

## Transcript

>> NICOLE JORWIC: I think we have a pretty good number of folks on and so out of respect for everybody's time I will get us started. So, folks who aren't familiar with me, my name is Nicole Jorwic and I am the Senior Director of Public Policy for The Arc of the United States and I am glad to be joining you today for The Arc's 2020 Post Election and what to expect for the rest of the 116th Congress Webinar. I'm glad to be joined today by our Director of Advocacy and Mobilization, Claire Manning, as well as Lee Jones from The Arc of Georgia, who you will be hearing from both later on.

So, I'm going to get us started. It has obviously been a whirlwind. In some ways it feels like the longest election ever, but before we get started just some housekeeping rules. All attendees are muted. You can turn on closed captioning, select the arrow on the closed caption button, select show subtitles and use the Q&A function to ask questions.

Sorry it's going the wrong way. So enter any questions that you have into the Q&A box and we will either answer them in the box or answer them live. If you have any technical problems during the webinar, please visit [support.us](http://support.us) or type them into the chat box and we will work to answer them as we go on. So without further ado we will get to the content of the webinar which is again around the election and what we will anticipate coming out of Congress.

So obviously to kind of get down to some basics, the US political system is dominated by two political parties, Republicans and Democrats. This year the republican candidate was the incumbent or the current sitting president, Donald Trump and his vice president, Mike Pence. The Democrat was former Vice President Joe Biden and his Vice President candidate was

California Senator Kamala Harris. The election was on November 3rd and of the 538 electoral votes in the electoral college, which is how we decide elections in this country, Joe Biden-- it has been determined has 306 and President Trump has 232.

Although the electoral college will not officially vote until December 15<sup>th</sup>, however, it is our expectation and it is what the majority of media outlets and what is again expected that Joe Biden will be sworn in as the President and that Kamala Harris will be sworn in as the vice President on Inauguration Day which is January 20th of 2021.

A lot of attention has obviously been paid to the presidential election. It's important to note that this is the biggest voter turnout that we've ever seen, well not ever, but that we've seen in modern times. Some of that was because of a lot of modes of voting that hadn't been opened to people for a long time. Obviously absentee voting in a lot of states was only available if there was a reason that you required it and that obviously was also helpful to a lot of people with disabilities.

So we're going to be--I'm sure Claire will be talking about it. As data comes out, as things are happening and as with polling, with everything else, we sometimes don't see data until after, but we will be seeing I'm sure, that a lot of that participation--hopefully we can see that carry on and move forward because it's very important, whatever the results are that we make sure that everyone's voice is heard.

Again, so the attention, a lot of it was paid to the presidential races, but there was a lot going on in Congress as well. All 435 seats in the house of representatives were up for election and 33 Senate seats were also up for grabs. Every two years the 435 House seats are up although the number can change depending on redistricting.

Democrats have had control of the house since the 2018 election and were looking to maintain it in this election. The Republicans have had the majority or control of the Senate since 2015 and were looking to maintain it.

I realize I didn't go through my slide. This is obviously a photo of the President-elect Joseph R. Biden. And so again, what's coming in 117th we don't really know. We do know what's happening in the house although some of the seats are still up for grabs. The Democrats did maintain control of the house, but they did lose some seats. A lot of the pollsters did anticipate that the Democrats would pick up seats, they did not, they actually lost some seats, but they did maintain control.

Who will be in House leadership hasn't been decided although the expectation is that speaker Pelosi will remain in control on the Democratic side and that leader McCarthy, who is the majority leader currently in California will retain the leadership role for the minority, for the Republicans.

The important committees--there's a lot of committees that are important for the work that we do in the disability community and for The Arc. Energy and Commerce. I know it sounds weird. Why would Energy and Commerce be the committee that is important for people with disabilities? But Energy and Commerce is the only committee that oversees Medicaid and so that's a really important committee.

It's likely that the Democratic leader, well it's actually almost assured, of that will remain Representative Pallone from New Jersey, but who is up for leadership on the Republican side of that is up for, not debate, but is up for a vote in the Republican caucus because Representative Walden, who had been the committee chair on the Republican side, is retiring and so it'll be interesting--and it's really important for the community to see who ends up in that role because it's really important who chairs the committees and the

relationships that we have as Arc staff but also the relationships that our chapter network retains with those offices and those committees are also extremely important.

One of the folks that we've heard is really actively seeking the leadership position on the Republican side is Representative Cathy McMorris Rodgers, who is a representative from Washington. Her name may sound familiar, she is a mother of a young man with down syndrome. So having a parent in that role could be interesting, so we'll be watching that one closely and so I just wanted to mention that.

On the senate side it's a lot more complicated and that's where a lot of the unknowns really are. Democrats have won 48 seats and Republicans have won 50, but that means that there are two outstanding and those two outstanding races are in Georgia, which is why we're so glad to have Lee joining us today and you're going to hear from her in a little bit. What's going to be going on in Georgia are two runoffs and those runoffs are going to happen on January 5<sup>th</sup>. And why that really matters is because what happens in those two races is going to determine who has control of the senate.

If it goes--either if Republicans win two or win one, or one goes each way, then it means that the Republicans are going to maintain control of the senate. And why that matters is because of the priorities of the incoming Biden administration may be more difficult to see happen and also because of some of the things that we haven't seen occur with code legislation is because of where they've gotten stopped is really the senate and so that's why we're watching that really closely.

What an evenly split senate means is really interesting. I've been learning a lot about it even today as I was preparing for this presentation. But it really is interesting and it's very rare. And what it really means is that every vote

does count on every piece of legislation. It's also incredibly rare. It's only happened three times in history that there's been an exactly split congress, in 1881 in 1953 and in 2000, although in 2000 it was really brief. In 2000 Senator Jim Jeffords of Vermont-- it was a split congress in January but by May he had switched from a Republican to become a Democrat thus handing the majority to the Democrats.

Why does this matter? It's not only about what legislation we want to see pass, but also it's about who controls those committees. I talked about on the House side the Energy and Commerce committee controls Medicaid, and Medicaid isn't the only issue that we're worried about, it's one of the main ones I worry about so it's probably why I'm mentioning it, but on the senate side, Senate Finance is the committee that oversees Medicaid.

For example, right now the majority leader is Senator Grassley from Iowa, and the minority leader is Senator Wyden from Oregon. In a split Congress who would be in that role is really a negotiation. When that has happened in the past, whether if it's a split Congress, if Republicans have it or Democrats have it it's really just a decision making point, it would be between the majority and minority leaders.

Those decisions have been made. The caucuses have voted already for who will be their leaders so it will be the same leaders as last senate. The Republican caucus has voted leader McConnell as their senate leader for next senate and Senate Democrats have voted Senator Schumer as their leader. So those will be the leaders of the parties. What their role will be, will really be determined by the people of Georgia.

Under an evenly divided chamber, the party that holds the white house runs the senate. So, the Vice President casts the deciding vote. So, on any major piece of legislation--because the Vice President is also the president of the senate, if there was a tie vote, in a 50/50 situation, Vice president

Harris would cast the deciding vote. So this is all really interesting and really tricky and frankly part of why we were wondering whether or not we could even put together this kind of webinar is because there's so many unknowns.

But what we do know is that there is still some time left with 116th Congress. We were talking about the election and the 117th which is what starts in January, but we still have what's called the "Lame Duck" session of congress. That is not our terminology for it. That is literally the definition that is used in the senate handbook and that's what is called a congress that has been voted, so obviously the vote already happened, but they still have some time left in office. So that time left in office is what's called "Lame Duck" and there are some things that we know need to happen during that "Lame Duck" session.

One of which is that right now the government is only funded until December 11<sup>th</sup>. So, we know that Congress has to act on a funding bill. There are some pieces of that obviously we need to see the government funded so all of us have an interest in that, but there are some specific pieces that we're going to be watching very closely and that includes "Money Follows the Person."

"Money Follows the Person" is a federal program that provides federal dollars to state programs to move individuals with disabilities and aging adults out of congregate settings or nursing homes or institutions and back into their homes and into communities. Since 2005 when it became law, it has moved over 105,000 individuals out of those institutions and nursing homes and back into the community. It's a really important program. It also shows cost savings. Frankly, it's been a very frustrating four years of getting seven short term reauthorizations and we really need to see in December either a long-term or permanent reauthorization of the program.

And it is set to expire with that December 11th bill, so they have to do something with it and we will be pushing for that long-term or permanent reauthorization, which I know Claire will be talking about our advocacy specifically around that, but MFP legislatively is something that we're looking at.

Also during all of this year the main focus of The Arc's advocacy work has been around COVID and there is a possibility-- but I do want to be really clear that the possibility of COVID relief is still a pretty long shot, but it's possible. Why it's a long shot is because, it's for a variety of right reasons. Some of it is because no one's really sure about who's going to be in charge next year, nobody's sure about what the different priorities are going to be for the incoming administration and so they might just, what we say kick the can, until the next Congress on COVID relief. But it's really important to remember that no big COVID relief package has passed since March 27th and we're now facing a time when cases and rates of infection are going up all over the country and so it is possible that something will come together.

And why I'm mentioning that is because on the priority list of The Arc during the entirety of this year--on the top of that list has been dedicated funding for Medicaid home and community-based services. In the House version of some COVID relief that has passed, in May and September, the House Democrats did pass The Heroes Act and it did include that dedicated funding. And so there will be, this week we hope, or we know that there should be some legislation introduced this week that would pull that language out of The Heroes Act and have it stand on its own so that if a COVID bill does come together that that bill could be attached to something if it does come together during this Lame Duck session.

And so that would be that 13 billion dollars dedicated for home and community based services so just wanted to flag that for folks who are on the call because this is new information that just came together over the weekend. So if something does come together, The Arc and Claire will make sure that we have grassroots advocacy going to make sure that would be included. But I do again want to unfortunately make sure to highlight again that that is a long shot. But we do want to make sure that that we're well positioned if something does come together. I believe that was my last slide so I will turn it over to the great hands of Claire and I will run the slides for you Claire so just let me know when.

>>CLAIRE MANNING: Thank you. Hi everyone. I'm very happy to be speaking with you all today. As Nicole said I'm Claire Manning. I'm the Director of Advocacy and Mobilization at The Arc US. Big thank you for taking the time to join us today. I know that there is a lot going on right now. Slide please. And on our call today—slide, oh I think Nicole's working on it. On our call today we have chapters, we have folks from our alumni, self-advocacy, sibling councils and I just want to pause for a second and say a huge thank you to all of you.

This year The Arc's network has done just an absolutely incredible amount of grassroots advocacy under unprecedented and extremely difficult circumstances. We have been nimble, we have been creative, we've had to change plans, change plans again, try new things, all the while dealing with a pandemic that disproportionately impacts the disability community. So huge thank you to all of you for your hard work.

And I want to pause for just a second, additionally--slide please--and talk a little bit, because we don't always have space to do this, talk just a little bit about some of our successes this year, just really briefly. This year we have worked really hard on voting as Nicole mentioned. People with

disabilities often face really significant challenges to voting and we knew that this pandemic would only increase those challenges and barriers and of course we know that decisions that are made at every level of government from local to state to federal can have a really big impact on the day-to-day lives of people with disabilities and the programs and supports that support them to live in the community.

So, it's really important that we were able to get out and vote. In a non-partisan and non-political way, all across the country The Arc community hosted candidate and education forums to make sure that people running for office understood the issues that are facing our community and also to provide individuals a chance to hear directly from the candidates that they would be voting on.

The Arc created plain language materials in English and in Spanish that were utilized by many chapters, individuals, and partners. And many chapters also created state-specific information particularly during the second half of the year when it became so clear that that vote by mail, state-specific vote-by-mail information, was going to be really really really important.

Self-advocacy groups across the country hosted virtual question and answer sessions to answer questions about the different voting laws and rules that they have in their own states. Together we got the word out through social media campaigns, we registered people to vote, we helped people find their polling location, request absentee ballots. So many chapters of The Arc are actually leaders in their Rev Up coalitions and so much more.

And as Nicole mentioned, it's not exactly over yet. Georgia has these two runoff races that are going to have a really big impact and they're happening on January 5<sup>th</sup>. This means that in Georgia the effort to get out

the vote really continues. The Arc Georgia, led by Stacey Ramirez, has worked hard to make sure that individuals in their state have the information that they need about the different rules and regulations in Georgia. The Arc of Georgia has been heavily involved in voting efforts for a long time. They're a part of the leadership of Rev Up in their state and they partner really closely with disability organizations in the state and beyond.

And one of their most successful strategies to get information out into the community is through what's called their Grassroots Connector Network. And grassroots connectors are individuals throughout the state of Georgia who work to organize their own communities. They're community leaders and they work on the ground to get the word out and I'm very excited that we have Lee Jones, one of the grassroots connector from Georgia on the call with us today and she is going to share with us a little bit about the work that she has been doing both in the general election and then the runoff coming up to make sure that people in her community have the information they need to get out and vote. Lee, I'll turn it over to you.

>> LEE JONES: Good afternoon everyone. My name is Lee Jones. I'm the Grassroots Connector for The Arc Georgia and what that means is I work in my community to advocate for people with disabilities to be able to exercise their right to vote. Unfortunately, people with disabilities are--it's a population that is often overlooked. I identify as disabled. I have lived this experience. A lot of people believe you can always see a disability but that is not always the case. What you see in front of you is not always the case.

Additionally, I live and work in a county with a historically low voter turnout for African Americans. In my county, historically only eight percent of African American males and twelve percent of African American females go to the polls. But in the 2020 general election, half of the county came out to

vote. I'm not sure about the African American community numbers yet, but this is unprecedented in our county. I am involved in the leadership of many organizations in my community including my neighborhood association, the NAACP and my own foundation. Through these partnerships, I have been able to get information out about voting to many people. For the 2020 general election and now for the senate runoff, we're focusing on educating people about their voting options: how to register to vote, important deadlines, and how to get an absentee ballot.

I've worked with partner organizations to deal with situations of voters with disabilities who have not been able to bring their service dog in to vote, or not having headphones that were available that they truly needed. These situations were resolved, and election staff were retrained on how to support people with disabilities. I'm sure a lot of my colleagues can attest to the fact that this is an issue that really needs to be paid attention to.

I've also focused my work on making sure that formerly incarcerated individuals, some of whom have developmental disabilities, are aware of their voting rights. We have also gotten the word out through social media. Of course, the pandemic has severely impacted how to get the word out but we have transitioned and had to do everything virtual. I have been learning a lot about social media and how to use the platforms to get information out to community.

For the senate runoff, we are partnering with the NAACP and other partners to pull our resources because we really want to maximize getting information out to our to the voters, especially those with disabilities, as to how they can get their vote and get their voice heard. We are planning COVID-19 safe events. On election day we did have two COVID safe events where we partnered with local community partners to do voter education. That went very well.

For example, we're making flyers to give away at food distribution sites and we have volunteers available to answer questions that people have about the upcoming event and we started this this past Saturday. We're also passing out information with another partner when people come for lunch at the local soup kitchen. So we're really trying to get information out to community, we're getting our volunteers together, we're working with other community partners and activists to really educate voters, especially the African American community, the Hispanic community and other people of color, about what their voting rights are and how they can vote.

>> CLAIRE MANNING: Thank you so much Lee. It's incredible work that you are doing. Especially as we said, during such a strange and difficult time. So thank you for everything. I know that all eyes are definitely going to be on Georgia for the next couple of months. Big thank you.

>> LEE JONES: Thank you so much. Thank you.

>> CLAIRE MANNING: Thank you for being here.

>> LEE JONES: Thank you for having me.

>> NICOLE JORWIC: Claire there's a question for Lee on how our chapters can support Lee and The Arc of Georgia right now leading up to the runoff. Lee is there an answer for that.

>>CLAIRE MANNING: I know Stacy's on as well she might have thoughts on that too well.

>> LEE JONES: I know all the community partners and all of the grassroots connectors, we're forming party groups is what they're calling it, to see where our strongest assets are and how we can support one another and in the different areas of Georgia. So that's in the works right now. Now for locally, what we're doing is, anyone that wants to volunteer just to help us

with these initiatives to educate voters and whatever their personal networks are, if they want to go door-to-door in their community, we're always welcome to have volunteers to help us.

>> CLAIRE MANNING: Wonderful thank you for that. And I'm seeing in the chat also that Stacy Ramirez, who leads The Arc of Georgia, is on as well. Stacy do you want to just put your email in the chat to everyone and if anybody has questions about how they can support Georgia during this time they can reach out to you that way. Does that work? Okay Nicole can you move us up--there we go. Thank you, Stacy. And thank you again, Lee. Nicole, can you move us on just to the next slide here.

So, it probably feels like a long time ago, but we also did a ton of work as a community around the Census this year. Of course, every 10 years the government in the United States counts everyone and it's it seems like kind of like what's the connection between the Census and disability. Well the connection is that the funding for the Census, actually the data from the Census, impacts funding for federal programs and state programs that are really key for many people with disabilities. So, it's absolutely crucial that the disability community is counted, and we know that people with disabilities are considered a historically hard to count population by the Census Bureau, so this work was incredibly important.

And as a group, we provided plain language information to hundreds of thousands of people in both English and Spanish. We asked people to take a pledge to complete the Census. We hosted countless webinars and virtual events. And if you'll recall, the Census work really happened at the beginning of the pandemic and we had to shift really quickly into this new virtual world and kind of learn as we went. We utilized over 300 Census swag toolkits, promoted videos all the while dealing with multiple changes

to the deadlines around the Census and much more. So, thank you for all of your work on that. Slide please.

And of course while all of this was going on we also worked together on our biggest priority, which was our COVID-19 advocacy, to urge Congress to include people with disabilities, their families and the direct support professional workforce in pandemic relief legislation, which as Nicole mentioned has not been passed since March. We did all this work, and we continue to do it through our hashtag “We are Essential” campaign, which I know everybody on this call has been heavily involved with.

A big part of the campaign has been focused on sharing personal stories. We know that stories are one of the most powerful, if not the most powerful, advocacy tool that we have. So, we have shared stories with Congress, with the media, with the general public. We've organized paid and social media outreach to reach an even broader audience.

We as a group have connected grassroots advocates to their legislators through our August congressional recess and I'm very excited to share that this work has resulted in, it says right there 128,000 tracked actions, calls, emails and tweets to Congress, but we're actually pushing 130,000 right now, which is just an unbelievably incredible number. Congress cannot say that they are not hearing from the disability community. So, hats off to all of you. Thank you for everything that you're doing. I know that it's going to make a difference.

We have a couple new tools that I want to share that we can do this work through. Slide please. Because we have a lot more to be done as Nicole shared with us, in the next Congress, in this lame duck session, so we have a new action center. Hopefully, you've seen it. If you haven't please check it out at [thearc.org/action](http://thearc.org/action). And on here--advocates you can always go there you're kind of like, “What's the latest action alert. What's the most

up to date?" You can always go there anytime you want. You can see the latest action alert; you can look up your legislators. If you have somebody who would like to be getting alerts but they're not you can encourage them to go there and they can actually sign up for alerts. If you haven't already, please check this website out and share it with your networks. Slide please.

I want to just show you kind of--since this is a new center and our action alerts are looking a little bit different these days, I wanted to show you that we now have an option where you can actually, on the same link, you can email, call or tweet at your legislators. My ask is that whenever possible you do all three. They serve different functions.

You might think like what's the purpose of tweeting at my member of congress. Well tweets are very public. Other people can see that. That encourages them to take action, it makes the member of congress pay a little bit more attention, their staff is paying attention to that. And we know of course that calls are probably the most impactful, but when you're sending 130,000 emails that's incredibly impactful too. Whenever possible, do all three. If you have to pick just one, calls please. Next slide.

What do we have new and coming up? We have recently, I believe last week, updated all of our COVID-19 action alerts. So if you go on the [arc.org/action](https://arc.org/action) you can see we have a share your story alert and we also have a contact your Member of Congress alert. So those are updated with fresh language kind of based on what the information we have right now and some updated asks.

We also just today added a new Money Follows the Person action alert because of the funding that's going to end, as Nicole mentioned December 11<sup>th</sup>. So in the next couple weeks we will be doing a big push around that on social media. We're going to have an email going out in just a few days here, so please share that out with your networks as well.

And then the last thing that I wanted to mention is throughout 2020, we've had several different types of advocacy toolkits that we've shared. We had our Census toolkit we had our COVID We Are Essential tool kit, and we also had our voting toolkit and these toolkits had a lot of different things: sample social media, sample graphics, letters to the editor, and we're going to be putting together a 2021 advocacy toolkit as well.

So I just wanted to take a minute and ask if you have any feedback or things that you found to be particularly helpful or maybe not helpful, or things that you would like to see in these toolkits as we think about 2021, to please reach out to me and let me know because we would love to hear from you about how we can best support your work on the ground. So, I will pause there and I'm happy to answer any questions.

>> NICOLE JORWIC: Thanks Claire. And I know we had a couple of questions that I'll start with. I'll remind folks that if you do have questions either on anything Claire just shared, anything Lee shared or anything I shared, to put them in the question answer feature.

There were a couple questions, one of which was around--I mentioned the freestanding of the standalone HCBS legislation and someone asked who will be introducing it. So I'm sharing information that is kind of hot off the presses and I can't really share too much more information about that because we're actually actively working on getting additional co-sponsors and hopefully working very hard to make the standalone legislation bipartisan.

Because as Claire mentioned we are we are a bipartisan non-partisan organization and so that's always our goal and that's something that I've been working on a lot for the past four days, but what I will say, what I can say is that the senator who introduced the HCBS grant legislation early in the year and the representative who introduced the language that ultimately

ended up in The Heroes Act are both involved, so that was Senator Casey and Representative Dingell and they're both going to be involved in what ultimately is introduced.

And then I saw that Dan Stewart from Indiana said that he has gotten positive feedback on the calls that he's made and so that's great to hear. And I just wanted to say as one of the lobbyists for the organization, that I cannot overstate how important those 130,000 plus phone calls make. We do not have you know the same power as some other industries have, but the power that we do have are those phone calls and those stories and so it's incredibly powerful and strong.

I do hear sometimes we're not hearing from people and I can go back and I can ask Claire for the amount of phone calls that have come from a certain state and that is invaluable. When we send those things, when you do those things that is not something that is done lightly and so every time you do that, every time you share that, every time you ask other family members, other friends on your list to do that, it is not a small thing. So I just have to put that plug in there.

There's a question, has a date been decided for the Money Follows the Person action alert? We actually haven't sent it out yet, so Claire if you want to...

>> CLAIRE MANNING: Yes, so we're going to be sending it out later this week. We're going to be posting it on social media on Wednesday. However, it's live on [thearc.org/action](http://thearc.org/action) so feel free to scoop us and put it out to your networks as soon as you can.

>> NICOLE JORWIC: Any other questions for us? We will give everybody another minute or two but if not, Claire and I have a hard and fast rule that if folks don't have questions that we will happily give people time back.

>> CLAIRE MANNING: Everybody's busy. And we appreciate you being here

>> NICOLE JORWIC: [laughs]

Yes, and we didn't say this at the beginning, but we are recording this, I think. We are. And we will make this available for chapters because I know a lot of our state execs want to be able to share this with folks, so that was something that I just wanted to make sure to share because this is something that will always be evolving and all of our eyes will be on Georgia and all of our thoughts will be with Georgia.

I will double check the chat. A lot of thanks to Lee and to Claire. Looks like there might be one more, nope just folks saying great job to everybody. Thank you all for taking some time on your Monday. We are coming up on the Thanksgiving holiday. It's an odd year but we are very much, at the national office, thankful for everyone in our network and so thankful for all of you for taking time spending it with us today. So, thank you. Thanks Claire and thanks Lee.

>> CLAIRE MANING: Thank you everyone.