

**STATEMENT OF
CHAIRMAN TOM WHEELER**

Re: *Transition from TTY to Real-Time Text Technology*, CG Docket No. 16-145; *Petition for Rulemaking to Update the Commission's Rules for Access to Support the Transition from TTY to Real-Time Text Technology*, and *Petition for Waiver of Rules Requiring Support of TTY Technology*, GN Docket No. 15-178, Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking.

When our nation's telecommunications system was first established, it was created without considering the needs of people who are deaf and hard-of-hearing. As a consequence, people who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, and have speech disabilities were left out. It was only when three deaf men – Weitbrecht, Saks and Marsters – came up with the idea of using teletype machines to couple with telephones that the TTY was born in the 1960s. These individuals did what the telephone companies did not. They made telephone communication possible for people who could not hear or speak.

But the TTY has only served as a band-aid for a telecommunications system that remains largely inaccessible to people with hearing and speech disabilities. It is an antiquated technology that uses a long discarded protocol, and has considerable limitations – both in terms of its speed and reliability. In addition, it only works on specialized equipment, keeping its users in telephone silos – apart from the mainstream telephone network that the rest of us use.

Real-time text, as a native IP technology designed for the packet-switched network environment, has been recognized internationally as an effective replacement for TTY technology. The universal availability of real-time text in virtually any off-the-shelf end user wireless device will allow both people with disabilities and people without disabilities to adopt this solution seamlessly and ubiquitously.

We now have the opportunity – as we design our new communications system that is based on Internet-protocol – to finally make our nation's communications systems accessible to everyone.

In some places, this item sets out basic requirements for how to do this. In others, it offers strong guidance on how to achieve this in a way that will ensure that people with disabilities have the same access as voice telephone users.

It is now up to industry to get this right. It will be critical to work with consumers on this – to confer with people with disabilities about their needs, and the features that are essential to making real-time text a successful alternative to TTYs and voice services. We understand that a lot of industry-consumer collaboration has already occurred on bringing us to this point. Let's make it to the finish line.

I would like to thank many individuals and consumer organizations who contributed to this proceeding, many of whom have representatives here today. In particular, I'd like to recognize the National Association of the Deaf, Telecommunications for the Deaf, the Hearing Loss Association of America, Communication Service for the Deaf, the Northern Virginia Resource Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons, Gregg Vanderheiden of the Trace Center and, finally, Gallaudet University who is represented by their President Bobbi Cordano and Christian Vogler.

Thank you to the wireless service providers, who have engaged on this issue, and who already have made significant progress on the deployment of real-time text. Their leadership has brought us to this point.

Finally, thank you to the Commission staff for their work on this item. Frankly, I'm disappointed that this particular item did not go further. But I could not be prouder of what our Disability Rights Office and FCC team have accomplished over the past four years to make communications technology more accessible to people with disabilities. We prioritized text-to-911 availability, improved accessibility of emergency information on "second screen" devices, adopted closed captioning quality standards, expanded hearing aid compatibility obligations to cover modern wireless devices, utilized and promoted greater use of customer support via American Sign Language on videophones, made our deaf-blind

equipment distribution program permanent, established a Disability Advisory Committee, and sought to highlight the need for more video-described programming. Special thanks to Karen Peltz Strauss and CGB Directors Alison Kutler and Kris Monteith for their leadership, which made this progress possible.