FAREWELL JOHN

NCIL Chief
John Lancaster
to Retire

THE MOVIE 
“BLINDNESS”

SOCIAL SECURITY 
COLA FOR 2009

INTERVIEW: 
ANDY IMPARATO, 
AAPD

KEEPING WARM 
THIS WINTER
So what does this mean for President-Elect Obama’s last year. Today, we are in a global recession. Nearly 6 million Americans having lost their jobs in the shape since the Great Depression of the 1930s, with (to quote one of the president’s many gaffes) the stores, automakers, insurance companies and every faire practices of financial institutions have sent us into Domesticity, eight years of deregulation and the laissez people who teach their children to hate Americans.

$10 trillion debt. We owe money to our enemies and of American a Third World country, a banana republic realized. George Bush has made the United States any other means. Today, my worst fears have been in key states. When you can’t win on merit, win by tactics and misleading the evangelical right, urging its But the Bush administration prevailed by using fear torpedo his campaign. To paraphrase Bush speaking about Vladimir Putin (“I looked into his eyes and saw his “soul”), I looked into Bush’s eyes, and I was scared of him. He exhibited more wisdom than I had. I thought the re-election of George W. Bush was a grave mistake. One Bush term was enough for me, as I had had enough of the inept, bumbling buffoon from Texas. I didn’t trust the man and those around him to do the right thing for America. In fairness to the American people, his 2004 opponent, John Kerry, ran a lackluster campaign, letting a group of goons that called itself the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth torpedo his campaign. To paraphrase Bush speaking about Vladimir Putin (“I looked into his eyes and saw his soul”), I looked into Bush’s eyes, and I was scared of what I saw.

But the Bush administration prevailed by using fear tactics and misleading the evangelical right, urging its proponents to vote on divisive “gay rights” propositions in key states. When you can’t win on merit, win by any other means. Today, my worst fears have been realized. George Bush has made the United States of America a Third World country, a banana republic with highly, deadly sophisticated weapons. We have a $10 trillion debt. We owe money to our enemies and people who teach their children to hate Americans. Domestically, eight years of deregulation and the laissez faire practices of financial institutions have sent us into a quicksand-like patch of red ink. Banks, department stores, automakers, insurance companies and every major state of the union are in need of a financial bailout. Every aspect of our economy is threatened because the Bush administration “mis-underestimated” (to quote one of the president’s many gaffes) the foreclosure crisis. America is in the worst economic shape since the Great Depression of the 1930s, with nearly 6 million Americans having lost their jobs in the last year. Today, we are in a global recession.

So what does this mean for President-Elect Obama’s campaign promises? Obviously, many of his promises may have to be put on hold, deferred, postponed or years at the Tufts New England Medical Center until syringomyelia made it impossible for him to sit upright.
NCIL Chief Lancaster to Retire: National Advocacy is Key
By Eleanor Canter

John Lancaster, executive director of the National Council on Independent Living – and my boss -- recently announced his retirement.

As a boss, he has high expectations but acknowledges the importance of each staffer’s contributions. Though to his staff he is gruff, like a bear, he is also protective, like a bear to his cubs.

Lancaster, 63, has accomplished much since joining the organization in 2005. Not only did he take the NCIL office to Washington, D.C., and provide salaries for the staff, but he saved the organization financially. He brought order to chaos in every way and empowered the staff to contribute to the betterment of the organization. He never withheld information from the staff; in fact, he often took his colleagues out after work for birthdays or other occasions or just to talk.

Raised in Hamburg, N.Y., a bedroom community south of Buffalo, he graduated Hamburg High School in 1963. In Cleveland, and then received a Naval ROTC scholarship to attend the University of Notre Dame. There, he majored in liberal arts, which included a “Great Books” course on

indecent some of the great novels of Western literature, and I am a huge fan of James Joyce’s “Ulysses.” Of the latter book, he said, “If you don’t like (it), read it again.”

Lancaster trained with the Navy during his summer vacations, spending his second one in Little Creek, Va., with Navy SEALs and Marines learning about amphibious warfare. During another summer stint in Corpus Christi, Texas, he learned to fly a T-36 aircraft. He survived boot camp during his final collegiate summer and was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Marine Corps upon graduation.

He was sent to Vietnam in the throes of the Tet Offensive. Ho Chi Minh’s effort to change the course of the war as he neared death. Lancaster found himself in the middle of a mortar attack on landing at the Dan Nang Air Base.

“I was in-country for five months, got shot and started a career in disability rights issues,” he said. He also earned a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star while in Vietnam.

He was sent home, spent nine months in a VA rehabilitation hospital in Cleveland, and then returned to Notre Dame to pursue a graduate degree in philosophy. Unable to reconcile his practical nature with a love for German philosopher Martin Heidegger, he applied to law school, which was at the time housed in an inaccessible location.

“At first they didn’t want to let me in, not only because I was disabled, but also because I had applied late and had a less-than-stellar undergraduate record,” he said. “I talked my way in, though, and they eventually began renovations. This was my first taste of advocacy. Over the years, the campus became quite good in terms of accessibility, and today it is fully accessible.”

In 1973 the Rehab Act was being debated in Congress and the bill was signed by President Richard Nixon. Lancaster took a class called “Law and the Handicapped” with Professor Marcia Burgdorf and her husband Bob, who later drafted an early version of what became the ADA. John began a letter-writing campaign in support of the Rehab Act of 1973.

“I wanted to become a persecutor... I like to phrase it that way,” he said. “But no one would hire me. There was a lot of obvious discrimination that focused mainly around accessibility. ‘How will you climb the court steps?’ and ‘How will you use the library racks?’ they would say.”

He was finally offered a job as a law clerk for the Board of Veterans Appeals, an administrative law tribunal. “I knew I was in trouble the first day of that job,” he said. “I went down a long gray hallway to reach my office, which I shared with three men with gray suits and gray faces. The phones had no dials. They were dictating machines! I was bored out of my gourd!”

“Once day, Judy Heumann and Jim Maye came down the long, gray hallway. They barged into the office and said, ‘We heard you have a law degree and use a wheelchair. We need you.’ I said ‘How do you know I’m any good?’ They said ‘We don’t care. Come on.’”

Two weeks later he had a new job at Paralyzed Veterans of America coordinating services and doing some broader disability work. He pushed legislative advocacy for the broader disability community and was appointed Advocacy Director. During the late ‘70s he went into private practice, where he had the opportunity to join the board of the now-defunct American Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities.

During that period he got to meet and work with many of the heroes of the early independent living and disability rights movement: “Judy Heumann, Charlie Carr, Lex Frieden, John Chappell, Denise and Pat Figueroa, Justin Dart, Max Starkloff, Bob Funk, Evan...
Kemp, Ed Roberts, Frank Bowe ... All the movers and shakers! And in 1978 we got involved in the amendments to the Rehab Act and writing of the Act’s regulations. We got to do some real advocacy around that.

“In the late ’70s I dabbled in private practice and had the opportunity to represent the state of Maryland. Amendments to the ADA Act had just passed, and Maryland was one of the first states to receive a grant to start its Protection and Advocacy System. We had to push through legislation to establish the P&A under state law. They needed to be able to accept state money and still be independent enough to sue the state.”

That would be his first major success as a private-practice attorney and a legislative advocate for people with disabilities. “I got very involved in Maryland politics and sailing around that time. I supported Harry Hughes in his race for governor, and he appointed me director of the Governor’s Office for Individuals with Disabilities.”

In 1987, at the end of Hughes’ second term, the ADA was being debated, and John went to work for an Annapolis sailing program, implementing accessible sailing across the country.

“I loved it! Sometimes I wish I still had that job. I was very successful at sailing, and I was also successful in the time in getting the Maryland delegation to support the ADA, an easy sell with Congressman Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) as one of the act’s champions.”

In 1991, Justin Dart was chairman of the President’s Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities. “I had applied to be the executive director but was hired as an executive assistant. I set up trips for Justin and Yoshiko to help them promote the newly passed ADA. I traveled with them to all 50 states.

did get us to Pierre, but by minivan over rolling South Dakota plains. They took the back seats out to accommodate our wheelchairs and gear. I sat in the passenger seat while Yoshiko and Justin sat on cushions on the floor of the van for the six-hour drive. I never asked why they were so quiet throughout the drive, but I knew it was their wedding anniversary.”

President Clinton asked Justin Dart to stay on as chair of the President’s Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, but Justin declined and Tony Coelho took on the chairmanship. Soon afterward he awarded Lancaster the second annual Justin Dart Award and offered him the executive director position.

“Why would I want to do that?” I said. “There’s no budget to do anything and the committee doesn’t have the power to affect real change.”

Coelho agreed and said, “Yes, I want to kill the committee.” He laid out a plan to build up the committee before tearing it down to create the Office of Disability Employment Policy under an assistant secretary at the Department of Labor, a position with some real power. Lancaster wrote the first 23 drafts of the Executive Order that President Clinton would sign to create a committee headed by Coelho and Becky Ogle, which would eventually establish ODEP.

“There’s a good one: In 1998 when the president — twice! We took five states at a time, journeys of several weeks. It was wonderful; I got to know them both very well at that time.”

Lancaster recalled with a laugh a trip he once took with the Harts from Minneapolis to Pierre, S.D.

“We were traveling on a tiny airplane. It was Northwest Airlines Airlink service, operated by Mesaba Airlines. Everywhere we went, we traveled with huge amounts of luggage. Justin was very particular about what he ate and how, so in addition to our wheelchairs, old-fashioned desktop computers, printers, and suitcases we carried huge boxes of every kind of utensil you could imagine and several coolers of very specific food. It was always canned this and ‘pickled that.’

“Anyway, we were about to board this ‘puddle jumper.’ They had already checked all of this stuff, and the gate agent says, ‘Mr. Dart, we cannot take you and your party.’ I have a feeling that it was less because of our disabilities and more because of the amount of luggage we were checking, but they actually blamed it on our disabilities. Mistake!

John actually sang the word mistake here. “The media had already been following our trip, so we engaged them in the story, and we engaged attorneys too. We filed, settled and won that suit. We didn’t collect any money damages. We wanted big policy changes, and we got them. Mesaba
Andy Imparato, executive director of AAPD

Andy Imparato: Making a Difference from the Inside

By Mike Ervin

Andy Imparato was a 24-year-old student at Harvard Law School in 1990. “I was kind of an overprivileged, somewhat overconfident, left-wing law student,” he said. “I thought I had unlimited potential.”

But then, out of nowhere, deep depression, what is now called bipolar disorder, overwhelmed him. “Seemingly overnight, I went from being a cocky, visiting student who talked a lot in class to having difficulty getting out of bed, fantasizing about being hit by a car and feeling no sense of self-worth.”

His new wife and high school sweetheart, Betsy Nix, helped him through it “by reminding me that I was still a smart, capable person who had value, even if I didn’t feel that way.”

After clerking for a federal district judge in Boston, Imparato worked for the Disability Law Center in Boston, where he developed a strong sense of disability pride. When his two-year fellowship at the DLC ended in 1993, he moved to Washington, D.C., to work with Senator Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Disability Policy. From 1997 to 1999, he worked as general counsel and director of policy at the National Council on Disability (NCD).

Since November 1999, the Stanford Law graduate, has been president and CEO of the American Association of People with Disabilities.

“At NCD, I felt like we issued great reports but that there wasn’t a well-organized, powerful constituency outside the government that was holding the government accountable for implementing our recommendations,” Imparato said. “I went to AAPD to help organize that constituency.”

These days, the Beverly Hills, Calif., native lives in Baltimore with Betsy and their sons, Gareth, 15, and Nicholas, 9.

In this interview, Imparato discusses the power and peril of working inside Washington, the vital importance of bipartisanship and the evolution of the ADA Amendments Act.

Independence Today: You’ve said you still have five- or six-month stretches of big emotional highs and lows. How does that feel, and how does it affect your life?

Imparato: When I am depressed, usually between October and April, I think of that as my low-energy period. I lose self-esteem and motivation but going to work every day when I am depressed and spending time with my two boys and playing World of Warcraft online after hours all help me to cope. When I have my high energy, usually between April and the beginning of October, I try to focus on things that matter. My self-confidence and initiative go up dramatically, and I can be difficult to work for or be married to. I try to be careful how I say things when I have high energy because I have a tendency to exaggerate or be unnecessarily harsh, especially with authority figures. I have taken medications on and off over the years but have yet to find a medication that really helps.

IT: Why did you take the job at AAPD?

Imparato: The folks who selected me included some of my mentors, like John Kemp, Pat Wright, John Lancaster and Lex Frieden. I took the job because I worked in two branches of the federal government, and I felt like my energy and passion could be put to better use in service of the movement if I were outside the government.

IT: How does working inside the Beltway limit you and others?

Imparato: Washington can be a toxic environment. The political/policy culture tends to attract people who are excited by accumulating power and that can lead to rewarding some pretty problematic behaviors. Those of us who work in D.C. for more than a decade always have to ask ourselves if we are simply part of the establishment and have lost touch with the reasons we came to D.C. It helps me to get out of Washington every day since I commute from Baltimore. It also helps me to travel and connect with grassroots leaders on a regular basis.

IT: What power can insiders leverage that outsiders cannot?

Imparato: Working in D.C. has given me an opportunity to build strong, long-term relationships with elected and appointed officials and key staff, and that can lead to greater trust and greater access to information. Having said that, the real power in our community will always begin and end outside Washington.

IT: Working with a bipartisan board like yours must inevitably lead to hard choices about compromises. When has AAPD made tough compromises?

Imparato: The older I get, the less partisan I get, and the more annoyed I get when it seems like our community is being unfairly partisan. If we want to have real power that is sustainable, we need to build and cultivate relationships with key leaders in both parties. You do that by being an honest broker and holding both parties accountable when they screw up or miss opportunities to lead on our issues. I think compromises often lead to better policy outcomes because negotiation helps both sides figure out what is most important to them. The compromises that AAPD participated in creating around the ADA Amendments Act made the bill stronger and made it possible for it to become law. We overturned four nasty Supreme Court decisions and restored civil rights protections for millions of Americans with disabilities. I don’t believe that we gave up anything significant, so that is the kind of compromise that we can all be proud of.

IT: What major compromises did you make?

Imparato: We allowed the first prong of the statute to continue to use the words “impairment”
For Visually Impaired, New Product Makes Any Computer Accessible

By Deborah Kendrick

Access to movies would have been very hard to sell me on this product, but that is only the proverbial tip of the iceberg with the amazing System Access Mobile Network from Serotek Corp.

The entertainment aspect of this full-bodied screen-reading software for blind and visually impaired people is what initially attracts many customers – and that in itself is somewhat revolutionary. There have been production models of computers accessible to people who can’t read the screen since the initial wave of Apple machines swept the American public in the early 1980s. Such technology has put blind and visually impaired people on a level of unprecedented equality with sighted peers in the classroom, the workplace and elsewhere. Popular applications that enable computer users to do online research; write, edit and manage documents and spreadsheets; and communicate via e-mail have been available almost since their inception via synthesized speech, Braille translation programs, magnification or some combination of such tools.

But the fun elements of using a computer – games, movies, instant messaging and more – have been more elusive. A sighted user with the most limited technical knowledge could join AOL, point and click with a mouse and be instantly entertained by a movie, a game, a chat room or today’s special on Amazon or QVC. For blind computer users, these venues took far more effort and expertise or were simply not accessible.

Mike Calvo, a blind Cuban-American who is proud of the street smarts he gained growing up in a tough section of Miami, wanted to change all that. He met the former legally blind guy, Matt Campbell, online, and the two began talking about a product that was originally called Freedom Box. The Freedom Box would be for people who were blind, visually impaired or had limited hand function, and it would bring everything people enjoy on the World Wide Web into one simple environment, requiring no more than a few key presses to get anywhere.

That original product was remarkably innovative and gained wide popularity among people with limited technological savvy. As word of the original network and all its content spread throughout the blind community, more elite users began clamoring for more and more features. The result is that today, the System Access Mobile network is holding its own with, or pulling ahead of, the leading screen readers in the assistive-technology field, and its network provides equalizing enhancement of entertainment and information. With System Access Mobile, you can carry a flash drive containing the software on your key ring and turn any computer anywhere into an accessible one. And the product’s price tag is hundreds of dollars less than its predecessors in the market.

So what does it do? With System Access Mobile running on your computer, you can access such popular applications as Microsoft Word, Excel and PowerPoint. You can send and receive e-mail via Outlook or Outlook Express (although many customers prefer the e-mail capabilities within the SA Mobile Network itself), and you have full access to the Internet. Access is delivered via text-to-speech, with the almost-human NeoSpeech voices, or via screen magnification.

With SA Mobile on a U3-enabled USB drive, you can plug into any computer anywhere – a colleague’s office, a library, an Internet café – and it instantly becomes an accessible machine. If you’re away from home or office and need a file that’s back on your desktop computer, you can use that same USB thumb drive, plug it into a computer anywhere that has an Internet connection, and remotely control your own computer – even from halfway around the world – as if you were sitting in front of its keyboard.

Now, let’s get back to the fun stuff.

The System Access Mobile Network is a smorgasbord of entertainment and information assembled in one friendly, accessible environment. From the network, you can handle e-mail, log into hundreds of radio stations, get news from around the world, go shopping, participate in community forums, read and write blogs, and much more. Sure, blind and visually impaired people could do many of these things with other products, but nowhere has so much content – millions of items – been brought together for such effortless access. All menus speak.

All information can be magnified. The discoveries are endless – and FUN!

The movies initially drew me in to the System Access Mobile Network. I’ve always loved movies – lots of blind people do – but without description of the visual elements, the experience is diminished. The art of describing video content without stepping on dialogue has been growing in availability and popularity for nearly 20 years now. Television programs, live performances and first-run movies can all be found with the equalizing enhancement of description.

What the Serotek folks have done is round up described content from around the world – nearly 2,000 items – and put them all in one easy place. The material is copyrighted, of course, but because there is only audio (the original movie or TV program track plus description) and since it is only people who have difficulty seeing the screen who are accessing it, the delivery is legal. You can “watch” a movie directly on your computer or download it to a few MP3-style devices designed specifically for blind and visually impaired people. Now, when I fly across country, there is no more frustration of taking the headphones off to watch a movie and then not knowing what’s happening when the culprit skulks into the victim’s house or the sexy hero writes something romantic on a napkin!

Instead, I download my own movies from the System Access Mobile Network, put them on a pocket-sized player and never miss a thing.

And, when I get to where I’m going, there’s no need to lug around a laptop if I don’t want to. I can just plug in my USB drive, containing the System Access Mobile software, and use any available public computer.

With Serotek and its System Access line of products, Calvo has found a brilliant way to help the blind community be on a par with its sighted peers – and help his business flourish too. It’s a perfect blend of successful elements, a basic win-win for everyone.

For more information about System Access and the System Access Mobile Network, visit www.serotek.com or call 866-202-0520.

Deborah Kendrick is a newspaper columnist and senior features editor for AccessWorld, an assistive-technology magazine.

For a complete news roundup, go to: www.itodaysnews.com

News Briefs

supplied

by David Reynolds

from Inclusion Daily Express.

www.InclusionDaily.com
Reeve, arguably the most famous person with a spinal cord injury, died as a result of complications from a pressure wound infection. In early October 2004, he was being treated for a pressure wound that was causing a systemic infection called sepsis, a complication that he had experienced many times before. On October 9th, Reeve felt well and attended his son Will’s hockey game. That night, he went into cardiac arrest after receiving an antibiotic for the infection. He fell into a coma and was taken to Northern Westchester Hospital in Mount Kisco, N.Y. Eleven days later, Reeve died of heart failure at the age of 52. His wife, Dana, headed the Christopher Reeve Foundation after his death.

October 25th, 2002 – Paul Wellstone died in a plane crash. Wellstone was a two-term U.S. senator from Minnesota and member of the Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party, which is affiliated with the national Democratic Party. Before being elected to the Senate in 1990, he was a professor of political science at Carleton College. Wellstone was a progressive and a leading spokesman for the progressive wing of the national Democratic Party. On February 24th, 2002, he went public with his diagnosis of multiple sclerosis. He served in the Senate from 1991 until his death. His wife, Sheila, and daughter, Marcia, also died in the crash. They had two other grown children, David and Mark, who co-chair the Wellstone Action nonprofit group that promotes, among other causes, political advocacy and grass-roots organizing.

--- Compiled from various sources by Michael Reynolds

Do you know of an important date in disability history? Send it to Mike Reynolds at: upllycrip@gmail.com

Commentary

It’s Plain to See that “Blindness” is a Demeaning Film Portrayal

By Kathi Wolfe

Recently, while dining at a Chinese restaurant with some poets before a poetry reading, I asked the woman next to me to pass the salt. “Wow!” she said, handing me the condiment. “You do so well!” She then touched my white cane and added, “I don’t know if I’d even be able to eat by myself if I were blind.”

The incident reminded me of humorist Dave Barry and his line, “I’m not making this up.”


I do not knit. Yet, watching this seemingly endless 122-minute film, I wished I had knitting or something to keep me awake.

Comparing notes with Beth Haller, an expert to keep me awake. Haller, an expert on disability and the media who teaches mass communication at Towson University, I found that I was not alone. Two audience members walked out after about 20 minutes, and about five others left later and never came back. Haller wrote her review of “Blindness,” which she posted on her blog “Media Dis&Dat.”

The last I heard, “Blindness” was tanking at the box office. That’s the good news about this movie.

The film, a faithful version of Saramago’s book, takes place in an unnamed country where everyone, except one character (a doctor’s wife, played by Julianne Moore), goes blind. The blindness, which spreads rapidly, becomes an epidemic. People are frightened of losing their sight and are scared to be around anyone who can’t see. The government (which, like the society, quickly collapses) confines all those who are blind in an asylum.

As you’ve probably guessed, there are no rehabilitation or independent living services for the many people who are newly blind. So, days from the shock of being suddenly without sight, the inhabitants of this odd nation are totally disoriented. They don’t know how to get anywhere or do anything — and I do mean anything — such as how to go to the bathroom or put their pants on. To reference Dave Barry again: I’m not making this up, folks.

The doctor’s wife pretends to be blind so she can stick with her ophthalmologist husband (“the doctor,” played by Mark Ruffalo). Moore’s character, a decent person, helps everyone. As the lone sighted person, this woman, of course, is the only competent person -- at least according to the “vision” of this film. That lasts only for a while, until the film commences to the next metaphor about blind people — one that we who are visually impaired so love.

As the people who are blind try to survive, new to their disability and short of vital necessities such as food, they begin to fight with each other. We are in “Lord of the Flies” country.

A thief declares himself to be “the King of Ward 3.” He and his henchman, a man blind from birth, force women to have sex with them for food. Rival blind gangs form.

It’s not spoiling anything too much to say that the group led by the doctor’s wife wins the fight. They escape and go to her house.

There, they’re happy to be free. They’re like a family, almost like “The Brady Bunch,” if you can imagine the Bradys, all newly blind, stumbling around, unable to do anything, waiting for Florence Henderson to feed them.

(The people who are blind in “Blindness” are so inept and pathetic that “The Brady Bunch” folks seem like Einstein in comparison.)

As a legally blind person, I found “Blindness” to be not only boring but demeaning toward those of us who are blind. But at least, unlike many who saw or reviewed the movie, I knew that the film’s depictions of being blind were stereotypes.

I don’t claim to be a Mensa member, but I know how to feed myself and go to the restroom.

But as was the case with the poet at the Chinese café, many people, even in 2008, are amazed that people who are blind can do something as simple as eating a meal. Like the amazed woman -- a kind, well-educated writer and teacher who ability, if they become blind, they wouldn’t be able to feed themselves.

The movie “Blindness” (like the book that the film is based on) isn’t meant to be taken literally. It’s an allegory — a parable. Saramago uses the situation of everyone becoming blind as a metaphor for disaster — for the misunderstanding, fear, isolation and breakdown that can occur in human society.

The novel, which I haven’t completely read, got generally good reviews. From what I’ve been told (and can tell from looking through it), the book is experimental.

Saramago uses long sentences, mixes tenses and doesn’t give his characters names. As in the movie, they’re simply known by such monikers as “the doctor’s wife,” “the thief” or “the woman with dark glasses.”

Here’s a sample of the type of writing found in the novel:

Blindness

Continued on page 14
abandoned. If I were President-Elect Obama, I would proceed full speed ahead. I would increase the deficit even more, if necessary. I would not let those who stood by and watched as Bush ran the country into the ground call for spending restraint. Vice President Dick Cheney, channeling Former President Ronald Reagan, once asked, “What’s wrong with deficits?” Yes, in the darling eyes of conservative Republicans doubled the U.S. deficit that he inherited from Former President Carter. My question is: What’s wrong with taxes? Isn’t it your patriotic duty to support the security of our country, provide for free education and protect communities with police and firefighters? What has given Americans an edge in technology, militarism and medicine? Taxes. What has made this country great is the fact that we pay our taxes to enjoy the freedoms, protection and wealth we can build with our very own revenue: our country, our taxes.

Joe the Plumber, the inerudite symbol of America used by the Republican presidential ticket, said that it is unfair for people to have to pay more just because they make more. He called it “socialism,” as do many conservatives. John McCain objected to this spreading of the wealth as promoting “class warfare.” But those of us who dabble in history know a little knowledge is dangerous. So how did this socialist “virus” -- the idea of a “progressive tax,” that wealthier people should pay higher taxes -- sneak into the American lexicon? It was through America’s 26th president and McCain’s hero, Theodore Roosevelt, another great Republican.

The Bush administration’s “We Don’t Give a Damn” policy is an example of how one administration undermines the goals of the next by fiscally restricting the new agenda with the fiscally myopic policies. If Obama were to abandon his promises to the American people, he would be the failure that Bush and his neocons want him to be. Obama should keep his promise to eliminate wasteful and ineffective federal programs. He should keep his promise to the middle class to cut that group’s income taxes, and he should move swiftly to implement universal health care and end our involvement in Iraq. This, combined with a public works program to rebuild America’s aging infrastructure -- such as bridges, the electric grid, schools, low-income housing, railroads and hospitals -- will help kick-start the economy.

I know that, for people with disabilities who expect so much from the next president, some of his cuts, and the changes he will usher in to government, will be met with disappointment. We are, after all, part of America. Everything that happens in the country is going to affect us, and I wouldn’t want it any other way. We need our country back from the hatemongers, bigots and other extremists who pollute the airwaves. We can rejoice in all that Obama’s victory symbolizes about overcoming our past and all that it makes possible for the future, even for people with disabilities. Racism is far from eliminated, but it resides in the backward minds of backward people. After winning the election, in his memorable speech in Chicago’s Grant Park, Obama said, “If anyone still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time, then tonight is your answer.” The answer, he said, is “spoken by young and old, rich and poor, Democrat and Republican, black, white, Latino, Asian, Native American, gay, straight, disabled and not disabled.”

The changes Obama makes are not going to meet with everyone’s approval, especially those people with or without disabilities who did not want a black president. To quote Reagan: “If you’re afraid of the future, then get out of the way, stand aside. The people of this country are ready to move again.”

Video of President-Elect Obama’s speech:

www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=4572578n

Patricia Figueroa Jr.
Editor

For important disability news
daily, go to:
independentliving-
USA
www.ilusa.com
or give us a
link on your home page.
friends, whom I had known from my childhood in Hamburg. She has been a great asset to me and given me a tremendous amount of support over the years. She always simply understood disability rights issues and my passion for it. She just never needed any convincing. I’m going home because we have been living apart since 1995. I’m going to support her for once, and I can’t wait.

“My departure has nothing to do with NCIL. This job has been very challenging and difficult, but I have enjoyed it very much. The best thing about NCIL is the grassroots movement, but it also causes most of my heartburn. I’m tired of D.C. and its nasty, confrontational feeling, although, I will say that this election cycle has not been as nasty as some that I’ve seen. 2004 was rough.”

That year, Lancaster was a member of Americans Overseas for Kerry. In Hanoi they raised funds for Senator John Kerry’s campaign and fought the smearing of his military record. He remains on an anti-American list maintained by the so-called Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, as well as a government watch list to this day.

Lancaster has seen positives as well.

“The disability rights movement has seen tremendous progress in the physical infrastructure of the United States and in communication. We get frustrated, but the progress is tremendous. People who are too young to remember may not realize that we got the disability agenda and the policies for the entire world. The problem is that we haven’t kept up, we have not followed through. We still fail tragically short on education, youth transition to work, and independent living.

“And in employment, we have not seen nearly enough progress. I often feel that I have not been very successful in life because I have always worked on employment for people with disabilities, and there has been so little progress. I know one person can’t solve all of the problems in such a huge area, but we need a paradigm shift when it comes to employment, and this was never able to accomplish. I wish NCIL members had more focus and impact on this issue, because it is a problem that we need to address.

“In order for NCIL to be effective, all of the nation’s centers and independent living councils (SILCs) must join, Lancaster said.

“NCIL needs to add value to its member benefits, although members already receive a lot for the dues. We need to be more secure in our finances, our mission and our promise to promote independent living. More important, though, centers and SILCs need to understand the importance of national advocacy. They need to see the importance of being part of a larger community that will not always agree on every issue. Disagreements are not a reason to leave NCIL; in fact, they are a reason to get more involved!

“I also believe that we need to do advocacy with our entire society – advocacy that goes beyond Congress. When we turn down funding from corporations or organizations we disagree with, we miss out on this opportunity. Good or bad, the reality is that current-day advocates need resources. Organizations that are well funded and staffed can be much more effective. We must engage our financial and human resources; the membership must pay its dues and be seriously involved in order for the organization to remain viable. We are not unprincipled, but we cannot be a lone voice.

“My most unpleasant moments at NCIL have been watching members decide to leave or turn down funding when we are desperate to build the organization. Having insufficient resources and staff can be very frustrating. I regret not being able to complete my mission to give NCIL the staff and resources to be successful before my departure. Of course, we are still in decent shape going into rough times, and I am proud of that. Four years ago we never would have weathered the crisis we are facing now.

“My best moments at NCIL have been the passage of the ADA Amendments Act, Money Follows the Person, victories on judicial nominations and other policy achievements. And, of course, meeting thousands of people with disabilities and many SILCs and SILCs that make up this wonderful movement of people coalesced on principle and a common vision.

“I may stay involved with some NCIL committees, or sometime down the line run for a position on the board. I’d like to stay involved in finance, international employment and veterans issues. And when I have a little more free time, I’d like to do some writing for Independence Today.”

As Joyce wrote in “Ulysses”: “Hold to the now, the here, through which all future plunges to the past.

Eleanor Canter is a NCIL staff member. She can be contacted at the NCIL office.

Polling

Continued from page 8

half of the state’s delegates were eventually reinstated. The major candidates for the presidency stayed away from Florida as if they would catch some fatal infectious disease if their feet touched the state’s soil. For most of the primary season, Florida was once again a national joke.

At one time, poll workers were proud of their jobs. In Florida, however, some poll workers don’t admit what they do for fear they might somehow be blamed if their feet touched the state’s soil. For most of the primary season, Florida was once again a national joke.

Take, for instance, the 2008 presidential election. Many people thought that, because it didn’t get much negative publicity, Florida had managed to oversee a well-run election process.

Polling

Continued on page 14
Hot Tips for Surviving a Cold Winter

By Brenda Brown-Grooms

Natural gas, heating oil, propane, electricity, coal, and wood and pellet stoves are all means by which people will keep warm this winter. Each method will cost more than it did last year, substantially contributing to a cost of living that is problematic in this economic downturn.

The U.S. Energy Information Administration estimates that the average household expenditures for all space-heating fuels are projected to be $1,137 this winter (October 1st to March 31st), a 15 percent increase over the estimated $956 spent last winter. The largest increases will be in households using heating oil and natural gas. The projected increases primarily reflect higher prices, although colder weather than last winter will also contribute to higher fuel use in many areas.

Hurricanes Gustav and Ike caused 32 million barrels of crude oil and 165 billion cubic feet of natural gas production to be shut down in the Gulf of Mexico. Recovery is still ongoing.

According to the most recent projections of heating degree-days by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the lower 48 states are forecast to be 2.4 percent colder this winter compared with last winter, but 1.7 percent warmer than the 30-year average (1971-2000). Regional heating degree-day projections vary widely, however; for example, the west-north-central region is projected to be almost 5 percent warmer than last winter.

Those who heat their homes with natural gas will spend, on average, about 18% more ($155) than last winter. About 52% of all households across the nation use natural gas as their heating fuel. The increase in this winter’s prices is based on a projected 17% increase in price and a 1% increase in consumption. In the Midwest, where 72% of households use natural gas to heat their homes, the projected increase in prices is 17%, based on a 19% increase in prices and a 2% decline in consumption.

About 7% of households use heating oil in this country. They can expect to pay 23% more ($449) this winter. Most are in the Northeast (where 31% of households use heating oil as the primary space-heating fuel). An 18% increase in prices and a 5% increase in consumption are expected to cause a 23% increase in cost from last year.

Propane costs are projected to be, on average, 11% more ($188) than last year. Propane-heated households represent about 8% of the total U.S. households (107 million). Although the increase will vary widely by region, western households may expect a 5% increase in expenditures, while southern households can expect to spend 16% more this winter.

Households heating with electricity are projected to pay 10% ($89) more this winter. Ranging from 12% in the Northeast to 59% in the South, 35% of all U.S. households use electricity as their primary heating fuel. The 10% increase in electricity prices is based on that amount of increase in consumption and prices.

Electric-power-sector coal consumption is projected to grow by about 1.2 percent in 2008. Slow growth in electricity consumption, combined with projected increases in electricity generation from other sources (nuclear, natural gas, and wind), will lead to a slight decline (0.9 percent) in electric-power-sector coal consumption in 2009.

Pellet and wood-burning stoves are efficient alternatives to natural gas, oil and coal. Wood pellets are generally made from sawdust and wood shavings. Of 107 million households in the U.S., about 800,000 homeowners currently use pellet stoves. Although they can be used to run a whole-house heating system, pellets are more commonly used in fireplace inserts and freestanding stoves that serve as supplemental heating appliances.

Because most homes do not have thermostats in each room, users may be tempted to turn up the primary thermostat when rooms adjacent to the heated space are cool, thus defeating the purpose of a pellet stove. Pellet stoves, however, require loading, lighting, tending and cleaning, as opposed to simply flipping a switch.

If you already have a fireplace, you can increase heating efficiency and circulate the heat with a fireplace insert. Essentially a self-contained fireplace, this insert fits into an existing box and allows the air to circulate around it, thus heating it. The insert is connected to the chimney to vent the smoke and combustion byproducts.

If you don’t have a working fireplace, choose a freestanding stove, which you can place nearly anywhere in your home. (Venting a freestanding stove requires punching through the building envelope and installing a chimney of appropriate design for wood-burning appliances.) Whichever type of appliance you choose, expect to pay at least $700 plus installation fees of $250 and up. A National Fireplace Institute-certified installer should install the appliance.

Heat load is measured in British thermal units per hour, or Btu/h. You need 25 to 30 Btu/h per square foot, or at least 5,000 Btu/h for a 200-square-foot space. The actual heat loss (and conversely the amount of heat needed) is based on where you live (outdoor air temperature), the amount of insulation in the ceiling and exterior walls of the space, the number and size of the space’s windows, and whether there is heated space above and below the room. Calculate how many Btu/h you need to heat your space and select an appropriate-sized insert or stove.

The average cost of a cord of firewood or a ton of wood pellets is $190. A true comparison of costs involves comparing not just the price of the fuel, but also operating costs, including installation, maintenance, and flue gases.

Federally funded programs administered by states (usually through social services departments) will have their work cut out for them this winter. With the rising cost of fuel, there is a lot of money available to help poor and disabled populations, what dollars there are will be stretched to cover as many people as possible -- with many literally "left out in the cold" by guidelines changed to make it harder to qualify for heating assistance, in anticipation of more applications.

There is still time to apply for fuel assistance for the winter season. If you think you will need help paying to stay warm this winter, apply now. The Federal Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) is designed to help...
that substantially limits a major life activity," but we redefined those words mean. We left those words in because they were important to the employer community, and it was easier for us to sell the bill as "restoring" the original ADA by sticking with the original statutory language but clarifying its meaning. As we entered into the legislative process, we knew that we would likely need to compromise on some issues at some point, just like we did with the original ADA. We also made it clear that you are not entitled to a reasonable accommodation if you are only covered by the "regarded as" prong. That was EEOC's position before the ADA Amendments Act, and given the much broader "regarded as" prong we got in the bill we view as comfortable giving that argument up.

IT: What similar deliberations went into your positions regarding Supreme Court nominees (John) Roberts and (Samuel) Alito?

Imparato: I worked with my staff and our coalition partners to do an independent, non-partisan analysis of their records. In neither case did I find evidence of a serious problem with their jurisprudence in the area of disability law and policy, so I did not recommend to my board that we oppose their confirmations. My board unanimously agreed. We did work to ensure that both nominees received questions in the confirmation hearings exploring their approach to disability law and policy, and we were delighted that they both received a number of questions from Democratic and Republican senators.

IT: Did AAPD get flak for any of this?

Imparato: Sure we took some shots from folks who would have liked to see us oppose one or both of the nominees, but we did not receive any criticism that made us reconsider the wisdom or fairness of our decisions.

IT: How important is the ADA Amendment Act in the historical spectrum with ADA, IDEA, etc?

Imparato: It is one of the most significant disability rights laws in the last quarter century. It is definitely the most important piece of disability legislation that I have seen in my 15 years in D.C. It restores civil rights protections for millions of Americans and breathes new life into the ADA and sends a clear message to the federal bench that they screwed up in their twisted interpretations of the ADA.

IT: How could the finished product have been better, worse?

Imparato: My goal was to work something out with the employer community that fixed the problems we were having with the definition and that kept our community unified behind the compromise. I believe we did that, so I am not sure we could have done better. We could easily have walked away from the negotiating table or negotiated something that split the community. In either case, that would have been worse because we would still be stuck with the bad court decisions and millions of disabled Americans losing on the issue of whether they are disabled enough.

IT: Do you agree that those active in the movement inside the Beltway are usually the most educated, affluent and privileged people with disabilities? Does this make it difficult for them to understand the pain and priorities of those who are isolated and live on SSI or in nursing homes or in their inaccessible family home?

Imparato: Not really. I think this kind of characterization is unnecessarily divisive and not consistent with my experience. I think the bigger problem is that most D.C.-based disability organizations are not controlled by disabled people and often lack the insight that comes from first-person experience.

IT: What are AAPD’s legislative or policy priorities now?

Imparato: Transforming the four largest federal entitlement programs (Medicaid, Medicare, SSDI and SSI) so they are more consistent with the goals of ADA and IDEA. There is a need for a deep transformation in our approach to entitlements that support people with significant disabilities to work to their full potential and contribute to their own support and be as economically self-sufficient as possible. We are also working on protecting the accessibility requirements in the Help America Vote Act and applying accessibility requirements to newer Internet-based technologies. We want to invest more in young people with disabilities so that they can learn as much as possible in K-12 education and higher education, with an expectation that this investment will yield a return over their lifetimes.

Mike Ervin is a writer and member of ADAPT, a group that works for the civil rights of people with disabilities.

Cold Winter
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households that: spend a large portion of their income on energy bills; have a child or children under age 8, adults over 60, or disabled individuals living in the home; have an income at or below certain established guidelines; and have run out or are in danger of running out of heating fuel.

Those eligible must meet income guidelines (generally 60% of a state’s median income or below), either pay directly for heating costs or pay rent that includes heating costs, and be a U.S. citizen or a qualified alien.

Those with access to a computer can visit their state’s Home Energy Assistance Program Web site. Others should call their local social services office.

Brenda Brown-Grooms is an independent living coordinator with the Blue Ridge Independent Living Center in Roanoke, Va.

Winter Energy-Saving Tips

- Use a programmable thermostat with your heating system to automatically lower the temperature at night or when no one is home.
- Keep the warm air in and the cold air out by adding insulation, caulking and weather-stripping around doors, attic access, windows, outlets and any area that can let the cold air in and the warm air out. Or call a Home Performance with Energy Star® contractor to assess your home’s efficiency.
- It’s a good time to check smoke and carbon monoxide detectors and replace old batteries. Remember: As you seal up leaks in your home, this becomes even more important.
- Make sure floor and wall vents are not blocked by draperies, furniture or rugs. Vents should also be cleaned regularly with a vacuum or broom.
- Battery chargers for wheelchairs should be turned off when not in use.
- If you sleep on an air mattress, turn it off when you do not expect to use it for more than five hours.
- Keep blinds and drapes of sun-exposed windows open in the daytime and closed at night.
- When the fireplace is not in use, keep the flue damper tightly closed.
- Have your heating system inspected by a Home Performance with Energy Star contractor. If you have a forced-air heating system,
check your air filters once a month and replace if dirty.

- Make sure outdoor portions of your heating system are not blocked by leaves, shrubbery or other objects.

- If you have a window air-conditioning unit, remove it for the winter months to prevent heat from escaping through and around the unit. If it can’t be removed, buy a cover to prevent drafts.

- Install rubber gaskets behind outlets and switch plates on exterior walls. Gaskets can be found in most home improvement stores.

- Ceiling fans can keep you comfortable in the winter too! Reversing the direction of the blades pushes warm air down in to the room.

- Lower your water heater temperature to 120 degrees. For added savings, have your water heater wrapped with an insulation blanket by your heating or plumbing contractor.

Computers

- When you shut down your computer, don’t forget to turn off the monitor as it can use twice as much energy as the computer!

- Use an advanced power strip for convenience; that way all of your computer accessories are turned off by one switch (even in sleep mode, your computer may cost you $105 a year).

- Use the power-management feature on your computer monitor; it will turn off the monitor when idle for more than 15 minutes when you leave your computer on.

- Consider a laptop computer over a traditional desktop as laptops use less energy.

Copiers, Fax Machines and Mailing Machines

- Turn off electronics when they are not in use.

- Consider a multifunction device, which combines printing, copying, faxing and scanning, and look for the Energy Star label to further increase energy savings.

- Plug your copier, fax machine and mailing machine into an advanced power strip so that when you switch off your computer (or put it in sleep mode) all of the peripherals will also turn off.

Battery-Charging Systems and External Power Adapters

- Avoid leaving on transformers and charging units for appliances and battery-operated devices (such as cell phones and phones) when they aren’t being used.

- Instead of just turning your electronics off, it is better to unplug them because even when they’re “off” they still draw electricity from the outlet, something known as a “phantom load.”

- Plug your battery-charging system or power adapter into a power strip to enable you to shut off power with the flick of a switch. For even better control, use a power strip with a timer or a programmable power strip.

Cordless Phones

- When buying a cordless phone, look for the Energy Star label. Energy Star phones use only about one-third the energy of standard cordless phones.

- Don’t forget to turn off your DVD player, video-game console and television when not in use.

- Plug your DVD and home audio products into an advanced power strip so that when you turn off the television, all the home audio and video components will also turn off.

- Consider combination products to save space, simplify set-up and save energy in standby mode.

Televsions and VCRs

- Turn off televisions when no one is watching them. A TV left on for eight hours a day or while you sleep will cost you about $41-$102 per year.

- When choosing a new television, look for the Energy Star label to save energy.

- If considering a flat-panel or large-screen television, consider purchasing an LCD model rather than a plasma model to cut your power usage by approximately 50%.

Printers, Scanners and All-in-One Devices

- Ink-jet printers use as much as 90% less energy than typical laser printers.

- Choose a multifunction product (printer/copier/scanner) instead of separate products.

- Don’t forget to turn your printer off at night as it still draws power even when not in use.

- Plug your printer, scanner and all-in-one device into an advanced power strip so that when you switch off your computer (or put it in sleep mode) all of the peripherals will also turn off.

Lighting

- Use energy-efficient, Energy Star-qualified CFLs instead of standard incandescent lightbulbs, and you will use 75% less electricity.

- Energy Star CFLs also emit less heat and are cooler to the touch than incandescent bulbs.

- Replace your home’s five most frequently used incandescent lights with CFLs; it will save you more than $60 a year in energy costs.

Ceiling Fans with Lighting Kit

- Invest in an Energy Star-qualified ceiling fan with a lighting kit to help cool your home and improve airflow. An Energy Star-qualified model is about 50% more efficient than a conventional unit and can save up to $20 per year on cooling and heating bills.

Lighting Fixtures

- Energy Star lighting fixtures put out the same amount of light as standard fixtures while providing excellent color rendering and light temperature.

- Use floodlights only when needed; they use 2.5 times more electricity than indoor lights.

- Replace 150-watt floodlight bulbs with outdoor Energy Star-qualified CFLs.

- Keep your lights and fixtures clean to improve efficiency as much as 20%.

Holiday Lighting

- Energy-efficient lighting comes in a variety of festive styles and colors, including light-emitting diodes.
(LEDs), fiber-optic lights, candelabra CFLs and rope lights, all of which use substantially less energy than standard holiday lighting.

### EXTERIOR

### Doors
- Use Energy Star-qualified doors that use materials to prevent heat loss and provide maximum energy savings.
- Use multiple glass panes (double- or triple-paned insulating glass) to reduce heat flow.
- Use improved weather-stripping in the frames as well as a magnetic strip to create a tighter seal that will reduce air leakage around the edges.

### Windows
- Choose Energy Star-qualified windows to keep your home cooler in the summer and warmer in winter.
- Use multiple panes of glass to insulate against the weather, sound and impacts.
- Consider U-value and Low-E coatings. U-value is the measure of a window’s ability to insulate. Low-E window coatings are thin and transparent, permitting visible light to pass through, while effectively reflecting radiation and keeping your home cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter.
- Close storm windows in the fall.
- Plastic placed over windows will help reduce drafts when installed securely.

### Skylights
- Choose energy-efficient skylights to help reduce your home heating and cooling costs.

### Attics
- Insulate your home, especially the attic.
- Install a vapor barrier in your attic to reduce the flow of moisture from inside your home through the insulation. This eliminates the condensation that reduces insulation efficiency.

### Exterior Lighting
- Use solar-powered LED landscape lighting. This new technology is charged by sunlight (using zero-metered electricity) and lasts for up to eight hours with a full charge.

### BATH
- Take showers instead of baths.
- Shortening the time you spend in the shower will not only save energy but will also conserve water.
- Use a low-flow showerhead rated at 2.5 gallons per minute or less.
- Keep the water running only when rinsing.
- Repair leaking faucets, especially on the hot-water tap. One drop per second can waste as much as 10 gallons of water in a week.

For additional tips go to: [http://www.getenergysmart.org/Resources/tips.aspx](http://www.getenergysmart.org/Resources/tips.aspx)

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**Social Security Cost of Living Increase Scheduled for 2009**

The hike is the biggest since 1982

For the 8.5 million aging individuals and those with disabilities who rely on Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or are awaiting a decision on their application for benefits, the U.S. government has good news. There will be a 5.8 percent cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) increase in Social Security payments beginning January 2009.

The increase is the biggest since 1982. It will result in more than 34.9 million Americans receiving a slightly bigger check in 2009, increasing the typical retiree’s monthly check by $63 -- from $1,090 to $1,153 a month (online: go to Allsup.com, search “SSDI COLA”). The 2009 cost-of-living increase will go to more than 55 million Americans receiving Social Security benefits. The Social Security COLA is tied to the annual increase in the Consumer Price Index, which takes into account the rate of inflation for the goods and services people buy.

Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W) for the third quarter of the previous year is used to set the following year’s COLA. For the quarter ending Sept. 30th, 2008, the CPI-W was 5.8 percent.

“The Social Security cost-of-living adjustment isn’t about getting ahead,” said Paul Gada a financial planner for an advocacy group known as Allsup. “At best, it’s about keeping up. Even that is going to be tough, as people have already experienced higher living expenses this year with no sign of that letting up near term.”

“It’s very difficult when your income is fixed, but your expenses are not fixed and generally just seem to be increasing. But the first step is to honestly assess your financial situation. Allsup offers a special calculator to help people learn to reverse credit card debt and a personal debt consolidation calculator.

Because many individuals with severe long-term disabilities are unable to work, they are more likely to be low-income earners. But people with long-term disabilities cannot afford to be without some plan to cover health-related costs on an ongoing basis. People with disabilities who are eligible should examine all their Medicare options, including traditional Medicare (Parts A and B) with supplemental insurance (Medigap) and prescription drug (Part D) coverage, as well as Medicare Advantage plans.

### Social Security keeps an estimated 40 percent of Americans out of poverty

For example, due to pre-existing conditions, people with disabilities often are not able to get supplemental coverage. This means that if they are enrolled in traditional Medicare only, they are likely to have high out-of-pocket expenses. Medicare Advantage plans, on the other hand, combine basic traditional Medicare coverage with the added security of having supplemental insurance. Many of these plans also provide prescription drug coverage and offer other services, such as vision and dental care, which are not part of traditional Medicare.

The key to financial survival on a fixed income is controlling costs. Unfortunately, the usual scenario is the government giveth, and the government taketh away. Seniors and individuals with disabilities have seen their Medicare Part B premiums double over the last eight years, from $45.50 in 2000 to $96.40 in 2008. So some...
portion of the COLA increase will be consumed by an anticipated rise in premiums for Medicare beneficiaries.

For recipients of benefits that are finding it hard to make ends meet, the government-sponsored financial assistance programs available to low-income individuals include:
- Help paying heat, electricity, telephone and water bills
- Support for energy-efficient home upgrades
- Reduced public transportation fares
- Property tax credits
- Free meals for children attending school, including summer months
- Food pantries offering free monthly food packages.

Did beneficiaries get a raise above the national rate? Perhaps — but only if you ignore the bigger picture of the inflationary pressures facing older Americans.

The price index is a broad measure of inflation based on a survey of consumer prices paid by a big chunk of the U.S. population. Retirees are affected disproportionately by a set of prices that tend to rise quicker than inflation in the broader economy: health care, energy and transportation.

A study by the Senior Citizens League of 15 key expenditures found that people older than 65 have lost 51 percent of their buying power since 2000. Advocates have been for years called for a new formula to determine the COLA. But so far, the idea has not caught on.

Social Security keeps an estimated 40 percent of Americans out of poverty and accounts for up to 80 percent of retirement income for people in low-income brackets. Even wealthier Americans rely on the program for about 50 percent of retirement income.

--- Compiled from various sources

### Polling

Continued from page 9

And for the most part, it did go more smoothly than usual. That is, of course, unless you happened to be assigned to one of the major colleges in Florida at the student center on campus. If you were, you would know that once again, you had landed quite memorable.

During the primaries, a major effort was made to register as many voters as possible. That worked. More than 1,500 new voters were reported to have signed up on campus. You would think with 44,000 students, that a major warning, the county board of elections supervisor would be prepared for more voters in that precinct. He wasn’t. In fact, he precipitously ran out of ballots around 10:45 a.m. To make matters worse, the precinct deputy — me — was not told that had happened.

At the time, I was outside the building and didn’t know why the line was so long until around noon, when one of the attorneys helping with the elections came out and told me. The two of us told the people in line the delay was caused by the elections office underestimating the turnout. We also told them the line should start moving faster soon because we had added more privacy booths, which is true. We started the day at the precinct with four or five privacy voting stations, and by the end of the night we had 12. The problems seemed to be solved. They weren’t.

Next, in a moment of what could only be called insanity, the county board of elections supervisor decided that any students who wanted to vote at the university instead of in their home precincts would be allowed to vote there. As long as they were registered in the state of Florida, they would be allowed to vote by provisional ballots. That would have been fine, except that the elections office had not sent over

### Blindness

Continued from page 7

“The blind man and the blind woman were now resting, apart, the one lying beside the other, but they were still holding hands, they were young, perhaps even lovers who had gone to the cinema and turned blind there, or perhaps some miraculous coincidence brought them together in this place, and this being the case, how did they recognize each other, good heavens, by their voices, of course, it is not only the voice of blood that needs no eyes, love, which people say is blind, also has a voice of its own.”

Are you still awake?

One friend, who is blind and active in the disability community, told me that she loved reading “Blindness” but was concerned about the impact of the movie.

“The book uses blindness as a metaphor,” she said. “It’s more clear that the writer isn’t referring to literally blind people. But in the movie, with its graphic, visual images, the distinction between the allegorical and the literal could be lost. People will come away thinking that blind people literally are like animals — unable to care at all for themselves.”

“I know, meta-literary fiction is supposed to be about reality,” another friend said to me about reading “Blindness,” “but I gave up after 50 pages. Who wants to stick with a book when it’s like one extremely long sentence?”

The National Federation of the Blind staged 72 protests in front of cinemas showing “Blindness” in 38 states in October. The movie was a critical and box-office failure, NFB president Mark Maurer said in a statement before the film’s release. (Director Fernando Meirelles) “worked diligently to preserve the intent and resonance of the acclaimed book,” Miramax said, calling the novel “a courageous parable about the triumph of the human spirit when civilization breaks down.”

Look for the movie, which was an entry in the Cannes Film Festival, to be out on DVD.

I’m betting that, despite its mixed reviews, it will pick up some Oscar nominations, if not statues. It’s the kind of “serious” fare that Hollywood sometimes goes for in an
Blindness  
Continued on page 14

effort to prove its gravitas.

As a creative artist, I support other creative artists. I’m all for making art and encouraging experimentation in all kinds of art, from the literary to the cinematic.

As a poet, I know that we can’t live without metaphors, and I wouldn’t like it if people told me what images I can use in my work.

Nor do I like being overly politically correct. A button on my dresser says, “Being politically correct means always having to say you’re sorry.”

But I hope that my work doesn’t contain demeaning depictions of a whole group of people, and that I’d protest against it if it did.

Kathi Wolfe is a writer and poet. She writes frequently on disability issues. Her recent book “Helen Takes the Stage: The Helen Keller Poems” is published by Pudding House Press.

not going to help – at all,” Christopher Danielsen, an NFB spokesman, told the AP.

A statement from the American Council of the Blind read, in part, “The dehumanizing, animalistic

way that blind people are portrayed in this movie has blind people across the United States angry. Some are even organizing picket lines and staging protests at theaters where the movie is being shown.”

“The movie ‘Blindness’ is a demeaning depiction of people’s reaction to losing their eyesight,” said ACB president Mitch Pomerantz.

As you might expect, Miramax, a division of Walt Disney Company, didn’t apologize for “Blindness” or pull the film out of theaters as a result of the protests.

“We are saddened to learn that the National Federation of the Blind plans to protest the film ‘Blindness,”’ Miramax said in a statement before the film’s release. (Director Fernando Meirelles) “worked diligently to preserve the intent and resonance of the acclaimed book,” Miramax said, calling the novel “a courageous parable about the triumph of the human spirit when civilization But I hope that my work doesn’t contain demeaning depictions of a whole group of people, and that I’d protest against it if it did.

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Kathi Wolfe is a writer and poet. She writes frequently on disability issues. Her recent book “Helen Takes the Stage: The Helen Keller Poems” is published by Pudding House Press.

the paperwork to process that many provisional ballots. We ran out of the necessary forms and, again, everything came to a grinding halt until they arrived.

By the time the line started moving again, people were getting off work and out of afternoon classes. Some who had already been in line earlier that day came back following their afternoon classes. (Many who had left the line earlier so as not to miss their classes came back after we told them to return before 7 p.m.) Despite the long line, which wended its way around three sides of the building, everyone in it

Polling  
Continued from page 14

by 7 p.m. was allowed to vote.

The students waited with very little complaint. Some people found out about the long line on the local news, and a number of them brought food, drinks, guitars and sound systems. The last students voted about 11:45 p.m.; the last poll workers left about an hour later.

The supervisor of elections (who originally had been appointed to his office by former Gov. Jeb Bush) told reporters that part of the delay was due to poll worker errors. Later that day, He admitted that the delay at the university

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New Digital TV Era About to Dawn

Beginning February 17th, 2009, over-the-air -analog broadcast television will end in the United States

By Mike Reynolds

Beginning February 17th, 2009, over-the-air broadcast television will end in the United States and be replaced by digital broadcast services. It will mark the first change in the transmission of broadcast television since the TV’s invention.

Because of the impending change, many media outlets have mentioned the need for a digital-to-analog converter box, a fact that will disproportionately affect people with disabilities, a majority of whom rely on television for a large part of their daily information and entertainment.

To make the switch, a television watcher will need a digital-to-analog converter box. The government is giving out $40 dollar ATM cards that will be enough to offset the cost of a converter box. Several national retailers are offering the new converters for less than $40. A household that already uses cable services will not need a new converter. Each household is eligible to receive two coupons; there is a separate program for individuals who reside in nursing facilities.

The boxes will provide a much clearer picture for most viewers, and many Public Broadcasting Service stations nationally are planning to offer a second channel of content. The major television networks are also offering digital broadcast service, often in high definition, as well as independent local television stations.

In rural areas, however, low-power television services are not required to switch to a digital signal. Those who rely on low-power or repeater stations, the majority of which are small religious stations or community broadcast stations, may need an antenna that will also have an analog antenna or one that can work passively with an analog antenna. Some individuals may need to use an A-B switch to use their existing antenna and the digital converter box.

Many stations that serve rural areas of the U.S. may actually experience a decrease in coverage area because a digital signal does not cover as much area as an analog one. In Maine, for example, some communities, many of which are economically depressed, fall outside the coverage areas. Some of these areas, which are close to Canada, would receive analog signals from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation until 2011, the date that Canada is scheduled to switch to digital signals.

...there were some major problems that the early transition brought to light. The San Francisco Chronicle reported more than 1,000 calls to the FCC and local call centers concerning problems associated with the switch.

According to the National Association of Broadcasters, those who live in areas that will receive both digital and analog will need a converter box that receives both signals. That can cost more than $100, so a $40 coupon would be insufficient to offset that. TV watchers in those areas could use a “rabbit-ear” antenna or an A-B switch.

“The digital television transition has suffered from a lack of leadership and forethought,” said Jon Bartholomew, media and democracy campaign coordinator for Common Cause. “The process to get a converter box that works in your location can

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be difficult in the best of circumstances and almost prohibitively difficult for people with disabilities. Those who rely on crank TV sets for information in an emergency will be left out in the cold after the transition."

Bartholomew also discussed a June article in the Portland (Maine) Press Herald in which writer Tom Bell needed to go to the store several times in order to obtain the correct TV antenna and related how a person with a disability who relied on public transportation could spend several days, due to public bus schedules, to exchange unsuitable equipment because of incompatibility issues.

Bartholomew’s comments mirrored concerns in Wilmington, N.C., test site of the switch to the digital-only signal, instituted on September 8th. According to the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights (LCCR), a coalition of more than 180 national civil rights organizations, there were some major problems that the early transition brought to light. The San Francisco Chronicle reported more than 1,000 calls to the FCC and local call centers concerning problems associated with the switch. Although the majority of Wilmington residents who called already had converter boxes, many had not scanned for channels or their antennas were not installed correctly.

Despite a projected advertising budget of between $100,000 and $125,000, observers agreed that there were an extraordinary amount of problems in Wilmington, where only 7.4 percent of the residents relied solely on over-the-air television signals.

"That the financial and human resources spent in the Wilmington area to best prepare its residents for the pilot transition will not be replicated in every vulnerable community,” Nancy Zirkin, executive vice president of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights said in a statement. "The government should work closely with Wilmington to flag particular areas of concern that can be shared with local community organizations. With this information, community organizers can better mobilize public education efforts in the most vulnerable markets to make sure as few Americans as possible are left in the dark come February 17th, 2009." The LCCR has advocated various civil rights legislation for the past 50 years.

At an event signifying the 100-day mark to the switch to digital television, the LCCR issued further concerns about the accessibility to digital television in minority communities, especially among the elderly and people with disabilities. AARP and other national organizations made significant contributions at the event, and the American Association of People with Disabilities is launching an initiative to assist with information on digital converters for individuals with disabilities.

According to David Rehr, president and CEO of the National Association of Broadcasters, one of the biggest problems with the program is that many households will apply very late – possibly too late – for coupons. Because there are only a limited number of coupons available, many households may find themselves without a coupon. With more than 34 million coupons requested so far, Department of Commerce Secretary Carlos M. Gutierrez said that people need to apply now "in order to make sure to get one."

Though the switch to digital will provide space for extra channels and content from a local perspective, it may not significantly help with the broadcast of municipal meetings and other local areas of interest because there is no federal mandate for such broadcasting on digital television signals. Community-access television is mandated, but it is contingent on having a subscription to a local cable provider. Although annexes will be available to cable subscribers, anyone can produce content for community programs. One of the benefits of digital broadcasting is that DTV will be the primary standard.

Though digital video recorders can be extremely costly, the increase in new media sites such as YouTube has led to a proliferation of digital technology, from Apple’s iMovie to $150 digital cameras that can film at DVD quality. Stand-alone DVD recorders and DVD burners have become very inexpensive, and many community-access stations have programs that teach how to use that equipment to cover local events. An event could be recorded and transferred to DVD, then added to a video-sharing site such as YouTube, Google Video or Vimeo much easier than it would have been even three years ago.

The switch to digital TV could enable far more participation in community-access television and could benefit people with disabilities and other minority viewpoints on television. More information can be obtained at the Alliance for Community Media (www.ourchannels.org).

To receive a digital TV coupon, go to www.dvtr4.gov if you have Internet service or call the toll-free 24-hour automated system at 1-888-DTV-2009 (1-888-388-2009).

Opal Shelton Colvin is an advocate for people with disabilities and works with domestic abuse victims.
For Aging Baby Boomers, Retirement Road Looks Bumpy

By Patricio Figueroa, Jr.

The first of the vast U.S. baby boom generation (those born from 1946 to 1964) starting retiring in January 2008, setting off a demographic tidal wave with wide-ranging economic, political and social implications.

“Did you expect the road to retirement to be -- an expressway?” says actor Dennis Hopper, the pitchman for Ameriprise’s television commercials. You know retirement is now the big, hot thing because of the boom in commercials aimed at the retiring population.

People used to think of retirement as a time for traveling, going on cruises, taking up exotic hobbies like scuba diving, seeing the grandchildren twice a year. But now, retirement poses questions such as these: Will I outlive my nest egg? Or, worse, what is the economy going to be like when I retire?

That is the bind that many baby boomers find themselves in right now: an American dollar that is worth less every day, and spiraling costs for all the basics. The stock market is in the tank, and retirement funds have been devalued by nearly 40%. The safety nets, Social Security and Medicare, are in shambles. Thank God we didn’t go for those privatized Social Security accounts. Social Security looks better every day.

People with disabilities, who have typically not earned enough to have a 401(k) retirement account or IRA (Individual Retirement Account), generally contributed less than the maximum to Social Security. Even their disability benefits will not be as great as those of their non-disabled peers. Boomers with disabilities can expect a bagful of woes in the future, including increased costs for durable medical equipment, medications and personal care. In fact, it is the latter category that breaks the piggy bank for almost all PWDs (persons with disabilities) and non-disabled people.

By the time they are ready for retirement, almost all retirees will have some sort of disability or medical condition, whether it is arthritis, Alzheimer’s, heart disease, diabetes or something else. The baby boomers with disabilities have more health issues, which involve more medical care, medications, durable equipment and hospitalizations. Additionally, these boomers with disabilities face issues with housing, transportation and, most important, home care or long-term care (LTC). Usually, persons with disabilities live off their SSDI (Social Security Disability Insurance) checks and, for all intents and purposes, are retired. They may qualify for a waiver program, which restricts savings to no more than $2,000 in a savings account, or hope that the Community Choice Act is enacted by Congress.

So how can boomers with disabilities (BWD) plan for their retirement? The strategies for BWDs are as numerous as their numbers. Everyone’s situation is different. So let’s talk about the big things many of us can do.

For one, think the same way as baby boomers who are non-disabled. Have a dream, set a goal, and put the parts in sequence -- get on that expressway. Make a plan, Retirement is all about planning to achieve a realistic dream. Start by saving as much as you can even if it means doing some part-time work that does not meet the SGA (substantial gainful activity) criteria as defined by Social Security. Sell durable equipment, spare wheelchairs, hospital beds or unused medical supplies. Learn how to use selling Web sites such as eBay. Think of ways you can earn a little money or save some. Why? To have money to live on if you need Medicaid-paid home care.

Next, plan how to get into accessible subsidized housing, unless you already own your house. Keep in mind, however, that if you own your home, you probably will lose it to Medicaid if you need personal care services or LTC.

A Supplemental Needs Trust, a specialized legal document designed to benefit an individual who has a disability, is not the right answer for everyone. So avoid them if you can. Supplemental Needs Trusts make money for the state. If you have assets, think of liquidating them now or putting them in someone else’s name. For example, if you own your house (possibly through inheritance from your parents), refinance it, and put the money where the state cannot take it from you. Put it in your mattress if necessary.

People with disabilities have to learn to think like their non-disabled peers. If you’re on Supplemental Security Income (SSI), survival is topic one. Staying in the community is also a priority. As the new administration in Washington, D.C., prepares to take the reins of government, be aware that a universal health plan must also have a long-term-care component even if there is a small premium to pay.

Patricio Figueroa, Jr., a disability rights pioneer, is the publisher and editor of Independence Today.

Three Links You Should Have On Your Web Site:

WWW.IILUSA.COM
WWW.NCIL.ORG
WWW.AAPD-DC.ORG

This Book Is Available At Amazon.com
Inclusion Daily Express News Highlights
For September & October 2008

By David Reynolds

http://www.InclusionDaily.com

Accessibility
- ADA Applies To Airlines and Airports, Federal Judge Says
- Judge Orders Treasury Department To Quit Stalling On Accessible Currency
- Man Battles Burger King’s Barriers To ‘Have It His Way’
- Vermont Wheelchair Users Now Have Access To Appalachian Trail
- Appeals Court: Resort’s Renovations Are Enough To Make ADA Apply
- Colts' Stadium Responds To Complaints, Adds Up To 150 Accessible Parking Spots
- Advocates Find Barriers To Accessing Accessible Voting Machines
- Judge Orders Redskins To Continue Captions
- Schwarzenegger Signs Bill To Improve Accessibility, Reduce Lawsuits
- Family Wants “Y” To Follow Access Laws

Advocacy
- Police Arrest ADAPT Protesters At McCain Campaign HQ
- Martin Sheen Adds Voice Against Assisted Suicide Initiative
- Blind Activists Protest Movie ‘Blindness’
- Competency Term Goes To The Voters
- Governor Removes ‘Mental Retardation’ From Division’s Name
- Demonstrators Shut Down Traffic To Protest Inaccessible Bus Fleet
- Police Eject Advocates From McCain Rally
- Texas Campaign Calls For Banning R-word

Community Living
- Massachusetts Olmstead Plan Could Help Fernald Residents
- Laguna Honda Plaintiffs Celebrate Settlement’s Final Approval
- Pilot Project Will Inform Patients Of Alternatives To Nursing Homes
- Justice Department Sues Knoxville Developer For Fair Housing Violations
- Oregon Settles Civil Rights Suit By Providing More Pay For Man’s Caregivers
- Initiative Would Require More Training For Care Providers
- Board Approves Group Home Plan Despite Neighbor’s Worries
- Council Orders Neighbors To Get Along, Move

In other news

Construction Forward

Crimes Against People With Disabilities
- Hidden Cameras Catch Nursing Home Workers Mistreating Resident
- FBI Arrests Former NCED Officials On Corruption Charges
- Police Arrest Five On Kidnapping And Torture Charges
- Deputies Charge Five Institution Workers With 40 Counts Of Cruelty, Intimidating Witnesses
- Report: Women With Disabilities At Higher Risk Of Intimate Partner Violence
- Teacher Should Face Assault Charges, Parents Say

Criminal Justice System
- P&A Claims State Prisons Mistreat Inmates With Mental Illness
- Police Taser Man With Intellectual Disability
- Mom Says Jail Is No Place For 9-Year-Old Daughter

Education
- Mom: School Restrained Son Facedown For Four Hours
- Advocates And Parents Want Controls On Restraint Use In Schools
- Disability Rights NC Investigates Restraints, Handcuffs And “WWF Room” At School
- Appeals Court: Prospective Doctors Need Only Grant ADA Testing Accommodations
- Feds Order District To Improve Response To Parents’ Complaints

Employment
- EEOC Sues Hotel For Allowing Managers To Harass Worker
- Former Accessibility Specialist Gets $450,000 Payout Over Discrimination Claims
- State Fines Goodwill For Safety Violations After Worker’s Death
- Nursing Home Settles With Worker Over Discrimination Claims

Institutions
- State Announces Howe Developmental Center Will Close
- Justice Department To Investigate Institution For Alleged Civil Rights Violations
- State Says Historic People First Legal Win Should Be Tossed Out
- Oakwood Hopes Surprise Inspection Means Return Of Federal Funds
- Justice Department: Glenwood Problems Continue
Responses To Palin’s Disability Statement Show Wide Range Of Opinions
Study: Parents’ Stress Declines Over Time
Boy Saved By Autism?
Governor Asks Why Low-Income Housing Residents Were Left In Storm
New Wheelchair Would Take Rider To Destination With Spoken Command
Bush Signs Act To Restore ADA’s Intent
Economic Bailout Package Includes Mental Health Parity Provision
Palin Outlines “Special Needs” Proposals

ACCESSIBILITY
ADA Applies To Airlines and Airports, Federal Judge Says

DETROIT, MICHIGAN--A federal judge on September 2 denied a motion by Northwest Airlines to dismiss a lawsuit brought by five Detroit area residents with disabilities. The plaintiffs allege that Northwest fails to provide adequate assistance in the airport and on their planes. Judge George Caram Steeh said the Americans with Disabilities Act does apply to airports and airlines, opening the way for the case to move forward.

Judge Orders Treasury Department To Quit Stalling On Accessible Currency
WASHINGTON, DC--U.S. District Judge James Robertson has criticized the U.S Treasury Department for stalling on a May 20 court order to make paper currency accessible to blind Americans. Government attorneys argued that the judge should not interfere with the design process while the department works on ways to protect the bills from counterfeiters. The judge disagreed and ordered the department to design the next generation of $5, $10, $20 and $50 bills to be accessible so blind people could tell them apart.

Man Battles Burger King’s Barriers To ‘Have It His Way’
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA--Miguel Castaneda has filed a class action lawsuit against Burger King to force it to make its restaurants accessible to him and thousands of other Californians with disabilities. Castaneda’s suit accuses the fast-food chain of violating the ADA, along with California anti-discrimination laws, by failing to make accessible dining areas, parking lots, restrooms, ordering lines and ramps.

Vermont Wheelchair Users Now Have Access To Appalachian Trail
KILLINGTON, VERMONT--The first section of the Appalachian Trail in Vermont that is accessible to wheelchairs was officially opened in mid-September. The 900-foot boardwalk at Thundering Falls is the fourth accessible section of the scenic trail, which winds through 14 states from Maine to Georgia.

Colts’ Stadium Responds To Complaints, Adds Up To 150 Accessible Parking Spots
INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA--Officials with the Indiana Stadium and Convention Building Authority announced on September 19th that between 125 and 150 new parking spaces would be reserved for Indianapolis Colts fans with disabilities. Several fans had complained of the lack of accessible parking at Lucas Oil Stadium following the professional football team’s first home game.

Advocates Find Barriers To Accessing Accessible Voting Machines
NEW YORK, NEW YORK--The Center of Independence of the Disabled in New York conducted a poll site survey in Manhattan in September and found that many accessible voting machines were not easy to access. CIDNY said they went to 24 sites and found 21 of them had barriers such as poor signage.

Judge Orders Redskins To Continue Captions
GREENBELT, MARYLAND--In a decision that could affect sporting venues across the country, a federal judge ruled in early October that the Washington Redskins must caption play-by-play and songs at FedEx Field for deaf and hard-of-hearing fans. The Washington Post reported that the decision mandates that the team do much of what it began doing voluntarily after being sued by three fans.

Schwarzenegger Signs Bill To Improve Accessibility, Reduce Lawsuits
SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA--Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed a measure designed to encourage better access at California businesses, while reducing what critics called “frivolous” accessibility lawsuits. SB 1608 was the first of its kind that had the support of both political parties, along with business groups and disability groups.

Family Wants “Y” To Follow Access Laws
GREENWICH, CONNECTICUT--The family of Luis Gonzalez-Bunster are threatening to sue a Greenwich YMCA to force it to make its new facility accessible to wheelchair users. Gonzales-Bunster said that even though the Y has accessibility features inside, it does not have any ramps or lifts for him to get his wheelchair inside. The family is asking the operators to at least put up a temporary ramp while a more permanent solution is worked out.

Blind Activists Protest Movie ‘Blindness’
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND--Tens of thousands of blind Americans and other disability advocates joined picket lines and demonstrations across the country during the first weekend of October to protest the opening of the movie “Blindness.” They objected to the movie’s portrayal of blind people in a psychiatric institution that they claimed show them “as monsters.”

For more on these and other stories visit the Web site for Independence Today at: www.itodaynews.com
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