

**STATEMENT OF
CHAIRMAN MICHAEL K. POWELL**

Re: Telecommunications Relay Services and Speech-to-Speech Services for Individuals with Hearing and Speech Disabilities (CC Docket 90-571, CC Docket 98-67) Order on Reconsideration; (CG Docket 03-123) Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking.

Section 225 of the Act seeks to ensure access to communications facilities for all Americans. Today's Order empowers people with disabilities to participate in the information economy and reap its benefits equally with their neighbors.

Today's item takes another step toward fulfilling the goals of Title IV of the Americans with Disabilities Act by further refining the rules governing the provision of Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS). In so doing, we take a first step toward expanding the forms of TRS that will become mandatory TRS services. In addition, this Order gives relay providers the freedom to adapt their offerings to the needs of their customers. Features that they might offer such as automatic call-back, higher transmission speeds, and tighter security for IP Relay calls should represent value added benefits to consumers. At the same time, this Commission must exercise its oversight responsibilities to ensure that our TRS reimbursement mechanism does not become an unbounded source of funding for features that go well-beyond the TRS connectivity that so many people with disabilities depend upon.

Moreover, Video Relay Service (VRS) is an application spurring demand for broadband facilities. I am encouraged by this industry's ability to innovate and provide solutions for customers. The availability of these services reflects the vital role that broadband technology plays in improving consumers' lives, satisfying important social policy objectives, and driving our nation's economy. The possible expansion of TRS funding to include VRS will present difficult questions of federal authority as well as unique reimbursement questions. I look forward to hearing from the disability community as well as other stakeholders, as we tackle these issues together. Our Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau will continue to open their doors to interested parties who are legitimately concerned about issues that are vital to the daily lives of people with disabilities.

We are proud of the decade of expanded opportunity and enhanced communications that TRS has fostered. Support for Americans with disabilities is central to the FCC's agenda. Our efforts, however, are in no way complete. I look forward to the continued growth of TRS as well as policies that increase access to the information economy.