

**Prepared Remarks of FCC Acting Chairwoman Mignon L. Clyburn
M-Enabling Summit
Arlington, VA
June 6, 2013**

Good Morning. I trust everybody is awake by now, since it is so late in the day.

First, I wish to thank my friend, Karen Peltz Strauss, for her gracious introduction. As the agency's point person, or as we say, resident angel on accessibility issues at the Commission, I cannot help but brag about this superstar, who has opted to share her talents with us at the FCC. Because of this, millions will benefit for years to come.

And to all of the participants in week's summit, we are incredibly grateful for your participation and commitment. I'm encouraged to see wireless industry leaders here, like Sprint's Dan Hesse, highlighting opportunities in this area. Thanks are also due to 3G-ict and E.J. Krause and Associates for organizing this summit, and of course, to 3G-ict's Axel Leblois for actually conceiving this remarkable conference.

The FCC is proud to be an official partner of today's event, which dates back to the first M-Enabling Summit in 2011, which we were pleased to host, and I was happy to attend. We had over 350 participants from 30 countries, including ITU Secretary General Dr. Hamadoun Toure, Kareem Dale from the White House, and of course, many of you.

The most obvious takeaway for me from the 2011 summit, and today's event, is that broadband-powered technology, in particular mobile technology, offers an unprecedented opportunity to enhance the independence, productivity, and overall quality of life of older adults and persons with disabilities.

High-speed Internet access empowers individuals who wish to or are best suited to work from home or maybe even to start their own business. It can facilitate civic participation by directly and efficiently connecting individuals to their communities and government. It opens up a world of educational opportunities, and may even save your life, with remote health monitoring and consultations using broadband connections.

Every single day, we learn or hear about new applications that are available on our smartphones or tablets that can make our lives a little bit better – sometimes a whole lot better.

But one thing that's particularly exciting about today's summit is its timing. We often have to remind ourselves of this, but we are still in the early innings of the mobile revolution, and the fact that we are talking about accessibility issues so early in this evolution, is quite noteworthy.

Throughout the history of communications technology, it pains me to affirm that accessibility issues have been an afterthought. It was often years, and sometimes decades, before persons with disabilities were given anything remotely approaching equal access to communications like telephones, television and cell phones. The telephone network was around, for approximately 100 years, before we got our call operator assisted relay services. And television was around for 50 years before we required programs to be closed captioned and it took even longer before we put into place our recent mandates for video description.

We painfully realized that our failure to consider accessibility issues in the early stages led to retrofit solutions that were more expensive and less effective.

When I arrived at the FCC, in 2009, the smartphone adoption rate in the U.S. was about 15%; the app store model was still in its infancy; and the tablet market didn't even exist.

Today, the majority of U.S. mobile subscribers have smartphones; Apple just celebrated the 50 billionth download from its app store; and tablet sales have already surpassed desktop PC sales.

And with the introduction of those Google Glasses and the Pebble Watch, we're seeing a new phase of sensor-enabled, wearable devices that are hands-free and always-on.

In sum, talking about how to make these new technologies more accessible to seniors and people with disabilities now, as opposed to later, is critical, necessary, and that is why today's summit is so important.

We not only have a unique opportunity to harness the power of new wired and wireless broadband technology to improve the lives of seniors and persons with disabilities, we have an obligation to do so, for broadband is no longer a luxury, it is a necessity.

Since 2008, the U. S. has succeeded in bringing the broadband adoption rate up from about 60 percent to about 70 percent. But the fact remain that nearly one in three Americans has yet to adopt broadband at home. And what is most unfortunate is that populations who could benefit most, like seniors and people with disabilities, disproportionately find themselves on the wrong side of the digital divide.

With an estimated 54 million Americans living with disabilities, it is unacceptable to allow so many of our fellow citizens to be left behind.

That's why the FCC has been working so hard to promote universal broadband availability, taking significant efforts to ensure that these communities have the access they need to use broadband. Since I arrived at the Commission, and as long as I remain at the Commission, promoting greater accessibility in communications has been and will be a top policy priority.

So what has the FCC been doing?

To promote greater accessibility, we released the National Broadband Plan in early 2010, and one of the reforms that came out of this was the Accessibility and Innovation Initiative. The goal here was to serve as a catalyst to communications companies and developers, on ways to bring about accessible technologies. We've conducted workshops and held competitive challenges to produce accessible solutions. We also established an awards program at the FCC, to recognize the best private and public sector ventures to make communications tools more accessible to people with disabilities.

The Broadband Plan also included recommendations to enhance accessibility, many of which were included in the 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act, or CVAA— which is the most significant disabilities law since the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed more than two decades ago.

For more than two years, we've been moving aggressively to implement this landmark law, and I'm proud to say that the Commission has hit every, single, key deadline. In October 2011, we adopted rules to promote accessibility to advanced communications services like text messaging, instant messaging, e-mail and voice over IP services. These rules go into effect in October of this year. We have been meeting with companies and are already starting to see major improvements in the mobile industry. The list of accessibility features being rolled out because of the CVAA is already long. For example, there are adjustable fonts and color contrasts on cellular phones; greater ability to control mobile devices with your voice; the ability to have text messages read aloud to you; the ability for phones to speak as you move through the settings and programs; the ability for phones to tell people, who are blind, what they're touching on the touch screen; the ability for some phones to take pictures of printed text and read it aloud for the blind; and email programs that read messages to you. Each of these innovations can significantly aid users, and collectively, the impact could be huge.

The FCC has also implemented rules under the CVAA, to dramatically enhance the availability of closed captioning. Previously, only equipment that had a picture screen of 13 inches or larger was required to display closed captions. After January 1, 2014, equipment with screens of any size must be capable of displaying closed captions, if doing so is technically feasible as well as achievable with reasonable effort or expense.

Now, people needing captions, can use all types of devices, giving them the freedom to watch programs on their computers, their tablets, and even their mobile phones. This will help them not only enjoy recreational programming, but also keep informed, by having access to news and public affairs on their mobile devices. Just last month, the Commission acted to improve access to emergency services, for people with disabilities, with our work to facilitate text-to-911.

Since the 1970s, people who are deaf, hard of hearing or speech disabled, relied on text telephone or TTYs for direct emergency access. Now, because TTY services are a dying technology, this population needs a means of accessing emergency services directly. So text is needed to achieve equal and direct access to emergency communications during the migration to IP enabled emergency networks. These communities already have indirect access, through relay services. But in an emergency, it is better to have direct access, rather than go through a communications assistant, which can take longer, and has a higher risk of errors.

Of course, text-to-911 will also greatly benefit the general population, which increasingly uses text rather than voice to communicate on a daily basis. I am glad that text-to-911 services will soon be ready. Last month, the FCC adopted an Order that promotes the transition to allowing Americans to send emergency text messages, to law enforcement and other public safety agencies when they are in trouble. Until all carriers and public safety agencies can send and receive emergency text messages, consumers will receive a bounce-back message, letting them know that text-to-911 is not possible at their emergency center and that they must try another means to communicate in times of crisis.

Four of our nationwide carriers have voluntarily agreed that, by May 15, 2014, they will give their customers the ability to send emergency text messages to law enforcement agencies that can receive those texts. The Commission will continue to work toward adopting rules that make it a permanent requirement, for all wireless carriers, to offer emergency text messages.

Our implementation of the CVAA did not stop there. Over the past two years, we also:

- Restored rules, originally adopted by the Commission in 2000, to require video description on certain television shows, so that people who are blind and visually impaired can benefit from video programming along with everyone else;
- Created a new National Deaf Blind Equipment Distribution Program, by which local programs certified by the FCC, can distribute equipment to enable low income deaf-blind individuals to have access to the Internet and our telephone systems; and
- Adopted rules, to ensure that people who are blind and visually impaired, have audio access to emergency information, provided in text, when that information is shown, during regularly scheduled television programs.

We have nearly met all our statutory deadlines, but not quite. The CVAA also directs us to ensure that people who are blind and visually impaired, are able to change a channel, make a program louder, or find and select the program they want to watch on their video devices. We now have a notice of proposed rulemaking on this matter, and look forward to getting your feedback, to make sure that everyone has equal access to this equipment, which now typically provides such information via on-screen menus that are currently not accessible, to people who cannot see.

We will also be working diligently, to enforce these various mandates, and look forward to working with key stakeholders, to achieve the best possible outcome for consumers and industry.

Here's the bottom line: there are no more excuses not to make products and services accessible, for the tools and technologies, are readily available to make this happen.

The cooperative spirit that we are now seeing by the industry is proving that we have finally arrived to a place, where incorporating access is seen less as a burden than a challenge, and a way to reach huge markets of individuals who can benefit from access. The best, as the old song says, is yet to come.

Thank you.