

**Interview with Dan LeBlanc
Senior Advisor to the Governor for Workforce
Commonwealth of Virginia**

[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 transformation.

[Jeff Stoller] Hello this is Jeff Stoller speaking from the NTAR Leadership Center. This afternoon, we're pleased to be speaking to Dan LeBlanc; he is the Senior Advisor for Workforce in the state of Virginia. He serves as a member of Governor Tim Kane's cabinet in the role of Chief Workforce Development Officer. In that role, he is advising the Governor on all workforce development matters in the state of Virginia. He also chairs a workforce sub-committee where he is coordinating with the Virginia Community College systems and others to come up with an intergraded system. Mr. LeBlanc's duties oversaw the development of the Commonwealth's first ever strategies plan for workforce development. Mr. LeBlanc, thank you so much for joining us today.

[Dan LeBlanc] Well, Jeff, it's certainly my pleasure and indeed my honor to have a discussion with you today about what we do in Virginia. But on the intro, I also want to thank NTAR for the Leadership Center and for the work that you do, not only in partnership in Virginia but across the country to raise the awareness of the issues that impact people with significant disabilities.

[Jeff Stoller] How specifically is the Governor making employment of people with disabilities a priority in the Commonwealth of Virginia? Have there been specific leadership strategies that he has attempted that would help make progress in this area of disability employment?

[Dan LeBlanc] Governor Kane is a great leader on this issue and so many other issues that affect people that have no voice. He made a commitment early on in his career, certainly in his elected career as Mayor, and Lieutenant Governor, and now as Governor to promote strategic efforts on behalf of populations that don't have the voice that they need by appointing the first ever in Virginia special advisor to him and to the workforce sub-cabinet when he appointed Ed Turner, who is a person with significant disabilities. Ed's role has been, obviously to advise the Governor, members of his cabinet, as well as other workforce advocates in matters to people with disabilities. The other thing that the Governor did was to issue an executive order mandating that all of our state agencies, universities, etc. examine their recruitment and employment hiring polices and to remove anything that might be considered a barrier to qualified applicants of gaining a job in state government. The Chief of Staff of the Commonwealth of Virginia, who drives the Governor's agenda at the executive level, also sent a memorandum to the HR directors of all of our state agencies to comply with the directive. We also know that seventy percent of the people in the Commonwealth of Virginia with disabilities have an unemployment rate that's really significant. When you have people with disabilities, seventy percent are unemployment, something needs to happen. So the Governor, recently, in partnership with NTAR, had a forum, well attended, in Roanoke, Virginia to examine what is going on in Virginia with this population, take a look at basically a swat analyses of some of our successes

and where we have some challenges in meeting the Governor's request, and come forward with a blueprint. Here's where we struggle in our state, not just on issues such as people with disabilities and employment, but we have a Governor who cannot succeed himself or herself, so we can do strategic plans and we can do executive orders and we have the best people in the room, but we have to move the agenda to the next administration. So this blueprint will hopefully be a starting point with a good foundation so that whoever assumes the helm as the next Governor will continue on with our Governor's convictions and direction for people with disabilities. Examining not just one particular aspect, whether it be adults or returning vets with disabilities, but the full gamut, from youth all the way to those who are in retirement.

[Jeff Stoller] Do you see the Wounded Warriors program as perhaps the chance to get a foot in the door with employers who perhaps haven't been engaged with disability employment in the past, perhaps out of simply not understanding the issues facing people with disabilities? It seems that there is so much good will out there in terms of opening doors for the returning vets that in a way it may be an approach that helps introduce businesses that have been on the sidelines to get engaged for the full range of population. Is that part of the strategy as well?

[Dan LeBlanc] Yes, and we've had some success in Virginia with projects with companies, particularly in technology industries. And the Governor used some of his WIA, Workforce Investment Act statewide dollars, they're called, the Governor's discretionary money, to leverage a program where Wounded Warriors would have the opportunity to be employed in the technology industry with a great deal of success and a lot of partnering with business and labor.

[Jeff Stoller] Well, thank you so much. We've been speaking this afternoon with Dan LeBlanc who is a member of Governor Tim Kane's cabinet, his role as Chief Workforce Development Officer. Thank you again so much for your comments.

[Announcer] For more information about the NTAR Leadership Center and its research activities, visit www.ntarcenter.org.

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