



Interview with John Kemp
Executive Director and General Counsel
U.S. Business Leadership Network

[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the NTAR Leadership Center, helping state leaders help adults with disabilities to employment and better economic opportunities through collaboration, innovation, and change.

[Laurie Harrington] Welcome to Research in Brief, a feature podcast of the NTAR Leadership Center. I'm your host, Laurie Harrington. Today I'm speaking with John Kemp. John is the Executive Director and General Counsel of the U.S. Business Leadership Network. John Kemp is the 2007 recipient of the New Freedom Initiative Award, and the 2006 recipient of the Henry B. Betts Award; regarded as America's highest honor for disability leadership and service, and is widely respected for his many achievements, both in the corporate and nonprofit worlds. As a person with personal disability experience who uses four prostheses, John inspires others to achieve the impossible through knowledge, experience, vision, personality, and persistence. With more than 45 years of direct experience in the disability movement, John is a Principle at the Washington, D.C. law firm of Powers, Pyles, Sutter, and Verville. He presently serves as CEO of Access, Executive Director of the One Percent Coalition, and Executive Director and General Counsel of the U.S. Business Leadership Network. Thanks for speaking with us today John. John could you please comment for us on your ideas about partnership and collaboration between the USBLN and other key stakeholders in the community?

[John Kemp] The idea that people with disabilities and organizations that serve them can get everything done and accomplished by themselves is, is long gone. There's no way that the USBLN and its various stakeholders and partners can do these things individually. We need each other very much. Our strength is in our network. We have good leadership, I think, on our board of directors and other places, but the strength of the USBLN is really through the power and effectiveness of our affiliates. There would be our number one partners in delivering programs and services for employers and, and for people with disabilities. But we also tie in very closely with a number of other organizations, funding sources, service providers, and employer groups that are in the generic world. And so we are looking at the broadest, in the broadest sense a wide range of partners and, and collaborators to accomplish our mission.

[Laurie Harrington] John could you tell us about some state BLN's you would consider blue ribbon or exceptional Business Leadership Networks?

[John Kemp] BLN's are in various stages of development. We are only a 10-year-old organization, and really started out of the President's Committee, on Employment of People with Disabilities. And it started at a grass roots level and grew to creating a national organization about 6-7 years ago. Two years ago they made, the USBLN made a decision to employ, on a part time basis, me, to be their President and CEO. Over the period of the 10 years, and because it was a grass roots effort that grew up, some of our affiliates really took the, took the challenge and grew themselves into quite substantial organizations. The Florida BLN is a, certainly a blue ribbon organization. There are 15 different entities around the state of Florida that have BLN,

that are BLN's, and, and a state wide BLN that kind of coordinates all of their activities. Very impressive! Very, very good group! An exceptional group is the New Mexico BLN, which has been working very closely with a number of employer organizations, the business development councils around the state, and the U.S. Forrest Service, various federal installations there, military groups, just an incredible array of employers, governmental and private. And I, I must say that they are just as progressive as any entity I've ever seen. So New Mexico gets the five stars, if we can go that far. Oregon BLN, very strong. Washington State BLN, very strong. Pennsylvania BLN, very strong. Chicagoland BLN is also very strong. And I would put in, into the group the New Jersey BLN, which is affiliated with the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce, and then the Maryland Eastern Shore BLN, which is also associated with their local Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber, U.S. Chamber of Commerce is very instrumental in, in launching the USBLN, and so there is a natural affinity between local and state chambers of commerce and the BLN's around the country.

[Laurie Harrington] How does a state business leadership network begin to forge those effective partnerships and collaborations in their states and local areas?

[John Kemp] Well the first step is usually building on their lead employer network. BLN's are founded to be employer to employer networks where we have a safe place in which we can come together as employers and talk about some of the challenges, problems, and solutions to getting people with disabilities employed, to do a better job of marketing to people with disabilities. And, and now certainly vendering with disabled owned business enterprises. From that core group of lead employers, a number of partnerships spin out and are created. And those are the, kind of the glue that keep the whole process moving forward. Very effective boards and executive directors of our BLN's nurture those partnerships, whether they be with funding sources or providers of services, or organizations of people with disabilities who are seeking employment. All of these kinds of partnerships lead to a stronger kind of BLN. So it really starts with the lead employers and the, and the ability, and the strengths of the executive staff.

[Laurie Harrington] How does the U.S. Business Leadership Network support states' efforts at collaboration and partnering.

[John Kemp] The USBLN has entered into a number of partnerships to assist our state and local organizations in the way they collaborate and partner. One of them that comes to mind very quickly is the organization called the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation. We are partnering with CSAVR to connect our state BLN's with our state level BLN organizations. So we have that kind of marriage at the state level based on a, on a partnership that we've created with CSAVR. Another is with the Institute for Educational Leadership and their youth programs. We are partnering with them to develop tool kits and, and to create a template for connecting youth leadership programs at the state and local level with some of our BLN's. Our tool kits will assist our affiliates in creating student and youth advisory councils and partner, and direct them to partner with other groups as well. A third is with the Abilities Fund out of Iowa. And in that one we are working closely with the Abilities Fund to provide technical assistance and support to disability owned business enterprises around the country, so that they can grow their businesses. We certify them, if they meet all of our

standards; we certify them as disability owned business enterprises. We present them to the corporations that are looking for expanding their diversity and inclusion programs to include disability owned businesses. And then we make that, make that bridge for them. We have been certifying DOBE's, Disability Owned Business Enterprises for about 6 months. We have about 15 to 20 that will be completed by the end of the year. And then we hope to have 50 to 100 more in 2010. This is being met with tremendous support by the corporate community, and the Abilities Fund is providing the technical assistance to assist them in the growing their businesses. We help them get certified and we don't deal with the substantive issues of their business. But this is just one of, one of many kinds of programs. We also partner with the disability business technical assistance centers, the DBTAs around the country. And then JAN, JobAccommodation Network is a very good partner with us in our webinars and our conferences. And hopefully through that there are some marriages at the state and local level.

[Laurie Harrington] Thank you John for speaking with us today. I've been speaking with John Kemp, Executive Director and General Counsel of the United States Business Leadership Network. For more information about the NTAR Leadership Center and its research activities visit www.NTARCenter.org.

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