

**REMARKS OF FCC CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI
AT THE M-ENABLING SUMMIT
CHAIRMAN'S AWARDS FOR ADVANCEMENT IN ACCESSIBILITY**

WASHINGTON, DC

JUNE 12, 2018

To me, one of the highlights of the year is the annual M-Enabling Summit, and I'm thrilled to be back. Last year, I made a promise to you that during my tenure, the FCC would continue to be an active and enthusiastic participant in this conference. I'm glad we're making good on that promise.

This summit is unique in bringing together leading accessibility professionals and government officials from all over the globe. The innovations showcased here are just remarkable. In so many ways, they open the doors of digital opportunity for almost one billion people with disabilities around the world. This is an incredible accomplishment. So I want to congratulate the Summit's organizers. I also want to thank our dedicated FCC staff, many of whom are here this afternoon. Led by Karen Peltz Strauss, these public servants work tirelessly to improve access for people with disabilities. I'm proud to be on their team.

The FCC is working in many ways to ensure that Americans with disabilities can access all kinds of communications service.

For starters, we've forged ahead with research and development efforts to better understand the communications challenges encountered by people with disabilities. For example, we've been looking at ways to measure the quality and efficiency of telecommunications relay services so that those services can better serve consumers.

First, as a result of these efforts, just last week, the FCC approved a new way to provide relay services. Specifically, advances in fully automated speech recognition—ASR—now enable this technology to be used to generate captions on Internet Protocol Captioned Telephone Service (IP CTS) calls. Our recent decision will enable IP CTS providers to bring full ASR to consumers. Consumers will benefit from this innovation—just think about what it means to reduce the delay between the times that words are spoken and captions are displayed.

I should add that we've made clear in our IP CTS ruling that the FCC won't approve any application to provide ASR unless the provider shows that it will meet our mandatory minimum standards for functional equivalency, including those relating to the confidentiality of IP CTS calls. Full ASR will also lower the costs of providing IP CTS and help ensure the sustainability of this service for the Americans with hearing loss who need it.

Second, I believe that these efforts mesh well with our work on improving the interoperability of video relay services (VRS). Last year, we adopted rules requiring VRS providers to make it easier for VRS consumers to call each other regardless of the VRS service or equipment they use. This also enables consumers to switch between VRS providers.

Third, because we also need to stretch scarce TRS dollars as far as we can, we're aiming to improve accountability and fiscal responsibility in this program. So this past year, we launched a centralized database of VRS users. We need to reduce any waste, fraud, and abuse in the system in order to make sure that more users who need these services are able to get them.

At the same time, we've stepped up our efforts in a fourth area: encouraging both government and the private sector to include Direct Video Calling in their customer call centers. This would allow American Sign Language users to directly call agencies and businesses without the need for a relay intermediary. The FCC already offers this service. ASL users can call our customer service

representatives directly, so that they can have a more accurate, efficient, and private exchange of information.

Another program we're proud of is the FCC's well-known National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program, also called "iCanConnect." To ensure that people who are deaf-blind have access to communication products and services, iCanConnect has provided communications equipment to thousands of low-income deaf-blind people across the U.S. since 2012. It started as a pilot and became permanent just last July. And it's having a positive impact.

Let me tell you about just one of its amazing success stories. Debra Holst, a woman born deaf, also began losing her sight at age 30. Neglected in a facility for most of her life, in 2015, she went to live with her brother and sister-in-law. But they didn't know sign language. So Debra remained isolated and unable to connect with them or others. It wasn't until she was referred to the iCanConnect program by her church that she got the communication equipment—and training on how to use that equipment—that she needed. She now regularly exchanges text messages with her brother, sister-in-law, their children, 11 grandchildren and several cousins. She has even mastered a popular video calling app and that her face lights up when she gets an incoming video call or text message. *That* is the power of technology.

And we're doing more. To help people who have difficulty hearing over mobile phones, this past October, the FCC updated its rules requiring wireline and wireless phones to be hearing-aid-compatible and equipped with volume control. In the not-too-distant future, this will mean better-amplified volumes, and millions of Americans who use hearing aids being able to access phones using advanced communication services like Voice-over-Internet-Protocol.

Over the past year, the FCC has also looked closely at how best to ensure accessible emergency communications for people with disabilities. We're doing that through improvements to 911 capabilities, wireless emergency alerts, and responses to communication breakdowns caused by hurricanes and other severe weather. We hope for a quiet 2018 hurricane season, but in case it's not, we want Americans with disabilities to be as informed and safe as possible.

Another priority has been enhancing access to TV programming. Since I was last before you, the FCC increased by approximately 75% the number of hours of programming that must be video-described on certain channels. The new rules, which will become effective next month, will ensure that millions of Americans without sight can take in their favorite shows without worrying about missing out on the action when there are breaks in the audio.

Speaking of video, over the past few years, we've coordinated with the video gaming industry as they have worked through challenges in making their games' communication services accessible to people with disabilities. The extra time and flexibility that we afforded this industry to meet these challenges has enabled these companies to successfully overcome many accessibility barriers. We're excited about the progress they have made in finding such solutions.

A quick final point on video. This year, we also launched our very own ASL video library, available on our website and YouTube channel. We invite you to come check out our videos, which provide a wealth of information on accessibility and consumer-related topics.

This is a fairly diverse accessibility agenda, as you can see. And as we move forward with further reforms on that agenda, we continue to rely on our Disability Advisory Committee for advice and recommendations. In the past year, for example, this committee of consumer, industry, and government stakeholders has provided counsel on real-time text, ways to assess relay quality, and emergency information. We greatly appreciate their efforts, knowing the considerable time and efforts they expend to help us do our job.

That's not all we're doing to help close the digital divide for millions of Americans with disabilities—and positively impact the international accessibility landscape. But that's about all I can cover in my allotted time slot. I just want to reiterate my commitment to you that so long as I am Chairman, I will continue to prioritize ensuring that people with disabilities are not left behind as communications technologies advance. We want people with disabilities to be full participants in the digital revolution.

I find this to be a perfect segue to tonight's event: the Chairman's Awards for Advancement in Accessibility. Through these awards, we can recognize accessibility innovations and initiatives that help us reach our goal of full inclusion. And when innovations like these are developed today for those with disabilities, they set the stage for tomorrow's cutting-edge technologies designed for the general public.

As always, this year we had many superb nominations. I thank all of the applicants for making a difference in the lives of individuals with disabilities worldwide. This year, we have four excellent winners. Before I turn it over to the hardworking Chief of the FCC's Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau, Patrick Webre to announce the awards, I want to thank you again for allowing me to speak to you tonight. I hope you enjoy the rest of your summit!