

**REMARKS OF FCC CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI
AT THE M-ENABLING SUMMIT**

ARLINGTON, VA

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I would like to start off by thanking the Summit's sponsors and organizers for the opportunity to be a part of this terrific event. And special thanks to the dedicated FCC staff in attendance who work on accessibility issues—and in particular, Karen Peltz-Strauss. I may be the Chairman, but I've been around these issues long enough to know that Karen is clearly the FCC's top draw.

I'm proud that the FCC has been a partner in this event from the start. In fact, the Commission hosted the very first M-Enabling Summit at FCC headquarters back in 2011. And it's a sign of success that over the past six years, this event has grown to attract thousands of people from around the world who exchange information about accessible mobile technologies.

As long as I'm Chairman, I can assure you that the FCC will continue to be an active and enthusiastic participant in this Summit. That's because this Summit aligns perfectly with the FCC's statutory mission and my personal priorities.

Since day one of my Chairmanship, I've said the Commission has no higher calling than extending digital opportunity to *all* Americans. Every citizen who wants to participate in our digital economy and society should be able to do so—no matter who you are.

A big part of that is closing the digital divide in our country—connecting people who are being bypassed by the digital revolution. And the simple truth is, in too many instances, that divide persists, and is perhaps growing.

That's why I spent the past week on a road trip from Milwaukee, Wisconsin to Casper, Wyoming. Over 1,672 miles and nearly 20 stops, I personally heard from people in rural towns and Tribal areas about the need for high-speed connectivity in their communities. And I discussed ways the FCC could help.

Another aspect of confronting this challenge is to expand digital opportunity for Americans with disabilities wherever they happen to live. Unfortunately, in this regard, the simple truth is that we're not where we need to be. There's so much untapped potential, so many people with unexpressed ideas and unmet hopes. But however large the challenges of accessibility might be, we are working to tackle them because the opportunities are so much greater.

I think President George H.W. Bush framed this issue perfectly in his remarks after signing the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990. He said promoting accessibility is about opening “once-closed doors into a new era of equality, independence, and freedom.” That is heady stuff. Equality. Independence. Freedom. We're not talking about minor conveniences. We're talking about major improvements to people's lives.

That's why it's so important that we make sure that technological inclusion is the norm, rather than the exception.

I'm proud to have worked with my FCC colleagues over the past five years to empower individuals with disabilities. Many of our actions flowed from implementation of the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act (CVAA). For example, we adopted rules to bring the benefits of closed captioning to individuals who watch television on the Internet.

We also sought to ensure that people who are blind or visually impaired have access to Internet browsers on mobile phones, as well as audible emergency information on TV.

But our efforts have gone beyond implementing the CVAA. We're working on ways to improve video relay services, which can be critical for people who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, or speech-disabled.

We have new rules designed to improve the quality of video captioning.

And we've adopted rules to encourage the development of real-time text—a modern accessibility solution that's being featured at one of the Summit's panels.

It's not just the outside world we're changing with our efforts. We've also promoted accessibility through our internal practices. About two years ago, the FCC became the first federal agency to use interactive broadband video to handle calls to our customer call center from individuals who use American Sign Language. We've seen real success so far. The number of people who use our direct video calling feature has increased significantly, and more than half of the issues raised during these calls are resolved right on the spot.

Now, government involvement is important. But it's no substitute for private-sector leadership to make communications services accessible. That's where all of you come in.

Building accessible products and services by design helps everyone. It allows consumers with disabilities to benefit immediately from technological innovation. It can create buzz for your products. It can be far cheaper and more effective than retrofitting after a product is built. In short, "baking in" accessibility features can unlock tremendous value throughout the supply chain.

I was particularly heartened to see that you scheduled a panel on a new public-private partnership on market research. We need to understand how people with disabilities make choices in the marketplace. This will help us figure out ways to ensure that they take full advantage of the digital revolution.

The great thing about this particular conference is that it encourages collaboration among technology companies and the consumers they serve. This can lead to consensus and solutions that can satisfy everyone.

At the FCC, we want to help facilitate that collaboration. Our Disability Advisory Committee is working with external partners to explore how those with disabilities can benefit from using off-the-shelf, rather than specialized, technologies. This will be easier and less expensive for these consumers, and better ensure that they can use new technologies as they are developed for everyone else.

Another way the FCC can help is to shine a spotlight on technological breakthroughs that allow people with disabilities to better communicate.

That brings me to the night's main event: the Chairman's Awards for Advancement in Accessibility, commonly known as "the Chairman's Triple A." These awards allow the FCC to recognize notable innovations, improvements, and initiatives in accessibility that were introduced into the market during 2016.

We had many excellent nominations this year, and I want to congratulate all of the innovators who came forward to share their technologies and vision. We can't give all of them awards tonight. But each is helping people with disabilities better interact with the world—and that's a much greater reward than anything we can give them.

Tonight, we honor the best of the best. We are lucky this year to have four winners and two honorable mentions. I will now turn it over to FCC employee Gerard Williams to announce the awards. And I would like to assure you that the FCC's crack accounting team has given Gerard the correct envelopes so that he announces the right winners.

Thank you for inviting me to speak today, and keep up the great work!