

**REMARKS OF FCC CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI
AT THE M-ENABLING SUMMIT**

ARLINGTON, VA

JUNE 18, 2019

Thank you for that warm welcome! And thank you to the M-Enabling Summit's staff, sponsors, and organizers for allowing me and the FCC the opportunity to continue to be a part of this terrific event.

The Summit's platform for empowering technologies and focus on next-generation innovations and breakthroughs for users of all abilities goes hand-in-hand with the FCC's goal to make technology accessible for everyone.

This is my third year attending this ceremony, and I'm always impressed and inspired by the breakthroughs that are on display. But I have to acknowledge one notable change since last year's Summit.

After many years of dedicated service, Karen Peltz Strauss has retired from the FCC. As all of you know, Karen was a legendary advocate for Americans with disabilities, and we certainly miss her energy and expertise.

As hard as it was to say goodbye to Karen, I'm thrilled that we recently welcomed Diane Burstein to lead the Commission's efforts in this space. Diane joins us from NCTA, where she focused on accessibility issues as Vice-President and Deputy General Counsel. She's already off to a fast start as the Deputy Chief of our Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau. And with Suzy Rosen Singleton still running the point for our Disability Rights Office, we've got a first-rate team at the FCC fighting for people with disabilities.

2019 has already been a busy year for us in the area of accessibility. In February, we took steps to enhance program management and improve emergency call handling in the IP captioned telephone service, or IP CTS program. These reforms will make the program more sustainable and fiscally responsible by ensuring that providers are compensated only for calls made by individuals who are in fact eligible to use the service. They will also make it easier for IP CTS users to reach 911 quickly and reliably.

This builds on the important IP CTS reforms we made one year ago to improve this program for millions of Americans who rely on captioned telephone services to connect with others in the workplace and to improve the quality of their lives.

And last month, the FCC adopted reforms to help improve Video Relay Service (VRS), expand access to direct video communications, and protect the VRS program against waste, fraud, and abuse.

Even with all this, our work isn't done. That's why we're proposing to make permanent the pilot program for at-home call handling, which allows VRS providers to handle some VRS calls from at-home workstations, subject to appropriate safeguards. The pilot program enabled providers to attract and retain qualified interpreters who couldn't work at the providers' call centers. This, in turn, expanded the pool of qualified sign-language interpreters who can improve VRS reliability.

That's a high-level sketch of some of the FCC's work on accessibility. But I will be the first to acknowledge that we do not have a monopoly on wisdom when it comes to these issues. That's why we've made it a big priority to listen to and learn from advocates like you.

Just last month, the FCC hosted a forum on captioning. It gave the public a chance to discuss the captioning of live news programming. And it opened a conversation on how best to ensure accessibility

of local news content in small to mid-size markets, which are not subject to the FCC's rules requiring "real time" captions.

Additionally, our Disability Advisory Committee remains active. It's been a valuable way for consumer and industry stakeholders with interests in accessibility issues to exchange ideas. It helps consumers with disabilities participate in FCC proceedings, and helps us get the word out about our thinking on accessibility.

These forums and interactions have made me more optimistic than ever that we can significantly improve the lives of people with disabilities through communications technology. This week's Summit confirms that the glass is indeed getting fuller.

I'd like to recognize a group who unfortunately couldn't make it tonight, due to transportation issues. We were going to be joined this evening by a group of local high school students from Poolesville High School, in Montgomery County, Maryland. These students worked with the Hearing Loss Association of America as part of a national competition to create an innovative process, device, system, or software that enables people with disabilities to overcome workplace challenges. In 2018, they developed a text-enabled doorbell so that staff could communicate with visitors arriving to their office suite. In 2019, they designed a table top device that provides a visual cue in conference room settings. This helps hearing-impaired participants know who is speaking, giving them a better chance to lip-read.

Their creative solutions are the latest reminder that I was far less productive in high school than I should have been. We're sad they couldn't join us tonight, but their achievement gives us a glimpse of what's possible when we enlist our brightest innovators in this cause.

Closing the digital divide is the FCC's top priority and extending the promise of digital technologies to those with disabilities is an important aspect of addressing that priority. As we strive to give all Americans the chance to communicate without restrictions or limitations, I hope that all of you will continue to innovate when it comes to accessibility. And I hope you will let us know how we can continue to be an active partner in your efforts. Together, we can accomplish our goal to help Americans with disabilities be participants in—not merely spectators of—the digital economy.

And in furtherance of that goal, it is my pleasure once again to present the Chairman's Awards for Advancement in Accessibility, commonly known as "the Chairman's Triple A." These awards allow the FCC to recognize notable innovations, improvements, and initiatives in accessibility that were introduced into the market during 2019.

We had great nominations again this year, and I want to congratulate all the companies and entities who shared their technologies and vision. We can't thank you enough for all that you are doing to enable people with disabilities to better interact and communicate. But before I turn it over to the Chief of the FCC's Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau, Patrick Webre, to announce the winners, I'd like to mention one more thing.

I'm sure many of you are already aware that history was made this month when Ali Stroker won the Tony Award for Featured Actress in a Musical. What makes her win for her role in *Oklahoma!* historic is that Ali has used a wheelchair since she was two. It's hard to imagine a more vivid example of how *all* of us benefit when people with disabilities are empowered to use their talents. Ali Stroker gets up on a stage eight times a week. And through her acting and singing, she brings joy to hundreds of people during every performance. Ali closed her acceptance speech by thanking her parents "for teaching me to use my gifts to help people."

That's what tonight's award is about: celebrating innovators who make it possible for Americans with disabilities to use their gifts. Enabling those with disabilities to use today's technologies can help them realize their full potential. When that happens, we all win.

And in the spirit of the theater: Bravo to tonight's honorees, and I look forward to the encore!