

Disability History Association Podcast
Interview with Doug Crandell
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Emma Wathen: Welcome to another episode of the Disability History Association Podcast. I'm Emma Wathen.

Kelsey Henry: And I'm Kelsey Henry.

Emma Wathen: And it is our pleasure today to be in conversation with Professor Doug Crandall. Doug has an appointment as public service Faculty at the Institute on Human Development and Disability at the University of Georgia, where he directs the Advancing Employment Center. Doug, thank you so much for joining us today.

Doug Crandell: Thank you. I'm thrilled to be here. I'm looking forward to the discussion.

Emma Wathen: To get started, let's talk about your career path as a disability advocate. So, on top of writing scholarship about disability and economic justice, you have also worked in employment and disability support for several decades. How did you first get started in this field?

Doug Crandell: Oh, that's an easy one, but it's a great one. I love labor and I love employment. I come from a union family—a farming family, and I have an older sister with disabilities. We always expected her to work, and quite a worker she is. So, you know, as a brother, a sibling, who loves her very much, I'm sure that had something to do with the career path. But my undergraduate education was in industrial organizational psychology. And of course, again, coming from a labor family, I knew I wanted to do something in that arena, and when I figured out that there was an intersection of disability and labor, I was really thrilled by that. It's really the only thing I've done for 33 years is work in disability and employment.

Kelsey Henry: Wow, it's so fascinating to hear about the many different roads that brought you to the book that we're going to talk about today. So, in your personal, familial background, you were always kind of immersed in questions and also the actual lived embodied reality, thinking about labor practices, exploitative of labor practices and disability. So, it's this wedding of the personal and the political and the professional. I can see all those strands coming together, and in really powerful ways, especially in the book. So, Doug is here to talk with us about his most recent book, published in 2022, and it's called *Twenty-Two Cents an Hour: Disability Rights and the Fight to End Subminimum Wages*. Another context question, as an author, you've had a very varied career. You've tackled a variety of genres from memoirs, romance novels, satirical fiction, and true crime. You've really covered such a broad spectrum. And now you're writing disability studies nonfiction - and it's clear to me how your personal and professional life led you here. But I'd love to hear a little bit more in the context of other writing projects, and your identity as a writer. What prompted you to start this project? And how is it similar to, or different from your previous work.

Doug Crandell: Well, that's such an astute question. I appreciate the interest. I guess I will just say it for any budding authors out there, probably following the path of writing in several genres is not the advice I would give anyone. Publishing is just about as strange a

business as college and university life. But I did both of these things separately for a long time. Right? I never let the writing interfere with my work. I loved them both, and I couldn't do without either of them. When I've done book tours...Chicago Review Press published my first two books which were memoirs that include a lot of disability, substance use, and mental health stuff, and my own family, and in labor. I had to take time off to do the book tour. Chicago Review Press got us an RV, and we got to go from Atlanta to Chicago with about 15 stops in between back up, way, way back, almost 20 years ago. But I kept them separate, and I write a lot for something called *The Sun Magazine*. It's celebrating its fiftieth year. A very well-respected literary journal, and it's all essays, and I've written about my family—again all the stuff we've talked about—and published in *The Sun Magazine*.

About 6 years ago, I started thinking about a guy named Riley. He's portrayed in the opening part of the book. And I wrote this essay about Riley, who was someone who was in an institution and had been forced to be there, with no good health care, no good community supports, and I got to know him, and he was whisked off. *The Sun Magazine* published that, and it dawned on me that I had not written in my own field, right? So, I started collecting some notes around this. And we hear this all the time, right? That any book that we're compelled to read, not to put down, in other words, has to have at its core a mystery. Whether that's non-fiction, romance, true crime, serious nonfiction. It has to have a mystery. That mystery to me was—shamefully, by that time I would have celebrated 27 or 28 years in the field—I could not answer the question about why subminimum wages were still public policy in the United States for workers with disabilities. And so that carried me into trying to figure out that mystery, and I did. And it's horrifying.

Emma Wathen: Yeah, that's actually a great segue to the next question I was going to ask you, which is in the preface to your book. We're introduced to a man named Riley, who you just mentioned, who you met while working as a job coach for people with disabilities in the 1990s. And as you were talking about how every book has to start with a mystery, I also gravitated toward that story again. Because there's a mystery with that story as well. We don't know what ended up happening to Riley despite your best efforts. So, I was wondering, why did you decide to open your book with Riley's story out of all the people that you've met while working in the field?

Doug Crandell: Yeah, thank you, Emma. I was young. He was young. I thought I could change the world. I still do still believe it. I'm just tired, and I've always thought about him. And as I said, the impulse to write about my own field, I guess I was shuttling that off to the side. And I wanted to know what happened to Riley too. I wanted to know why it happened. In terms of the narrative structure of the book, of course, as we all know, there are editors and copy editors and substantive editors and line editors, and when I turned the manuscript into Cornell University Press, we just kind of all felt that there wasn't a zing in the beginning. It was in need of something much more personal. And I just thought, why have I not thought about using that essay from the Sun and editing it so that it sets the tone for the book. I was really pleased by that. It felt like a way to honor Riley to honor folks who in the book do get out. They do get a chance to have a life. Riley, and literally millions of others over the last 60–70 years in the United States haven't had that opportunity. So, I felt it was really fitting to give Riley's life the opening shots in the narrative.

Emma Wathen: Absolutely. Books about complex economic systems can sometimes feel so disconnected from the people who are affected by these systems. But this book felt very intimate because of your focus on people like Riley, and people like Alfred Busby and Sparkle Green. Another person who appears in this book is your father, who worked at a

ceiling tile factory and was involved in its labor union. I'm wondering, to what extent did your background, as someone who had grown up in a union family and someone who had worked as a job coach for people with disabilities, influence you as you were writing this piece of scholarship?

Doug Crandell: I love this question because no one's asked me that question, you know. I just finished an essay for *The Sun Magazine* called "His Body of Work." My father passed, and it's been almost now 9 years. And I wanted to put a cap on his body of work, and I don't know about you all, but when you come up with a great title, you're like, oh, that captures so much. It's my body of work, it's his body of work, it's his physical body.

My father early on was born into poverty, too. He's born in 1939, on Valentine's night, on a horse and sleigh in Vigo County, Indiana. They could not get my grandmother to the hospital, and he contracted polio when he was about 10. Luckily most of the intense effects of the disease were located in his left leg, and he was able to—you know, still had a gait problem, but not a large one, and he was healthy in so many other ways. But that kind of upbringing, you know, when you are on the cusp of not having enough food, when you're on the cusp of getting evicted, and there's disability, substance abuse, and mental health. By the way, it's in every family. We've convinced ourselves that somehow it isn't. Every single family has substance abuse, mental health, and disability somewhere, right? And I guess that is the labor part. Then I worked with my father in the ceiling tile factory during the summers. I was the first one to go to college in my family. One of the interesting things, which I don't touch on in the book, but since you asked the question, is that labor unions used to play a large role for folks with learning disabilities and intellectual disabilities.

People would have full time jobs. There were many workers within the local 563, the Paper Workers Union in Indiana, who had disabilities. And so it really does get to kind of the heart of this story. As I said, disability and labor intersect so perfectly with this story and the stories of the folks that are in the book. that it's also a way to kind of pay tribute to labor unions. It's one of my things I do every Labor Day as I spend time with union folks, some I know. some I don't know—just trying to do my part. I guess that's the answer in a nutshell. It was really part of my upbringing, just like it was getting to know, you know, what it was like to have a loved one with a disability and my sister right?

Kelsey Henry: One of the things that I loved about your book is that you were able to balance these personal and really highly personable stories about individual people: your father, Sparkle Green, and Riley alongside a really comprehensive and beautifully told policy level history of the relationship between disability and labor in labor law. So, for all the historians out there, I'd love for us to dig a little bit more into the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938. You trace the practice of paying workers with disabilities less than the federal minimum wage back to what is pretty ironically called the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, which has an exception that you reference repeatedly throughout the book known as 14(c) 14(c) legalizes subminimum wages for workers with disabilities. Can you say a little bit more about what the original idea was behind that legislation?

Doug Crandell: Sure. It is important history because we're still living with it, unbelievably. It's difficult to find in public life a public policy that hasn't at least been amended, changed, or updated. We found it. The section 14(c), as you say, the ironically named Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, authorized the ability to pay subminimum wages. It was designed really for people, and let's be honest, it's 1938, so, we're talking white males. I'm not talking people—we're talking white males returning from wars and being hurt on farms and factory floors, and they wanted to be able to put something in the policy. Remember, this is

1938. We're not even celebrating a hundred years yet of having 40 hour work weeks, overtime, the right to unionize, OSHA protections, right? So, it was a minor part of the Fair Labor Standards Act. It wasn't a huge one. As we move from 1938, it is mostly businesses, real businesses, who get these 14(c) certificates so they could bring somebody, maybe who's lost an arm in combat or, you know, had a traumatic brain injury, in a factory or on a farm - could bring those folks back in the fold and pay them. Remember this, the entire subminimum wage stuff is based on physical labor. It's physical—it's hands and feet, right? You're moving your body. That's what it's about. So, the productivity piece made sense in a manufacturing farming economy, but even based on that, we haven't updated it for 85 years. So that was kind of the intent, and it didn't start getting really wrapped into disability services until the early 1960s.

Emma Wathen: Yeah, so let's talk about the 1960s then. As you point out in the book, there is this widely held belief that advocates, politicians, and workers with disabilities only began to criticize subminimum wages in the last decade or so, but your book reveals that even in its early years, such as the 1960s, there were several points where 14(c) publicly came under attack. For example, there was Burton Blatt's expose of institutions in 1967. There was Senator Wayne Morse's proposal to revise 14(c) in 1965. Why do you think that these early advocacy efforts went under the radar?

Doug Crandell: Yeah. I know I've used this word before, but that is also an astute observation, because there is a really clear link to why these 2 pieces you mentioned, Morse and Blatt, are really really strong, and why they didn't go anywhere kind of ends up in the narrative thread through the seventies and eighties. Burton Blatt was a fascinating person. Dr. Blatt was the chair of special education and rehabilitation at Syracuse University. He could have stayed behind that desk and the podium writing white papers and research papers. Dr. Blatt was really what we would call an empath today. He was very led by his Jewish faith? He was acutely aware that millions of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities were first sent to gas chambers in Nazi, Germany. He knew all that history very deeply and very personally, and so when he saw these institutions—and I'll just say really quick, because it's a fascinating part of the story. He wrote a book called *Christmas in Purgatory*. He and a photographer named Fred Kaplan sneak into institutions on the Eastern seaboard to covertly take photos. So, *Christmas in Purgatory* is really a photo essay, and it is impossible to look at those 80 or 90 photos, and not have the hair on your neck stand up and choke up. It is horrendous. What Blatt was trying to do was say, look how we're treating Americans with disabilities who have not committed any crime. The institutions at that time were worse than our prisons, and the prisons were pretty bad.

So, he was really focused on just the kind of ways that we approach folks of intellectual developmental disabilities at that time. Still, the term mental retardation was still used. But the reason he didn't do much is because most of it was focused on what we would consider residential, or where people live. So, while it was very powerful, and the publishing story of *Christmas in Purgatory* is so interesting, it got curtailed on the subminimum wage side because there weren't yet as many abuses on the subminimum wage side. He was really trying to focus on these institutional settings.

Now, Morse's proposal started to show us, I think, in the Congressional Record. how powerful. even without paid lobbyists. Some of these organizations and systems are in the United States. As we get into the middle sixties, early seventies, a lot of these players in what I call the "disability industrial complex," were starting to learn how to lobby and organize around trade groups, right? And really use political power to do one thing: to keep anything from changing. And they've been successful in that. Right?

Emma Wathen: Would you mind defining that term for us? The “disability industrial complex”? Is it one that you came up with, or is it—

Doug Crandell

No, I am so glad you asked me that too. Kathie Snow is alive and well, and a wonderful thought leader. She coined the phrase. The phrase really started more than a decade ago, with Snow saying, we don't know where any of this money goes, just like the military industrial complex. We don't know what the outcomes are. We don't know what's being done in our name in these hundreds of billions of dollars a year that are spent in the disability industrial complex. So, you can see this all over American culture and politics and society, where we have allowed capitalism and lobbying to really guide even something as personal and as significant as living your life with a disability. That was one of the bigger shockers for me. I didn't know the extent, and I should have as a disability advocate and as a brother to a sister and working in this field, I should have known how much money is spent in lobbying. Yeah.

Kelsey Henry: I'm wondering if we can linger a little bit longer on the relationship between institutionalization and then the movement to de-institutionalize folks with disabilities, and how that kind of historical narrative arc from institutions to de-institutionalization plays into the story that you're telling about labor exploitation and disability. I think a good place to start would be the 1999 Supreme Court case *Olmsted vs L.C.*, which is sometimes referred to as the *Brown vs Board* for disability rights, and in this case the court ruled that people with disabilities, like the plaintiffs Lois Curtis and Elaine Wilson, had a qualified right to receive State funded supports and services in their own communities rather than in institutions. So, how did deinstitutionalization relate to subminimum wages?

Doug Crandell: Yeah, it is again a great question. The thing to remember about the history of disability and formalized services in the United States is, for the most part in and around the Civil War time, for a long time disability was something that either was viewed through a religious kind of viewpoint, right, or through the viewpoint of poverty? By the way, I just met a family about a month ago who casually said to me, a young family, that the reason they have a daughter with down syndrome is because they had sex before they were married. So, our perception of disability has been linked to poverty. We really treated it like poverty. There used to be some laws called “the ugly laws” that I don't touch on in the book. You probably read about some of this, where you could be fined for having a disability disfigurement, anything like that. So, we have been really strange, no surprise as Americans, in how we've treated it. So, once you move past this kind of religiosity around disability, you get us forming policies around poverty with people saying, well, they need to go someplace. And you get these workhouses and poor houses that then kind of get transitioned into institutions. Once we start formalizing Medicaid and Medicare, we have some funding streams to keep these kinds of large institutions open.

We lost Lois Curtis last fall. Lois and Elaine were two fascinating women who challenged Georgia and our nation's highest court to say that they'd been in institutions too long, both of them. Anyone who's been an institution has had to work to be there. There's a case, I don't know if you remember it from the book, but it happened in 1974 in Indiana. It's a huge class action lawsuit, Leo Sonnenberg in an institution, and another guy, along with their lawyers, all file this complaint that they haven't been being paid. Now, remember, as a culture, we say there's something wrong with you, Doug. You must go to the institution. But once all these folks are at the institution, they're working 40-hour-a-week jobs. Why? Because it takes a lot of resources to keep an institution of a thousand acres and 4,000 people in it moving, and people are cutting hair, doing landscaping, working on vehicles. So this lawsuit makes it in 1974 on the Fair Labor Standards Act, right? But there was another

piece: the Thirteenth Amendment. They successfully argued that folks were being held in captivity as indentured servants, and the prohibition against indentured servitude and slavery was evoked, and they won, but it was overturned by the Indiana Supreme Court.

Now, the important thing to know is these institutions are often underwritten. right, by huge state budgets. And so they're not really excited about dismantling those. One of the misnomers in the disability industrial complex is that we have somehow totally deinstitutionalized, but we just called them different things. Hospitals will often have units that are Medicaid reimbursed for folks who are homeless and picked up, or many folks end up in our jails and prisons with disabilities and mental illnesses. And so, this institutionalization part, we have obviously reduced it, and that's a good thing, and conditions are better, but, I point out in the book, particularly if you're a person in the United States with an intellectual or developmental disability, and you must go to a sheltered workshop or a day program and you are forced to do that—and particularly if that same organization is providing your housing—you're six to seven times more likely to be physically or sexually abused in those settings by paid staff members than someone with that exact same diagnosis label who's not inside the disability industrial complex. Subminimum wages are really a symptom of our disability policy because we can see through that lens that it's harmful. Many of the practices that we're underwriting are harmful.

Emma Wathen: Thank you for mapping out that process for us. So, as you just said, and as you say in the book when you're talking about the institutionalization in the United States, many times institutions are just renamed as 24-hour residential settings or intermediate care facilities. Would you say that a similar thing is going on with subminimum wages such as the spaces where workers with disabilities are getting paid being referred to as sheltered workshops and then work activity centers, then enclaves? Or are there distinctions between these models with some changes over time?

Doug Crandell: Yeah, it's also a great question. When considering any type of industrial complex, like military, pharmaceutical, fossil fuel, etc., you know the goal with language is to make sure we can keep people from looking too closely. Right? So, there's a switch. I've seen the affirmative business has been something someone's called a sheltered workshop. It just continues to evolve that way. Enclave, by the way, the real definition of enclave that the disability industrial complex brought upon and inside the system was really to mean eight or nine folks with disabilities doing some mobile work crew stuff like landscaping, cleaning. But, when you look up the definition of enclave, it means an encampment in a hostile territory. It's a war term. So, the language changes to keep us from looking too closely. We can then say, well, we don't have institutions anymore, we have 24/7 residential sites.

We've done this in employment quite a bit, too. In the federal language—and I should say there is a bill that's just been sitting in Congress that hasn't had any new sponsors since last fall, but it's the bill that federally would ban subminimum wages. Right now only about a third of the states have banned or are planning on phasing out subminimum wages. So, the way that they kind of get around these things is renaming stuff, and that bill is called the "transformation to competitive integrated employment." Because some of these shelter workshops have said, we don't want any more trouble, we don't want anybody messing with us, we're just going to pay people minimum wage. Well, if that was the case, why haven't you been doing that? Second, that doesn't give me any more choice. You are still holding me captive in this setting that I may not want to be in, and we call those settings segregated and congregated because we fooled ourselves to somehow believe that if you're an American with a disability, particularly an intellectual developmental disability, you're

just like the next person with an intellectual developmental disability. We're all specific human beings. Label has nothing to do with it. So, the language, I think, is something also that I started paying attention a lot to in this book, because I realized how many acronyms and really ignorant language I use from being inside this disability industrial complex for 3 decades, and I really had to kind of pair all that away so that it could be accessed by a general readership.

Kelsey Henry: Yeah, I want to ask another question about that. As someone who works in disability services, like human services, with a focus on disability and labor, can you say more about other instances in which you had to sort of unlearn the received assumptions that you learn from being within that world about the capacities and the limitations of folks with disabilities?

Doug Crandell: Yes, I think I came to this a little differently, mostly because my folks, and in my family we had seen my sister labeled, diagnosed, and sold short, and we talk a lot about low expectations in the book. The system is just rife with that. I think the bigger challenge for me was trying to figure out—how can I make this so that anyone can understand it—most Americans, when you hear Goodwill, or you pass a human service agency that might have two figures kind of holding hands, and that's their logo, and there's a beautiful mission statement about inclusion and a living up to our best independence, everyone goes "oh, good! They're helping folks."

Most Americans don't know that that's where six to seven times the abuse is happening. They don't know that subminimum wages is exploitative. They don't know that we haven't changed some of our disability policy significantly in decades, so that part for me was trying to learn how I could communicate it. So, I did have to do some gut checking to stakeholders and people I needed at the table. I'll give you a very quick example. Here in Georgia, it's still legal to pay subminimum wages, and you might imagine how painful that is for me. Last legislative session we came close, but who's been carrying a lot of that water is the YWCA, here in Georgia, which has a Women's Policy Institute. And this group of just dedicated women have taken these cause on in Georgia over subminimum wages, and they are doing so much better at getting other people to the table than somebody like me, who's a disability advocate, because they can see and cut through it and they have a real strong stance. So, I think that's the path forward, both federally and then in states where it's still legal is getting people who care about this, not just from inside the disability industrial complex, because while there are people who care about it and have worked for decades to dismantle it, they haven't done it. We can't get it done without people who are passionate and see this really for what it is. It's exploitation, it's bad public policy, and lobbying. And these powerful groups are really kind of standing it up so that it doesn't go away.

Kelsey Henry: It seems like you're getting at the necessity of coalitional politics. I remember in the preface to your book you talk about Occupy Wall Street being a galvanizing sort of flashpoint moment when the relationship between disability and labor exploitation, which can sometimes be seen as too niche in its emphasis on disabled people, there was a way for those issues, and those activists to speak and connect deeply with grassroots, political movements that had a lot of people and presence behind it. And that was a moment in which coalition, connecting disability and labor exploitation to larger dialogues about exploitative labor practices, was really important. I'm just going to put a pin in that, and I'm excited to circle back around to that.

I'm wondering if you can demystify something for me. One of the most egregious examples in your book is Henry's Turkey Farm where men with intellectual disabilities were trafficked

to and from a Texas institution to an Iowa meat processing plant where they were inseminating, killing, and processing turkeys for subminimum wages. The system operated for more than three decades, which is mind boggling to me, and I'm curious about why you think this abuse got overlooked by the government and by the community for as long as it did, and what happened once it did catch the public's eye.

Doug Crandell: Yeah, it's a complex, complicated question. Henry's Turkey Service is 3 times as long as the other chapters. I'm not the first one to write about it. There's a great *New York Times* documentary short and a great book called *Boys in the Bunk House*. But I think the thing that surprised me the most was that there is this wonderful reporter at the *Des Moines Register*, and she, in 1979, goes into Alyssa, Iowa, which is still only 300 people by the way. She goes and hears all these wonderful things. You'll know from the book that the owners called them "their boys," and just a lot of demeaning language. Of course, we find out so much more about people dying, people being physically and sexually abused, people running away. Some of the men ran away. They were tracked down and then chained to their bed. She writes this two-day expose on the front pages of the *Des Moines Register* in 1979 and we don't close it down until 2009. The only way I can answer your question as to why it didn't happen right at the time—by the way, it's not a mediocre, milquetoast two-day expose. It's very critical. Then we have the *Wall Street Journal* guys who are really crime investigators. They go in '80 and '81 to sheltered workshops for the blind in New Jersey and have also scathing front page stories. I think it's an American tendency to lie to ourselves quite a bit, and I don't think that disability gets left out of that. I think we want to believe that we're a nation that loves people with disabilities. It's just if you look at our policy, it actually looks like we hate people with disabilities. And so I think it doesn't get solved because there's a lack of oversight on subminimum wages in the Congressional record. This subunit of government is called the Wage and Hour Division, and they've always been responsible for issuing the 14(c) certificates, of monitoring that, and sometimes some years went by and they didn't monitor any of them. They didn't check on any of them. And when they did check on them they really didn't do much. And while some of that has changed, unbelievably in 2023, obviously more oversight is not the answer, the answer is banning it.

I think one of the enduring heartaches of this story is that every week you can see a horrific story, and that means there are thousands more that we don't hear about of the abuse of folks Americans with disabilities in the United States. So, I think it's part of that othering that we do. I think it's, to be honest, some apathy on our part. We think, again, that well, there are places that have those wonderful signs. I know somebody's son or daughter who goes to that program. Let me make this clear. We call those community rehabilitation providers, CRP's. There are literally thousands across the country, and so many of them do wonderful work. It's also where most folks with disabilities are being harmed the most. So, it's an issue around policy that I think also intersects with our personal, cultural, and familial kind of views of disability, and that's a tough thing to legislate. But certainly oversight isn't it. And for my money it should be switched off right now with an executive order. It doesn't need to be a bill; we should just ban it and be done with it so that we can move on and make much better policy.

Emma Wathen: For me, one of the most striking facts about the situation at Henry's Turkey Farm is that the owners had previously relied on labor from the exploitative bracero program, in which Mexican farm workers would be hired to work in the U.S. under short term contracts. And the owners only began to turn to using workers from the Abilene State School after bracero programs began to be phased out, in essence replacing one vulnerable workforce with another. What did you make of that parallel?

Doug Crandell: Shamefully, I was not aware of the bracero program. Just one more thing. We're not taught in history what should be in every labor history course. It didn't surprise me, I guess, given how much in our country we just look the other way when there's money being made. I mean, make no mistake, the folks who owned Henry's Turkey service, and other companies that have relied on that very, very, very cheap labor, know exactly what they're doing. They know that that's the way that they can make this kind of profit. I really thought, with Henry's Turkey Service and people in my kind of community of disability advocates trying to overturn this awful policy, saw 2009 as kind of a wakeup call for people outside of the disability industrial complex. I believed it would have been shut off right then. But understand this: that it's exposed in 2009 and by 2011 there's something put out about Henry's Turkey Service from the National Disability Rights network called, "Segregated and Exploited." It gets sent around everywhere, and then in 2011, we have a bill that gets introduced in Congress called the Fair Wages for Workers with Disabilities Act, and some of the biggest names in human services, like trade groups, Goodwill and others, spent millions fighting to keep subminimum wages legal.

We try again in 2014, and we passed something called the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, fully implemented in 2016, and what does it still have in it? Subminimum wages. It doesn't ban them, it just says that if someone is going to refer a worker with a disability to one of these places—one of these sheltered workshops—they got to jump through some hoops. That tells us how strong, financially and politically, that lobby is for the disability industrial complex. My guess is the reason we haven't had any more co-sponsors on the bill in the House since I think last September maybe, is because there's been some significant lobbying. It's just sitting there. So, what can we do? Right? I tell people you can go on the USDL's website. One positive thing that happened in the last decade is they put up where all the 14(c) certificates are. You can see if there's one in your community. How many are in your state? How many folks are on those 14(c) certificates? How many workers? Go and visit and ask questions: How do people leave here? How do they get a regular real job in the community. Because that's the only way we're going to impact it locally. There is also nothing wrong with also advocating strongly to ban it in your state, but I think having firsthand experience is really important. And you can see for yourself that it's an outdated harmful, bad public policy, and the only thing that's propping it up is money and lobbying.

Emma Wathen: Let's continue on this thread about wake-up calls that happened in the early 2010s. So, the title of your book *Twenty-Two Cents an Hour* refers to the wage that Goodwill paid their workers with disabilities. It became somewhat of a slogan when the National Federation of the Blind began its boycott of Goodwill in 2012. How did this boycott compare to earlier efforts to abolish subminimum wages for workers with disabilities?

Doug Crandell: If you don't know anything about the National Federation of the Blind, it is an absolutely impeccable organization that is always led by folks who are blind. Really they were the first ones embracing lived experience inside the disability industrial complex. This idea that, you know, nothing about us without us. So, I admire the leadership there. The history is absolutely fascinating, and I couldn't help but to put some of that in the book because it's so inspiring. What they did, though, by doing the Freedom of Information request for Goodwill, they did that on purpose. Right? I mean, you could have made a Freedom of Information request to a very small sheltered workshop, say in West Virginia, and find out probably the same thing. But most Americans know what Goodwill is and they needed that to pin it to, because the problem has been, as we talked about earlier, the folks who have been trying to solve this issue, like myself and others, are part of the system. And so, it needed people outside to have fresh eyes and to understand that it's truly a labor and civil rights issue. It's not a disability issue entirely.

What the boycotts did, which arguably were small—they weren't very big, you know, there were a handful of stores here and there, and signs and all that. However, what it prompted was a piece by Harry Smith on Rock Center, which used to be an evening news report for NBC—Brian Williams and Harry Smith—they did a whole segment, it's only about 4 or 5 min, but it's called the Wage Wars. They profiled a blind couple from Montana, who were also in the book and I had a great opportunity to interview and get to know them a little bit, and that kind of brought it to the general public.

I think, where the disability field misses the opportunity, though, is probably with Henry's Turkey Service. Because while there's a heart-wrenching book, I think it was a misstep not to use that to overturn subminimum wages. That was the only thing that we needed really to do that. I guess, in hindsight, when you think about tactics, you know, NFB is powerful in that it's got lots of local chapters and state chapters. While they have, I wouldn't say backed off of subminimum wages, I think they are wondering what the next step can be if you've got a bill that's not being acted on. I will say one other thing—it's a little wonky, a little geeky—but last fall the feds did release a 167 million dollars for states to apply to phase out subminimum wages. It's called—the acronym is terrible—it's called SWCIE: subminimum wage to competitive integrated employment.

I still have concerns about that. I'm working on some of those projects, full transparency, it's very difficult when you still have it legal nationally. It violates *Olmstead*, it violates the ADA, it violates IDEA, it violates just basic civil rights of citizens. And yet we're still trying to change it without getting rid of it, and that's a concern for me.

Kelsey Henry: I'm curious about some of the underlying assumptions and the internal logic of disability labor policy that you touch on in the book. You use this language of "cycles of low expectations," and that's a theme that comes up repeatedly. The cycle of employers and policymakers having really low expectations of people with disabilities and having a tendency to assess them on skills that they're bad at and not allowing them to demonstrate their individuality to show the skills that they're good at. You also show us some examples of people who had formerly worked in sheltered workshops and found opportunities to really thrive once they found employment in their communities that better suited their actual interests and talents. So, I think what this is touching on a little bit, and you spoke to this earlier, is a tendency to not see people with disabilities as individuals—a tendency to lump them into a category that's defined by incapacity instead of individual personalities and abilities. I'm wondering, what can human service agencies learn from some of the counter-examples that you gave in the book?

Doug Crandell: Yeah, you know. It's kind of the essence of this story. The truth is—and this is harsh, and I've wrestled with this, believe me. Not only have I been sued because of the book, I have received emails that are not very nice. But the truth is, it's all broken. Our views on disability—like so many other social issues, it's systemic. It's based on bad science, it's based on othering. But here is the harsh reality: I used to believe deeply that if I showed the opposite, what could be true and what is true, that it would change hearts and minds. It won't. The business models are set up for these provider organizations in the United States to keep people in their buildings, to keep billing minds and bodies. If someone is "fixed," rehabilitated, gets new skills, they can no longer bill off of that mind or body. It behooves them, the disability industrial complex, to have those low expectations to make sure that there's always—and this is a gross term but it's absolutely true—that there is a product to bill off of. And it happens to be human beings.

I'll give you an example. It's a small statistic in the book, but the number of folks on subminimum wages have dropped every year. We used to have about 1.7 million people on subminimum wages. We're down to about, depending on the data set, 100 to 150,000 people. Those folks didn't just go to work. We didn't convince these organizations to put people to work in real jobs. They moved them into another program. They moved them out of a sheltered workshop into a day program to do what? To keep billing. These organizations can bill Medicaid. They can bill state dollars. They can bill vocational rehabilitation dollars. Some of these organizations have big contracts with county commissioners to fund their services. So, the kind of hate mail I get sometimes is like, how dare you? We don't have enough money in the disability system as it is. That's true, we don't. But the money we do have, hundreds of billions, are going to CEOs who are making \$250,000, \$400,000, \$750,000 a year. So, do we need more money? Not the provider agencies. Not the disability industrial complex.

One of the things that's really promising is a set of advocates who are really talking about self-direction with funding personalized budgets. Right now if you have a Medicaid waiver and you're in a sheltered workshop, that provider gets all that funding. We want it so that you can self-direct— a family, a person with a disability, can choose their services and purchase that where they want to. That's the real promising part. But the good stories, what's possible, they don't care. Because they see that as a fringe piece, and all they have to do is keep it from changing, and that's where you get the lobbying. I spend a little time in the book talking about this kind of inspiration disability porn stuff. You roll somebody out and they go, where is Doug going to go if he doesn't have this sheltered workshop? Yes, he only makes 22 cents an hour, but it's not about the money. It's about his purpose, feeling good about himself, etc. It's all a crock, it's all just inspirational junk to deflect people from really looking at the truth.

The truth is, you're an organization receiving federal and state dollars, and you must get outcomes. You can't spend decades keeping people in a building and billing off of them.

Emma Wathen: What do you think the path toward the abolition of subminimum wages might look like? Are there measures that you would recommend to prevent the disability industrial complex from continuing to flow and reinvent itself the way it has for the past century?

Doug Crandell: Yeah, that's such a good question. Well, we've talked about it a little, I think there's some misnomer, right, that people go, "Well, Doug, you're going to get what you want. That bill is going to be passed at some point. There'll be more states that phase it out." And I say great. We've known for seventy years that it's a terrible harmful practice, and it took us seven decades to help. It's just a symptom of a disability industrial complex that is run amok. And it's like so many parts of our American lives. You've got to get the money out of it. You've got to get the lobbying out of these issues so that real disability policy can be made. You know, I often tell people, in the UK, in 2002, they came up with what is essentially Health and Human Services there. I'm paraphrasing, but every person with intellectual developmental disability in the UK would have a regular job, live in a regular house on a regular street and a regular community. That's disrupting the system. I spend a little time on Medicaid law which snoozes people pretty quickly, but even in Medicaid these organizations have lobbied to keep any change from happening. We often forget that lobbyists are really not lobbying for changes, right? They're lobbying to protect turf and money, and so that's really what it's about, and I think most Americans know that pharmaceutical companies and energy companies have lobbyists. I think it's really a shock, at least it was to me, and I think to most folks. So that's a starting point. The other point is, yes, we need to ban it federally, and then we need to start saying to these

organizations: "How long does it take you to rehabilitate someone? Why is someone still in this program a decade later? You're using federal and state dollars, show us your evidence-based interventions. We want to see what you're doing to get the outcome." Because these dollars don't say be nice to people with disabilities, take care of them, babysit. It doesn't say any of that. It says two large things: rehabilitate, help us get the skills back that we've lost. Or another one. habilitate, which means gain new skills that I didn't have. That's it. If you're in a program for twenty years and you're still in that program, I argue that that's malpractice.

Emma Wathen: So, my final question for you is, what's next for you? Is there anything that you're working on right now that you're able to share with us, or is there anything else that you wanted to mention that we haven't gotten a chance to talk about yet?

Doug Crandell: Well, I'm thankful for your interest. So, thank you. It's an important topic. For me, you know, I run the Advancing Employment Training Center. Since you all know how it is in the university setting, chasing grants and foundation dollars and trying to keep things going. For Georgia, you know, I've got to get it banned. I've got to get it overturned here. I can't stand living here and knowing it's still law. There are only about 300 workers with disabilities in Georgia on subminimum wages, as compared to say a California that's seven or eight thousand. So that's a policy issue. In terms of the writing, I'm slated to do a book on how Americans with disabilities are afforded housing in the United States and haven't started on that yet, so we'll need to dive into that. I guess the only other thing I would just say is, to reiterate something, and that is that all of this is being done with our tax dollars, And we need to care enough. There's a lot to attend to in American social life, that's for sure, but we need to care enough because there are folks who are not part of our economic fabric of our communities, and that's a misjustice to us, and certainly to the person. I don't want to see—and we will, I guarantee you - If we don't do something, we'll see another Henry's Turkey Service. We'll see more abuse and lack of oversight if we don't do anything. So, urgency, I guess, is probably my next thing, making sure I keep it for myself, and I'm helping others adopt that sense of urgency.

Emma Wathen: Well, I eagerly await the results of both of your projects—both your activism and your next book on disability and housing—but until then, if people have not yet read *Twenty-Two Cents an Hour*, please go check it out, and maybe do a little research on what the laws look like in the state that you're living in and see if there's anything you can do to help out.

Kelsey Henry: Thank you so much for coming on the podcast, Doug. You are so easy to talk with, and you convey your thoughts so clearly and passionately. I know this is going to be such an exciting and accessible episode for our listeners, and I'm just so glad that we're going to be able to publish this.

Doug Crandell: Well, you choked me up at the end. Thank you, Kelsey. Thank you, Emma. It makes me feel wonderful that you care about this. Thank you.

Emma Wathen: Well, thank you so much for recording this with us, Doug, and best of luck on your projects.

Doug Crandell: Thank you.

Caroline Lieffers: Thanks to everyone out there for listening or reading the transcript. Please join us again next time. Bye-bye.