



NCTI 2008 Innovators Conference

Session Title	Creating an Inclusive Workforce
Names of Presenters	Secretary Thomas E. Perez
Date	Thursday, November 20, 2008

Summary Secretary Thomas E. Perez, Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing & Regulation, gave a rousing address that stressed the role of workforce creation and economic stability is dependent upon an investment in human capital and the harnessing of technology to make the most of the opportunities and information.

Secretary Perez outlined his four values statements:

- 1. Every single child is gifted and talented.** It is the duty of parents, teachers, and businesses to draw out those talents.
- 2. A college degree is wonderful, but not everyone needs to have degree to succeed.** Understanding where the jobs are coming from in America is essential.
- 3. Technology is our ally in the quest to ensure everyone has skills necessary to succeed.**
- 4. There is no such thing as a spare Marylander – or anyone else.**

We need to do our best to make sure that underutilized groups are utilized. Under- and unemployment for people with disabilities is unacceptably high. We need to invest in improving learning for people with disabilities because if you're not focusing on making sure people have jobs when they get that education, what are you doing?! Maryland is also working to educate business people about skills and opportunities for people with disabilities in workforce. Maryland has a Chief Technology Officer now and that is a big step in the right direction.

How to get involved in your community:

- Have a conversation in the K -12 system about the kind of interaction are you having with employers concerning people with disabilities.
- Have conversations with the Governors' Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Board. For example, Maryland is offering the GED online. For people with day jobs and families they're caring for, online is more convenient, it's a win-win situation. There is an increase in the number of people who are up-skilling and people who can move up economic ladder. One of the biggest barriers to employment for people with disabilities is transportation; telecommuting allows people to work from home.
- Another conversation to have is with the federal government on how to reform the government. (Perez) is currently working on the Technology and Innovation in Government Reform group (TIGR). Discuss how to create a TiGR up and down state and local government.
- Talk to employers about your bottom line and competing; look for people in your backyard who can do this job and do this job well but are being overlooked.



Secretary Perez ended with a plea: Tell me what we can do to improve technology innovation regarding workforce issues and people with disabilities. The terrible data on employment for people with disabilities is a civil rights issue. Make sure we're educating employers to avail themselves of technology - making it accessible will be to their benefit.

Discussion:

Comment from Lisa Friendly of Bookshare: Half our staff is persons with disabilities at Bookshare, and that's a real plus for our work. Roadblocks that we encounter include trying to help them balance between being paid by us and getting social security.

Perez: This is an unconscionable position to put people in. Legislation was passed in 90's to ensure that we could build pathways to employment for people with disabilities to make sure they could still receive social security. Obama has robust team to address policy and disabilities. We need to work at federal level to address this but also go state by state.

Comment from Martin Lampner of CHIMES: We provide services at BWI airport under federal contract. We pay our workers 25 cents less than prevailing wage. Because of this, our staff with disabilities get "stolen" by other companies which allow us to move more people with disabilities into those spots and keep moving them up the ladder by paying them less so they'll be stolen (recruited). We are also creating social networking opportunities for people with cognitive disability and would like to point out that your comment on telecommuting – work at home can be very isolating to persons with disabilities.

Tom Perez: Working at home is convenient, but also isolating. Thank you, I hear you on that. Social networking opportunities are a good idea.

Comment from Annuska Perkins at Microsoft: What is the transition team doing to understand what technology does today to allow people with disabilities to use the internet? How do you go about bridging the needs coming out of that committee to understand what is really available and see what the gaps are? How do you engage..."

Tom Perez: While this is not my area of the transition, the Technology & Innovation Government Reform group (TIGR) and disabilities policy group have burst through their silos with the Obama campaign. President-elect Obama really does understand that technology is an ally. We invite you to teach us. We need you insights.