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**Leveraging Higher Education to Improve Employment Outcomes
for People who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing**

Good morning, Chairman Harkin, Senator Enzi, Members of the Committee and esteemed Gallaudet colleagues and friends. My name is Seth Bravin. I am a strategic industries program manager at the IBM Corporation. In this role, I am responsible for managing strategy and solutions for the IBM Human Ability and Accessibility Center. During my nine years at IBM, I have hosted several company-sponsored technology camps for high school students who are deaf and hard of hearing, and I currently serve on the Board of Directors for the Lexington School for the Deaf and the Maryland Association of the Deaf.

As a deaf professional and committed advocate for the rights and inclusion of all people with disabilities, I am honored to appear before this Committee to discuss leveraging higher education to improve employment outcomes for people who are deaf and hard of hearing, a subject that is both a personal passion and a partial focus of my job at IBM.

I also am here to bring to the Committee's attention several public policy issues that inhibit our collective ability to fully enable this segment of the U.S. population to not only obtain gainful employment, but to develop meaningful and economically viable careers. I will address difficulties associated with recruiting, hiring and retention of people with disabilities and the accessibility of information and communications technologies in workplaces and institutions of higher learning. I will conclude with recommendations for the Committee's consideration. It is our hope that the Committee will review these recommended topics during the current Congressional session.

These ongoing challenges are the consequence of lingering cultural discomfort with disabilities and attitudes facing people with disabilities, here in the United States and around the world. Put another way, it is overcoming the "fear of the unknown" regarding the people with disabilities that is the greatest inhibitor to employment and a fully inclusive workplace. These issues, identified by a 2007 study[i] conducted by the National Council on Disability, include areas like education, training, and transportation.

My Personal Story

I'll begin with a brief overview of my own journey, which I believe is relevant to the topic of today's hearing. I was born deaf. My parents, who are also deaf, both attended and graduated from college. My father was also an IBMer for nearly 25 years. Both worked hard to achieve success in work and life, and I benefited significantly not only from their personal experiences and professional lessons learned, but also from an enormously supportive home environment that encouraged my ambition and stressed the importance of giving back to the community.

Growing up, my parents taught me that my deafness was not a limiting factor, but an important part of who I was as a person. Early on, I learned that my deafness was a trait that helped me facilitate the development of an extra set of skills and entirely unique perspectives that could add real value in learning and work environments. It was my parents' positive attitudes and certainty in my ability to succeed that made me determined to pursue a degree in higher education at Gallaudet University.

Gallaudet is an amazing institution that provides students who are deaf and hard of hearing with the environment, role models, technology and tools to really succeed in higher education. For students who are willing to challenge themselves, Gallaudet also offers formative experiences that directly contribute to easing the transition into the workforce for people who are deaf and setting them up for success.

For example, thanks to Gallaudet's consortium program with more than a dozen other universities, I was able to take finance courses at Georgetown University. Here, I was not only exposed to a different set of top-notch educators and role models, but I was able to build confidence in my ability to communicate effectively in a hearing world.

At Gallaudet, I also learned from and regularly interacted with qualified instructors who were also deaf and hard of hearing professionals actively engaged in both the academic and private-sector workforce. These important people played a pivotal part in helping me believe not only that I could get a challenging job, but achieve any goal I set for myself personally or professionally.

After graduating with honors in 1996, I spent five years working in consulting and corporate law. At the same time, I taught for several summers at the Gallaudet Leadership Institute, which nurtured a passion for giving back to my community and helped me continue to develop critical leadership skills. Shortly afterward, I attend Cornell University where I obtained my Masters of Business Administration. Near the end of my time there, IBM recruiters made a trip to campus. I interviewed and shortly afterward accepted a position with the company where, as I mentioned earlier, my father worked for more than two decades.

While I have much to say about my nine years with this exceptional company, I want to first stress that my educational and professional success would not have been possible without the support of my incredible family and the opportunities afforded to me here at Gallaudet. The importance of family attitudes and tailored, challenging higher education learning experiences, facilitated by deaf and hard of hearing role models for students who are deaf or hard of hearing cannot be overstressed. In fact, one of my role models, Fred Weiner is here today. He had a rewarding career with AT&T and is now the Executive Director of Program Development at Gallaudet.

Not all young people with disabilities are so lucky. More than 90 percent of deaf children are born into hearing families.[ii] Some hearing parents are able to provide the necessary resources to raise a successful deaf or hard of hearing child. Other parents, however loving and supportive, do not have the same personal tools, resources and life lessons to share. Enabling the full societal inclusion of people who are deaf and hard of hearing as well as the much larger total population of people with disabilities simply cannot be accomplished by any one entity. Governments, advocacy groups, non-government organizations, institutions of higher learning, and employers must, where possible, partner to provide what many families cannot, either from lack of personal experience, finances, perspective or ability.

Together, through visionary policies and programs, I believe we can find new ways to support, encourage and enable the equal participation and success of people with disabilities throughout

primary, secondary and post-secondary education systems, in the workforce, and in society at large.

How higher education institutions can help

Clearly, higher education institutions play a vital role in helping improve employment outcomes for students who are deaf or have hearing loss. Certainly the culture of inclusion that I alluded to earlier matters a great deal. Modern and accessible technology is also critical, but let me share a few additional thoughts regarding my educational experience and how higher education institutions can really help as it pertains to employment and employment readiness.

- First, at the risk of belaboring the point, the power of **successful deaf and hard of hearing role models** simply cannot be underestimated. I remember one professor at Gallaudet who worked at Merrill Lynch and another from Cornell who worked on Wall Street. While my professor at Cornell was not deaf, for me, having exposure to a professional who had real working experience on Wall Street made a tremendous impression. Through my relationships with these professors, I saw firsthand how they thrived in the workplace. This gave me the assurance and determination to pursue my goals.

- Second, opportunities for deaf students to develop **communication and leadership skills** are absolutely essential to preparing them for success in the workplace. I, for example, served on the Student Congress representing my class at Gallaudet. Universities and colleges can help by providing more of these kinds of opportunities and strongly encouraging students with hearing loss to take advantage of them.

- The third and perhaps most overlooked thing that students, colleges and universities can do for the deaf or hard of hearing is provide ample opportunities for **collaborative team-oriented work**. When I was in business school, professors often assigned three or four students to work together for an entire semester on group projects. We met during the evenings and on weekends and only sometimes did the interpreter join us. Other times we used instant messaging and email to communicate. The experience really taught me and my classmates how to be creative and flexible in communicating and how to work as a team regardless of disability.

- Next, I'd like to talk briefly about the importance of **diversity**. At Cornell, we had students from more than 30 countries. Each brought with them different perspectives and cultural experiences. For me personally, it was interesting to watch how students were able to adapt to life at business school. I remember one student from China who had never visited the United States before and we were assigned to the same group for one semester. That was a successful experiment of inclusion and diversity that I will never forget. The opportunity to create personal relationships with people who are different is an important element in how we improve understanding and flatten unhelpful stereotypes.

- At the post-secondary level, support from **Career Centers** is also extremely important. Students who are deaf or hard of hearing need personalized help to understand the best ways to position their education, previous experience and unique skill sets to potential employers. Resume development, mock interviews and presentations with the alumni in the working

world are all valuable ingredients for a successful launch into the business world. Now that I am with IBM, I am occasionally asked to speak about my IBM experiences at Gallaudet University. Based on the response from students, I almost always walk away feeling as though I've made a real difference for some of them.

- The final, but probably most important service colleges and universities can offer are **internship connections**. Internships represent the number one critical success factor for obtaining a job in the "real world" of work. I call internships a long-term interview. When done correctly, companies and students with disabilities generally have surprisingly positive experiences. More often than not, internships give employers the opportunity to see first hand that hiring and employing a person with a disability isn't as hard as they previously believed. Students with disabilities too, are often pleasantly surprised to find that they are perfectly capable of functioning in an able-bodied workplace when paired with employers who are willing to accommodate their needs.

In today's competitive work world, it is the rare graduate who can expect to land a good job without some kind of internship experience. For students with disabilities, this previous work experience is even more essential.

How employers like IBM can help

Employers, too, play a critical role in improving employment outcomes for people with disabilities — including people who are deaf or have hearing loss. I'm proud to say that IBM has a long history of commitment to hiring people with disabilities and innovating to accommodate for their unique technology needs within the workplace and marketplace.

Diversity policies and programs:

When IBM first began exploring accessible technology innovation, it was due in part to an ongoing need to support our own workforce, which has always been extraordinarily diverse. In fact, for more than 100 years, IBM has embraced the concept of equal employment opportunity. We have aggressively pursued our own corporate policies and practices due to the deep and abiding belief of our founder, Thomas J. Watson, Sr., who in 1914 hired the first IBMer with a disability, 59 years before the U.S. Rehabilitation Act and 76 years before the Americans with Disabilities Act.

IBM has been embracing diversity and inclusion to drive innovation throughout the company since our founding. Our diversity milestones:

- **1899**:   We hired our first black and female employees.

- **1914**:   We hired our first IBMer with a disability

- **1934**:   We recruited our first professional women, three decades before the Equal Pay Act. IBM's founder, T.J. Watson Sr., also promised women "the same kind of work for equal pay." We also created focused development programs for those women so that they developed skills for critical jobs that were previously viewed as "men's jobs."

- **1941**: We hired Michael Supta, a blind psychologist, to recruit 181 people with disabilities. Dr. Supta's motto was "No person is handicapped if he or she has the right job."

Since 1995, IBM has increased its number of identified executives with disabilities 200 percent.

We also look at the specific jobs people with disabilities perform. We found that 58 percent of employees with disabilities are in key skill groups.

People with disabilities hold or have held job titles at IBM that include IBM Fellow, our highest technical level, Vice President, Director of Benefits, Director, IBM Human Ability and Accessibility Center, Global Solutions Director of Business Development; Director of Workforce Communications, Distinguished Engineer; Software Engineer; Development Engineer; IT Architect; Sales and Marketing Specialist.

These are high-level jobs that directly impact our clients. That means IBMers with disabilities contribute to the bottom line of our business — by serving clients, advancing technology or earning patents.

I'd like to take a moment and showcase one of my colleagues who embodies IBM's values and possesses the work ethic I just described.

> Dr. Dimitri Kanevsky is an IBM Master Inventor with more than 100 patents to his name. Deaf since the age of three, Dimitri exhibited an aptitude for math early on, attending a special school for mathematically-gifted children in the Soviet Union. In 1969 he entered Moscow State University, where he went on to receive both his Master's and PhD in math.

> Today Dimitri, 24-year IBMer, creates new technologies at the Watson research center in New York. His work includes human language technologies, communications technologies for accessibility, and speech recognition. Notably, his work has directly benefited clients in the auto industry and law enforcement. He is a role model for many.

IBM has worked diligently to develop an end-to-end approach for recruiting, hiring and retaining IBMers with disabilities. We began by establishing a Global Accommodations Guideline requiring all new buildings to have barrier-free design, upgrades automatically including accessibility; and case-by-case reviews when IBMers with disabilities join the company or change work locations. We also created corporate IT standards to ensure our technology and tools were accessible to all of our employees.

Over time, our holistic approach expanded to include:

- **13 Diversity Network Groups** for IBMers with Disabilities. These groups come together to provide support for our people with disabilities and to engage the larger IBM community to raise awareness and understanding about our people with disabilities.

- **Diversity Councils** within every business unit worldwide.

- People with Disabilities **Technical Leaders Forum** held every two years.

- **Online communities and forums** on our company intranet.

- A **Cost Recovery Program** that removes the cost of accommodations for disabled employees from the individual manager's budget to ensure that hiring and promotion decisions are based on skill and talent. Since instituting this process, IBM has spent about $2 million a year accommodating employees worldwide.

- Internships and mentoring programs — past and present — specifically tailored to people with disabilities, such as:

  - **Entry Point**: A program developed between the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), IBM, and NASA, IBM has placed 191 students with disabilities in summer/internships and hired 44 students to regular employment. As an IBMer, I joined Entry Point's booth at Gallaudet's annual career fair to help with recruiting.

  - **Lift**: A nonprofit program that trains computer programmers and analysts with substantial physical disabilities and then contracts for up to a year with companies like IBM.

  - **Project View:** An IBM diversity recruitment program offering Latino, African American, Asian, Women, Persons with Disabilities and Native American, BA, BS, MS, and PhD students the opportunity to explore IBM's national career options. This has been as especially successful path into IBM for many people with disabilities. I personally know a number of deaf colleagues who first identified career opportunities at IBM through the Project View program.

- **Reverse mentoring sessions** in which senior IBM executives meet with IBMers with disabilities from around the world to discuss personal experiences, viewpoints on our company culture, accessible technology solutions for our workplace and career progression.

At IBM, we believe it's not enough to hire people with disabilities — we want them to thrive as well as aspire to, and attain leadership roles.

Finally, with respect to employers and people with disabilities, I'd like to mention the importance of creating appropriate and responsive **support systems,** not just for people with disabilities, but for key professionals as well. For example, IBM human resources (HR) professionals supply the perspective and experience necessary to help hiring managers make informed decisions and provide unique approaches to problem solving. In addition, hiring managers and HR professionals sometimes contact me for advice to help with the transition of a new employee with a disability. I also reach out to new employees who are deaf or hard of hearing to give them a warm welcome. Other IBMers with disabilities do this as well. It simply is part of our culture and it's one of the reasons why IBM is continually recognized as a top employer for people with disabilities.

Accessible information and communications technologies: The 'Great Equalizer'

Accessible information and communications technologies level the playing field for people with disabilities, including people who are deaf and those with hearing loss. In fact, technology is the 'great equalizer' for people with disabilities.

I am proud to highlight of IBM's contributions to helping transform the information and assistive technology landscape to advance digital inclusion of all people include:

- 1975: First Braille printer
- 1980: Talking typewriter for people who are blind
- 1988: Screen Reader/DOS - One of the first screen reading products in the world. The word "screen reader" is now used as the name of the category of software.
- 1990: Voice Type and Via Voice (1998) technologies, which have roots in research for helping people who are deaf and hard of hearing.
- 1997: IBM Home Page Reader - The first practical screen reader and voice browser product in the world.
- 2003: Web Accessibility Technology (WAT) - Named '2003 Product of the Year' by the National Disabilities Council.
- 2004: IBM CaptionMeNow - Enabled deaf and hard of hearing users to attain captioning for corporate Webcasts and podcasts on demand.
- 2008: IBM AbilityLab Sametime Language Translator - Provides multilingual translation of IBM® Lotus® Sametime® chats to enhance collaboration between colleagues who speak different languages.
- 2008: IBM AbilityLab Sametime Conference Transcriber - Delivers speech-to-text capability for IBM® Lotus® Sametime® text and voice chat to allow people who are deaf and hard of hearing to more actively participate in meetings and teleconferences.
- 2009: IBM AbilityLab Captioner and Editor - Delivers cost-effective solution for real-time captioning of rich media content.
- 2010: IBM AbilityLab Voice Chat Transcriber - Enables automatic, real time transcriptions of conversations conducted through Voice over VoIP applications for people who are deaf and hard of hearing.

For me personally, without technology I would not be as competitive or productive in the workplace as I am now — if at all. IBM is, not surprisingly, adept at creating and maintaining the right ecosystems to support IBMers with disabilities. When I came to work here in 2003, the company already had relationships in place with interpreting and captioning agencies so that I could be productive from day one. This kind of approach by employers is crucial to supporting the success of new IBMers with disabilities.

The reality is that in today's agile office workplace, everything is connected, collaborative, and dynamically changing. Workers communicate via e-mail, instant messaging, and Web conferencing. Documents, reports, and calendars are all electronic. Business processes are now managed via online applications. Social media sites (Facebook, Twitter), news feeds, and Web applications (Google docs) are increasingly being used, and social capabilities are being incorporated into enterprise applications to drive new levels of global collaboration and innovation.

In many ways, this technology-based workplace creates an environment where workers with disabilities can have the flexibility to participate more equally and fully. Often however, these technologies were designed and launched without the ability to accommodate the needs of all people with disabilities. Audio-visual content creates difficulties for those with hearing and vision disabilities. Small devices require fine motor skills, which individuals with limited mobility or dexterity may not have. And the cognitive load is a challenge for those with cognitive disabilities.

For the potential of an inclusive workplace to be realized, current and future workplace technologies should be optimized for accessibility and standardized. IBM has made a commitment to advancing global standards and legislation in accessibility. We have led and contributed to the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) Web Contents Accessibility Guidelines (1999, 2010); U.S. Rehabilitation Act, Section 508 (2001); W3C Accessible Rich Internet Applications (2009). We continue to lead and contribute to 25 working groups in standards organizations worldwide, with the goal of harmonized international accessibility standards.

Fundamentally, accessibility is about democratizing access to information and services for everyone — regardless of age or ability — to support full and active participation in the workforce and society.

Finally, in addition to advancing accessibility for our clients and the world, IBM has retained a dedication to innovation on behalf our employees. In 2009, IBM developed a first-of-a-kind integrated IT solution, Accessible Workplace Connection (AWC), to bring together all of the company's processes, accommodations, intelligence and accessibility innovation into a single, integrated and globally-managed solution for IBMers with disabilities, their managers, and the human resources staff that support them.

Designed to deliver a "one stop" accommodations resource, the first version of AWC was released late last year and has already begun streamlining requests for items like screen readers and live captioning for teleconferences as well as centralizing the delivery processes. In the coming year, enhanced collaboration capabilities within AWC will also enable employees and established IBM communities to leverage the experiences of coworkers around the globe and ensure consistency in how accommodations are made and used throughout different geographies.

Increasing the hiring of people with disabilities

Having addressed some of IBM's best practices for recruiting, hiring and retaining employees with disabilities, I'd like to talk about the need for employers to increase the hiring of people with disabilities, including those who are deaf and hard of hearing.

First, take a look around the room. Take note of the blackberries, cell phones, or even laptops that either you have or the person next to you has. If you haven't noticed, the world of work has indeed changed. The new normal for work no longer is the traditional 9 to 5 workplace or is based upon a continuous Monday-Friday routine. The new normal work is characterized by rapid changes in technology and dynamic markets where clients want 24/7 availability of our systems and services. These new technologies and client expectations create greater opportunities for the kind of flexible work options that increase employment options for people with disabilities. This

is the new world of work — a world I believe is extending a hand to people with disabilities to not only participate, but to lead. IBM's workforce model recognizes this new normal in work.

At IBM, we seek to create an inclusive culture for our workforce, which include many of the concepts I just mentioned. Since 1995, IBM has measured our global journey toward inclusion through the representation of our people, the transformation of IBM culture, and the behavior expected of us as outlined by our company values. For those of you not familiar with our values, they are:

- Dedication to every client's success
- Innovation that matters — for our company and for the world
- Trust and personal responsibility in all relationships

Today, approximately 3,000 IBMers around the world have self-identified as having a disability, and we estimate that people with disabilities represent 1-3% percent of our global population, all the while remembering that disclosing one's disability is a very personal and private matter which is not mandatory.

The role of government in easing transitions from education to employment

I include people with all types of sensory and mobility challenges because there are certain practical realities that must be addressed for each of these groups to enable them to effectively transition from post-secondary education to the workforce.

A major barrier to employment for people with disabilities is accessible **transportation**. According to the latest National Organization on Disability/Harris Survey (2010), [iii] people with disabilities are twice as likely to have inadequate transportation when compared to the mainstream population (34 percent versus 16 percent).

Lack of mobility is a major inhibitor not only to obtain a job, but also if one aspires to a leadership role. The inability to travel, or the perception that one cannot travel easily, may even remove people with disabilities from consideration for a variety of jobs, making career advancement more difficult. Government and business must continue to partner and look at transportation from the perspective of people with disabilities.

Another critical issue facing people with disabilities transitioning to work is that of **assistive technology**. The Harris survey I referenced also reported that Americans with disabilities not only rely on assistive technology, but a third reported they would lose their independence without it. Many assistive technology accommodations cost as little as $500.00. At IBM, we've found that investments in technology can help enable incredibly capable IBMers to reach their highest potential and productivity. .

Recommendations

For education institutions:

Plan with accessibility in mind. As the planet progresses with increasing speed towards a fully knowledge-based economy, driven and enabled by advanced technology, one thing is certain: Education will be a critical determinant of success in the 21st century.

Despite sweeping global economic changes since 2008, demand for knowledge workers with specialized skills continues to grow by 11 percent a year. Many of these jobs will require lifelong training and continuous updating of skills. Fulfilling global workforce requirements while adjusting to new stakeholder expectations for highly personalized and individualized learning experiences, is difficult at best, especially given dramatic changes in the student landscape.

Global technology, government policy and demographic trends are converging to drive the transformation of 21st century models for education. CIOs and administrators of today's higher education institutions must manage changing expectations with new economic realities to create smarter systems that deliver on diverse stakeholder demands.

Planning with accessibility in mind from the outset can not only reduce long term costs, but lays the foundation for an inclusive culture and improves access to education for the entire workforce. At IBM, 80% of our learning content is online and enables our employees to access both knowledge and the expertise of their global colleagues. Taking a holistic, enterprise-wide approach to accessibility integration from the outset, enables cost-effective compliance with current and emerging legislation.

IBM continues to invest in research innovations and business insights essential to address end-to-end accessibility requirements facing today's higher education institutions. Accessible technology solutions can enable a culture of inclusion, especially in education and learning where ability—and the expansion, development and improvement of individual abilities — is the key metric.

For employers: Make accessibility a core business value

IBM defines an inclusive smarter workplace as one that includes seamless integration of:

- Smarter applications that are designed, implemented and deployed to support the requirements of all users.
- Consumable information in the form of web sites, documents, presentations and media that is enabled for accessibility.
- Tools and applications that support inclusive collaboration between all individuals, some of whom may have disabilities.

To realize the goal of a more inclusive smarter workplace, employers must elevate accessibility to a core business value, comparable to security, with associated processes and risk management. It must be:

- Included in corporate policy
- Designed into the workplace governance processes and infrastructure

- Measured and assigned a risk value
- Reported

For government: Enact and enforce modern, clear and relevant labor laws

In the 21st century, the economy is characterized by technological innovation, dynamic structural and market shifts, new business models, new workforce management models and changing labor pools. Thus, how work gets done and where it gets done is vastly different than it was a mere decade ago. We have embraced this change at IBM.

For us, the world of work is characterized by a philosophy that work is something one does, not a place one goes. We firmly believe that enabling our employees to manage their work and personal lives is a business imperative, one where technology enables all employees, including those with special needs, to work from anywhere, at any time they choose. However, elements of our labor law and associated regulations are stuck in the old ways of the early 20th Century, limiting our ability to comprehensively offer flexible work options to our entire U.S. population. The solution is a modern, clear and relevant labor law that reflects today's workforce needs where more flexible work options are not only desired and encouraged, but also permitted.

A shared responsibility: Build the employment candidate pipeline

Perhaps one of IBM's greatest challenges in continuing to increase the employment of people with disabilities in our global workforce is the lack of qualified candidates. Federal and State governments can help by creating incentive programs that begin with primary and secondary education systems and extend through to post-secondary institutions for higher learning.

Educational systems at all levels should be incentivized to:

- Create inclusive environments in which K-12 students with disabilities are fully integrated into mainstream classrooms and given the tools and technology to participate.

- Support deaf schools serving K-12 students and provide innovative tools and technology to allow students to reach their potential.

- Promote a focus on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) education for all students, with a special emphasis on identified students with disabilities who have aptitudes in these subject areas.

- Require IT accessibility training as a core component of K-12 Teacher certification within each State.

- Require universities that offer teacher credentialing or continuing education courses to increase annually the percent of their staff and administrators who have successfully completed IT accessibility training until they have reached 85% (combined).

- Require IT accessibility courses to be mandatory academic coursework for all STEM degree programs as a pre-requisite for any university receiving Federal research grant funding – either directly or indirectly.

Establish a **national clearinghouse** for vendors and content that can be used by States as part of their teacher credentialing/continuing education.

Provide **tax incentives** to businesses that establish internship and co-op programs specifically for students with disabilities.

Create a **private-sector resource** similar to the public sector Job Accommodations Network to assist small and medium size business in providing accommodations to support recruiting and hiring of interns, co-ops and employees with disabilities.

Partner with state governments, city transit authorities and employers to develop viable, **cost-effective solutions that address transportation barriers** for people with disabilities**.**

Conclusion

As I said at the beginning of my testimony, IBM's research and experience suggest that improving employment outcomes for people with disabilities — including people who are deaf or have hearing loss — cannot be achieved by any single public or private entity. This work requires collaboration among business, government, advocacy groups, academia and non-Government Organizations. Only through a collaborative ecosystem can we affect real and lasting change. Furthermore, we can all do more when it comes to inclusion and being comfortable with people who are different than we are — not just people with disabilities.

For some employers today, the inclination is to think that if a person has a disability, the employment issue can be handled by simply providing technology that enables an employee to work from home. In some cases that may be true or even necessary. But it's critical for people with disabilities to be visible and in the workplace. To overcome those lingering societal misconceptions I mentioned earlier, a professional with a disability must be fully integrated into the workplace, not isolated.

I'm sure there are many organizations that will hire a person with a disability with the right skills for a job, but how many have the vision to consider that same person to run their company or organization?

Today's institutions of higher learning can help by preparing students with disabilities to lead. By giving them the skills, role models, experiences and technology tools necessary for success, universities and colleges help lay the foundation of confidence necessary for students who are deaf, have hearing loss or any other physical or sensory disability to pursue and attain not just jobs, but *careers*. They can also help by increasing the visibility and integration of people with disabilities in their institutions so that our future workers and leaders enter the workplace with a higher level of awareness about this community.

Employers can make a difference by creating cultures that celebrate diversity and inclusion and provide the policies, processes and technology tools to support it. At my company, when a person is hired at IBM, they are immediately labeled an IBMer. There is no avoiding it. This label is not about whether you are a person with a disability, male or female. Nor is it about what

color you are or where you call home. It is a label that comes with enormous pride and sense of community.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I hope my personal experiences, the IBM history and practices I have discussed, and our suggestions for related reforms, are helpful.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

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i   National Council on Disability study. "Empowerment for Americans with Disabilities: Breaking Barriers to Careers and Full Employment." 2007. (http://www.ncd.gov/newsroom/2007/10012007

ii   Deaf Understanding. "Facts about Deafness." (http://www.deafunderstanding.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=11)

iii   Kessler Foundation/NOD 2010 Survey of Americans with Disabilities (www.**2010**disability**surveys**.org/pdfs/**survey**results.pdf)