANDREW HOUTENVILLE: That was a big finding in our first report with Kessler, that national disabilities survey was family members and family concerns are frequently a barrier.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: Andrew, one thing I forgot to mention, my organization is hosting a building back better for diversity, equity and inclusion virtual Summit in a couple of weeks, and we've got the governor of California speaking, we have our new senator, Alex Padilla speaking, Kim from the White House and Alex Barkoff speaking. I guess one of the things I am hoping will happen around this event is that we won't ‑‑ I think it's a really interesting question how the government frames the issue. When we talk about police violence, I don't know a lot of government leaders that are trying to pretend like we don't have a problem, but I feel like when we talk about labor force participation rates for people with disabilities, there's a tendency for incumbents in government to talk about all the great things that we are doing and to miss the gap that your slides pointed to and miss the urgency around that gap. So I'm just hoping, you know, we have a new leader coming into ODEP, she's speaking at our summit, been nominated, but I'm hoping ODEP stops bragging about all the great stuff ODEP does and starts talking about how horrible this gap is and we as a country need to do something about it. I know there's a tendency to brag about what we do. I think we need to common ground this unacceptable and it's possible to do much better, it requires us to do things we have never done before. Go ahead.

>> ANDREW HOUTENVILLE: So there's a very basic principle in economics that discrimination is counterproductive, and is a huge loss to the economy overall in terms of loss not only of people not working, but also loss of innovation, loss of ideas, right.

The thing I really like about the shift from a diversity framework to an equity and a justice framework is where that justice is like, man, it's just not good enough. Having so many people not working, not even working one hour, right, this is a really low threshold, this 30 percent, is that it's a justice issue, and that it's economically irrational, pure discrimination is irrational, right, and it is a huge loss to innovation. I think that the story could be told that it's much more ‑‑ you ‑‑ I understand the desire to say good things and have positive things to say, but also it's like missed opportunity and missed innovation because people who do things differently bring new things to the firm. That's what I like about the equity, okay, we have differences, right, we can ‑‑ we can explore those differences, we can honor those differences, but we have to tolerate those differences, and we can't act on those in negative ways, you know, and it's like we could be more innovative by bringing in different types of people.

>> ELAINE KATZ: Even Harvard business review has had articles about creativity in diverse teams. There's a lot of information out there right now that the more diverse teams you are. The problem is when you go to recruit and hire, if you're only recruiting and hiring through your own networks, and most people get jobs through networks, and your network is not equitable, diverse, whatever you want to put a label on it, you won't be finding those candidates who can add value to a job, who you may not have considered otherwise, now that we are in a tight labor market, sometimes people with disabilities are still falling to the bottom where before the pandemic, the level of engagement in employment was so high in this country, they were looking to people with disabilities. And people who were formerly incarcerated as viable populations to fill positions.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: Denise, were you going to say something? You're good.

>> ANDREW HOUTENVILLE: Just like what you're hearing.

>> DENISE ROZELL: I to. The point is to look at the ‑‑ the point is to look at the opportunity. I'm the policy geek, I think there's an opportunity here with this new administration, with the conversations that we are having, with the focus on equity, I mean all of those things, provides a policy opportunity as well. But I got to say, honestly folks, we have to be really ‑‑ I probably said ‑‑ I've been very optimistic about doing away with 14c recently, up until I had a rude awakening not too long ago about the fact that there really is some support in Congress on both sides of the aisle, and we are going to need to do a lot of work on that. I put that in there.

>> ANDREW HOUTENVILLE: Yeah, and I've always viewed that ‑‑ opposition to 14c type policy as being there's not really great alternatives, that people are fearful that there aren't opportunities out there that replace those experiences that come with 14c and the kind of the small kind of community‑based workshops, you know. I think it's fear, and I think there's really opportunity to ‑‑ with all the money that's being put into the infrastructure, that's being put into the economy, that's put into equity, that this is a time to address that. That there have to be good opportunities elsewhere.

>> ELAINE KATZ: They did address that in one of their recent meetings with testimony from people from the field and I won't name names, but one of the ‑‑ one of the legislators who has been a big supporter for 14c sounded more moderated in his tone and open to other opportunities. So I am hopeful that the more that people talk about this openly, that you'll be hearing more active discussion about it, there will be more favorable response. Especially with ‑‑ everybody is talking about higher minimum wage as well. It's not such an odd thing to talk about higher wages.

>> DENISE ROZELL: All I'm saying, it's going to take work from a community of people and a commitment to that. And like I said, I had been quite optimistic, and I'm not pessimistic by any means, because that's not who I am. I think there's a lot of challenges ahead for us that are more sobering. I'm more sobered.

>> ELAINE KATZ: John, do you want to add something.

>> JOHN O'NEILL: I was going to ask Andrew, as you mentioned the disability statistics that we report monthly, it's a very low bar, and I'm wondering if there are better statistics that could sharpen the crisis that we have been in for a long time and remain in.

>> ANDREW HOUTENVILLE: Yeah, certainly the poverty statistics come in really big. On a monthly basis, the hours questions ‑‑ we are not able to get at full‑time full, full‑time versus nonfull‑time. So I think we can ‑‑ we can sharpen them for annual statistics, but not the month to month statistics. There are some questions before we go, Andy, someone asked you to type in, I think you responded, type in the name of the conference. There is a question from Nadine, a comment and question about working from home is not a panacea, because you now bear the expenses, many of the expenses in terms of Internet connection, I've destroyed my couch, I've had to buy new ‑‑ all these things, right? I don't see employers picking up those costs, certainly my organization, the university is not ‑‑ has been like, oh, yeah, no way, we are not going down that pipeline of kind of providing office expenses for you. In fact, in the tax law there's been a retrenchment on what is considered a workplace, and what is not. So that's an interesting concept.

>> ANDY IMPARATO: I'll say quickly, whether it's California when people started working from home, we gave everybody a stipend, to help pay for costs of working at home. We are now realizing that was not enough of a stipend, and we are going to save a lot of money if a bunch of our employees don't go to an office. We are trying to revisit that internally and think about it from an equity lens. There are a lot of employees that have a harder time for paying all the things that they need to be functional at home. Some of them need a bigger boost from their employer, than people on the higher end of the salary end of the scale.

>> ANDREW HOUTENVILLE: Please lead the way. I'm going to end here, thank you, Andy and, Elaine, John and Denise, any final comments before we say goodbye. No.

>> ELAINE KATZ: Build back better is a time for optimism.

>> ANDREW HOUTENVILLE: I think that's right. I do think at the same time, social justice is a time to really point to the deficit that we have ‑‑ this gap has been forever, right, and that it's a justice issue. We have people that are dependent and living in ‑‑ not living independently, lack opportunities, there's a lot ‑‑ in building back better would address that injustice. All right. Well, thank you everybody, it's right at 1:00, we'll close. For those of you, we do have a ‑‑ we do have a feedback survey that we use. And please send us feedback at the following address. So research on disability.org/nTIDE/nTIDE‑survey. You can reach out to us any time if you're interested in learning more or finding new and better statistics or ideas. All right, thank you everybody, have a great afternoon, let's hope we meet back again in another year and we are way above the 30 percent mark.

All right. Take it easy.