

**REMARKS OF FCC CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI
AT THE CHAIRMAN'S AWARD FOR ADVANCEMENT IN ACCESSIBILITY**

OCTOBER 8, 2020

Thank you for that kind introduction, Patrick. And welcome to everyone watching on the livestream of the 2020 Chairman's Awards for Advancement in Accessibility! Internally, we call them the Triple A's. Obviously, we're not the first to use this acronym. Fortunately, minor league baseball, the tiny batteries lobby, and America's largest auto club have graciously refrained from suing us for trademark infringement.

In a first, we are holding this event online because we are still living through a once-in-a-century pandemic. While 2020 will always be remembered as the year of COVID-19, it was also a year when we celebrated two important anniversaries. In July, we celebrated the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). And, as you no doubt heard on the earlier panel, today marks the 10th anniversary of the 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act.

When thinking about how best to commemorate these anniversaries, I am reminded of the words of the legendary civil rights champion John Lewis. In an essay that was published upon his passing, he wrote that "Democracy is not a state. It is an act." Each new generation must build upon the progress made by those who came before.

The ADA and the CVAA were both landmark achievements. And we rightly celebrate their passage. But they are not the end of the story. They are just important chapters reminding us that the rest of the story remains to be told. We should and we must build upon their progress. Flowery speeches on anniversaries are nice and appropriate. Action that enables innovations that benefit people with disabilities is better.

For the past decade, the FCC has been working to fulfill the promise of the CVAA. And for the past four years, I'm proud to say that we have been able to continue this forward momentum.

We reformed the Internet Protocol Captioned Telephone Service, or IP CTS, eliminating hundreds of millions of dollars in waste and helping to ensure that this critical communications service remains sustainable for Americans with hearing loss who need it.

We also allowed service providers to use fully automated speech recognition to produce captions, as part of our IP CTS reforms. This technology reduces the delay between the times that words are spoken and captions are displayed.

We ensured interoperability of video relay services by incorporating technical standards and establishing an interoperability testing laboratory. We also authorized direct video communications between sign-language users and customer service call centers.

We increased the amount of audio-described programming that certain broadcast stations and cable channels must provide to consumers.

We increased accessibility to live news programming on smaller stations by hosting a forum and engaging with stakeholders of the Commission's Disability Advisory Committee to develop an accessibility toolkit for stations.

We extended hearing aid compatibility requirements for wireline phones to consumer equipment for advanced communications services, including a volume control requirement for wireless phones.

At the start of the pandemic, we quickly approved waivers for Telecommunications Relay Service providers to give them more flexibility to deal with reduced staffing and increased call volumes, to enable more of their employees to provide services from their homes, and to expand the pool of contractors

qualified to provide American Sign Language interpretation services. These waivers, which we have extended several times, have helped ensure that consumers can access relay services during the pandemic.

And we're still at it. Just this week, I shared with my fellow Commissioners new rules to expand our audio description regulations by phasing them in for an additional 10 markets each year for the next four years. If adopted, our rules regarding audio-described programming on broadcast stations will soon reach the country's 100 largest television markets.

Six days from now, our Disability Advisory Committee will meet to discuss new technologies for captioning live TV programming and best practices for creating audio description, among other topics.

Obviously, this is not a complete list of all our activities, but I think you get the point: We've been busy.

And when I say we, I'm talking about our amazing team at the FCC, starting with Diane Burstein and Bob Aldrich in our Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau. Our Disability Rights Office is filled with professionals dedicated to improving access to modern communications for the disabilities community. They also have two outstanding leaders: Suzy Rosen Singleton and Eliot Greenwald.

Recognizing these talented co-workers who have made remarkable contributions to the cause of promoting accessibility is a natural segue to talking about today's Triple-A winners.

Through these awards, we recognize individuals and companies who have brought us closer to our goal of full inclusion.

From the many nominations received, we selected three exceptional people who have advanced the cause of accessibility in telecommunications and media in different ways. Today's winners exemplify the perseverance and commitment of individuals who truly care and have dedicated their professional careers to the advancement of accessible communications.

To save some suspense for Patrick Webre's presentations, I'm not going to call anybody out by name. But if you're watching this, you'll know who I'm talking about.

The only reason our first honoree has never won a Triple-A is because she was previously ineligible since she was on the FCC staff. Seriously, if you were to build a Mount Rushmore of legendary FCC career staff, she would be etched into stone. She helped to write landmark legislation in support of accessibility and spent decades working on behalf of consumer organizations. She helped lead the coalition of over 300 national and regional organizations which played a critical part in the enactment of the CVAA. She even wrote the book—and to be clear, I mean *she literally wrote the book*—on making telecommunications accessible for deaf and hard-of-hearing Americans. And for many years in the FCC's Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau, she led our policymaking on accessibility matters and offered many her wise counsel—including me, for which I am deeply grateful.

We also recognize a tireless advocate for the deaf and hard of hearing. For 23 years, he led a national consumer organization that promotes equal access to telecommunications, media, and information technology. For eighteen years, he chaired a national coalition of consumer and professional organizations focused on fostering collaboration on public policy and legislative issues. He is a man whose stature and work has left an indelible mark on how telecommunications services are delivered. He was also no stranger to the FCC, serving distinguished terms on both the Consumer Advisory Committee and Disability Advisory Committee, including service to the FCC and the Americans we serve as Chair of the Disability Advisory Committee.

And finally, we recognize an industry leader extraordinaire—someone whose 30-year career has transformed the landscape of accessible technologies. He has championed and directed highly innovative and impactful technological advances at Comcast and AOL. His work directly opened the door to enhanced access to video programming for consumers who are blind or visually impaired. He personally showed me the accessibility innovations he and his team were pioneering during a visit I made to

Philadelphia a few years ago, and was it ever impressive—the memory of that visit has stuck with me ever since. And his work on the Disability Advisory Committee helped advance an important dialogue between industry and consumers to benefit individuals with disabilities.

Since we cannot be together in person, let me show the awardees and our audience at home a sample Chairman's AAA award. As one might say, the award is in the mail.

And with that, let me again congratulate each of this afternoon's awardees and thank all of you on our livestream for joining us. I'll turn it back over to Patrick to present today's awards.

[PRESENTATION OF AWARDS BY PATRICK WEBRE]

Thank you, Patrick.

I want to again recognize our winners: Karen Peltz Strauss, Claude Stout, and Tom Wlodkowski. These outstanding and worthy award honorees are part of an active community of policy professionals, advocates, industry technical experts, and members of academia who are united in building a more accessible world for people with disabilities. Many of them also happen to be in the audience. Thanks to all of you for your service.

I also want to thank everyone who had a hand in conducting this year's Chairman's AAA. From the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau: Ed Bartholme, Zac Champ, Diane Burstein, Sherry Dawson, Keyla Hernandez-Ulloa, Gerard Williams, Deandrea Wilson, Chantal Virgile, Mike Snyder, Suzy Rosen Singleton; and from the Office of Workplace Diversity: D'wana Terry.

And I want to thank each of you who have joined in to view this webcast. Take care and thank you for watching.