**Host (Lawrence Carter-Long):** Hello and welcome to CONVERSATIONS WITH THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ON DISABILITY. In this, our inaugural edition, we’ll speak with NCD Chair Clyde Terry about the importance of a story, what’s even better than finding a job and, for him, how it all began with the bearded man of New Hampshire.

Who are the bearded man of New Hampshire? NCD Chair Clyde Terry explains.

**Clyde Terry:** I was working for the developmental disabilities Council… A gentleman Larry Robinson who was director of The Independent Living Center in the state and Lee Purcley, who was an attorney for the Disability Rights Center.

We came together, in the case of Mr Robinson he couldn't get into a polling place unless the police officer came outside to get a smoke. For myself, I’m blind, I could never get a ballot that I could use privately owned independently house had to rely on someone else. Lee, was an advocate at heart, we all happened to have beards. We first tried to change the law in New Hampshire and were told “well, there's not much we can do here, you’ll have to go to Washington” and amazingly what we found is when we talked to folks with disabilities here in the beltway, is that everybody had a story or knew someone else had a story of problems with voting. We eventually got a small bill introduced in the Senate. The voting franchise became an important part of the national landscape. Sort of like ‘Mr. Smith Goes To Washington’ we tried to make a difference and at the end of the day I think we have.

**Host:** A real life example of how everything improves, how we’re all stronger when we're able to come together?

**Clyde Terry:** That's right. We don't do well when we fragment ourselves and segment ourselves. We're stronger when we recognize that we all have a joint interest in supporting the disability community as a whole.

**Host:** What are the milestones in terms of the work that NCD has done that you feel are significant? And are really informing the work that we're doing today?

**Clyde Terry:** The still landmark piece of work is the first versions of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The idea that person with disabilities shall not be discriminated against in all aspects of American life, that clearly is a touchstone and landmark, but I'm sure back then when folks at the Council started this conversation, there were those that said, “Oh no, that couldn't be done. That's impossible ‘cause people with disabilities for whatever reasons, you know, should not have the same rights as everyone else. We have to make exceptions.”

I'm sure that was the conversation at the time but here we are twenty-five years later and sometimes we still hear some of those voices. For example, the Council did a report on sub-minimum wage. The Council’s view is not so much look at today, let's look at tomorrow. We don't know what technology, healthcare, education, is going to do for all our citizens – including folks with disabilities, so we can’t have a public policy that discriminates. We need to have a public policy that includes.

**Host:** So, for those who may not be in the disability community and might not know what subminimum wage is, they’ll probably be shocked even know that such a thing exists, just give people a little overview.

**Clyde Terry:** In the thirties, Congress, I'm sure had the best intentions in mind. Given the nature of labor at the time, perhaps they thought that disabled workers should not get the same wages as people without disabilities but that was the 30s, we are 50, 60, 70 years past that time. Advances in technology, attitudes have changed, health care has changed, education has changed. We invest in education for all children with disabilities, why do we still have a public policy on the books that says they could receive only a dollar an hour or less?

**Host:** And so, just as we're not driving around in Model T’s anymore, policy marches on, and this is one of those areas that perhaps the policy hasn’t caught up with the ways that people are thinking or what even the expectations of disabled people are as we embark on 2016.

**Clyde Terry:** That's right I grew up at a time pre-ADA, pre-IDEA, pre any legislation that protect the rights of kids with disabilities. To get up to go see the blackboard I would stand up and the teacher would say to me “well you can look at it but don't get in the way of those students because they need to read it.” Well, I needed to read it too but my rights, my interest in having an education was not the same as everybody else. I was told in any number of times that I'll never finish school, that “there's a shoe factory in town you should probably just go work there now. You're taking up space in school.”

That was the attitude in the 50s. We’ve changed since then. And so this law that still has old attitudes about the possibilities for folks with disabilities needs to change too. I’m proud that the Council has voted over time to end that practice as a matter of policy.

NCD needs to continue to make sure that we continue to look around the corner, make sure we could eliminate any of the other artificial barriers that prevent people from being as successful as they want to be. It is important that we learn from history and make sure that people with disabilities are not scapegoats for other problems.

**Host:** What you mean by that?

**Clyde Terry:** The perception that folks with mental illness are a threat to our society. To not demonize the individual. The response to that is to make sure that we have an adequate mental health system, adequately funded, so that people can get the support they need. So they can indeed be the best that they choose to be. So they can be contributing, productive members of our society because we can't afford to waste any of the skills or talents of anybody. We need to be able to step back and say, “the solution here is a systemic solution of adequate support for folks who have different types of mental health psychiatric disabilities.”

**Host:** There is a resistance even to the word. So then how do you bring people together, to organize, to fight for their rights, to actually be that kind of voting bloc, or that constituency that politicians pay attention to?

**Clyde Terry:** It is remarkable. I was just in a taxi here in DC and the taxi driver was, he was losing his sight, and he said one of the most amazing things about America is that you are accepting, that you are working to find ways to include people who are blind, include that person using a wheelchair that I just left on the sidewalk but fact of the matter is that America is a place where we're trying to find ways to make sure everyone can participate and his country doesn't do that, so he is proud to be here. I think this community has to be proud that that's what we stand for and that's what we're trying to achieve.

It is a community that is broader, incorporates more, if not everyone at some point in time in their lives so I would resist saying that this is just a disability agenda. It has to be an American agenda.

**Host:** And one of the ways that NCD has always tried to make sure that America's agenda is NCD’s agenda is by requesting public comment at our meetings. How does public comment inform NCD’s work?

**Clyde Terry:** The voting issue never would have come to the attention to anyone here if the three bearded man didn't continuously come down for weeks on end putting the issue in front. The only way to understand what are people really thinking, what are they feeling, is to get out of DC periodically and hear from people.

**Host:** What are people saying? What do you see as the next big issue on the horizon for NCD and for the disabled community?

**Clyde Terry:** In our society money is power, and we need to be in a place where we are viewed as an economic engine just like any other group. One way to get there is to encourage the disability community to stop arguing about getting into the coffee shop – it's about time they own it, and we need to have government policies that support such changes so that folks with disabilities can acquire wealth, can acquire assets, so that they can flex some economic muscle in the marketplace. We have a strong independent living program across the country but the best definition of independent living is a paycheck and money in the bank.

**Host:** How can a federal agency like NCD help disabled Americans achieve those goals?

**Clyde Terry:** The beauty of NCD, the National Council on Disability, is that it is cross-disability in that has the fortune to sort of look around the corner in terms of what's coming next, (and ask) what are the barriers that people are experiencing today and think about how can we address them in a policy framework so that those barriers could be eliminated for generations to come.

**Host:** Thank you Clyde Terry for joining us on this, the first edition of CONVERSATIONS WITH THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ON DISABILITY.

If you’d like to find out more about the work that we do, please go to our website: ncd.gov

Until next time, I’m your host, Lawrence Carter-Long.