

**SEPARATE STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS**

Re: *Telecommunications Relay Services, and Speech-to-Speech Services for
Individuals with Hearing and Speech Disabilities (CC Docket No. 98-67)*

When we speak about the transformative power of telecommunications services, we really are speaking about the ability of technology to improve the life of every American. In a small but significant way, our action today does just that. By clarifying that captioned telephone service is an enhanced voice carry over service eligible for interstate fund reimbursement, we may enable millions of Americans to benefit from the innovative simplicity of this new form of TRS.

When Congress passed the Americans with Disabilities Act more than twelve years ago, it cautioned the Commission to avoid action that would “discourage or impair the development of improved technology.” With today’s action we heed Congress’ warning. Yet as the pace of technology quickens, we need to resolve petitions like this one with greater speed. For the same reason, we need to commit to reviewing our TRS requirements with ever greater frequency. The Commission also needs to complete its section 255 proceeding on accessibility to equipment and services. Similarly, we need to do more to encourage a robust dialogue between telecommunications companies and the hearing and speech impaired communities that rely on their products and services.

Although disabled Americans face unique challenges, innovative telecommunications services present unique possibilities for improving their lives. As their lives are improved, so are the lives of millions of others who can communicate with them.