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How Can Cloud Computing Help People with Disabilities?

**Interview with Pam Gregory, Director
FCC's Accessibility and Innovation Initiative**

FEDERAL NEWS RADIO (male voice): The Federal Communications Commission has launched a contest for ideas on how cloud computing can help people with disabilities. The agency's asking the public to submit short multimedia presentations. This is the first time the FCC has used the new GSA online platform for contests, challenge.gov. Joining us with details in studio this morning is Pam Gregory, director of the FCC's Accessibility and Innovation Initiative. Good morning. Thanks for joining us.

PAM GREGORY: Oh, good morning. It's great to be here. Thank you.

FEDERAL NEWS RADIO (male voice): So, first of all, what gave you the idea to connect cloud computing, of all things, with disabilities?

PAM GREGORY: Well, at the FCC, we're looking at everything and disabilities. So cloud computing is not unique. But, we were working with Silicon Flatirons and the Coleman Institute for People with Cognitive Disabilities in Raising the Floor which is a group of broadband supporters for people with disabilities. And, we thought about how we could incorporate cloud computing with people with disabilities.

FEDERAL NEWS RADIO (female voice): Why cloud though?

PAM GREGORY: Well, cloud is the future. Actually, cloud is already here and has been here since the year 2000. So, when you think about what...before cloud, in the olden days, you would put in...you would get in a magazine, a CD-ROM, and you'd put it in, and you'd load AOL, right?

FEDERAL NEWS RADIO (female voice): The olden days with CD-ROMs. Isn't that funny!

(Laughter)

PAM GREGORY: Yes, the olden days with CD-ROMs. And then you would launch your e-mail by launching – by clicking – on your AOL icon, and that's how you'd get to your e-mail. But today, you don't have to have one of those old CD-ROMs. It's all happening in the cloud. You go to the AOL website and that's how you get your webmail. And, all this happens out there in cyberspace.

FEDERAL NEWS RADIO (male voice): And, so, does it look to the FCC, and to you, as if people that offer services on the cloud are not offering them in a way that is accessible all the time to people with disabilities? For example large type versions or sound enhancement, that type of thing?

PAM GREGORY: Well, those are really great questions. What we're doing with the FCC's Accessibility and Innovation Initiative, is, we're trying to make sure that accessibility and disability access is on the forefront of every new technology. So that's why we want to be there. We want to be there from day one. Reminding technologists, engineers, programmers, everyone, that we've got 54 million Americans with disabilities and we want them to participate in the new world.

FEDERAL NEWS RADIO (female voice): So what are your partnerships? How are you able to pull this off? Who are the people you're working with?

PAM GREGORY: Well...we have a number of different initiatives at the FCC. This particular cloud computing initiative was done with the Coleman Institute for Cognitive Disabilities which is associated with the University of Colorado in Boulder, and also Silicon Flatirons – a man named Dale Hatfield who used to work at the FCC – it's a cross disciplinary area on telecommunications. And, we also worked with Raising the Floor on this particular challenge and there's a \$2,000 award – two \$1,000 awards for the winner of this particular challenge. And then, the FCC will allow – will consider its pick for the Chairman's Award in Advancement of Accessibility.

FEDERAL NEWS RADIO (male voice): And we're speaking with Pam Gregory. She's Director of the FCC's Accessibility and Innovation Initiative. And so, have you gotten any submissions in yet, and what kinds of things are you hoping to get?

PAM GREGORY: We haven't gotten any submissions in yet. It's a little bit early. The due date is May 1st of next year. And, the reason why we did that – we're hoping to engage students of all backgrounds, whether they're videographers, technologists, or even...even...um, just English majors. And so, we're trying to get students involved. We haven't had any actual submissions yet, but it's way too soon in the game.

FEDERAL NEWS RADIO (female voice): You're talking about how cloud computing is the way of the future, and it's really here, the future is now. You know what else is sort of the way of the future? It seems like these competitions.

PAM GREGORY: Yes.

FEDERAL NEWS RADIO (female voice): You know, these contests.

PAM GREGORY: Yes.

FEDERAL NEWS RADIO (female voice): To sort of, bring in more ideas from outside...

PAM GREGORY: Yes

FEDERAL NEWS RADIO (female voice): I don't want to say, outside the box, that's just so cliché. But, you know what I mean.

PAM GREGORY: It might be cliché, but it's right. We are trying to think outside the box. We're trying to think of new ideas. We think that there....everyone has a certain amount of genius, and has things to offer...

FEDERAL NEWS RADIO (female voice): Why, thank you.

PAM GREGORY: (Laughter) And why not take advantage of that. Certainly we can't come up with all the solutions ourselves, so we're looking outside the Commission to help us with these solutions.

FEDERAL NEWS RADIO (male voice): Now, who will judge the submissions that you get to the contest. And, then more importantly, once you've picked winners, what's the next step to turn that into reality.

PAM GREGORY: Well, we're going to have a panel of people from industry and the disability community pick the winners. But, I wanted to step back. Twenty years ago, there was a little movie called, the "Knowledge Navigator." And, it was a visionary piece by Apple. And, what they did is, they actually described, or actually showed what turns out to be today's iPad. So, the goal is – is for someone to come up with a video that will actually end up in a product. So, it's a visionary...it's a way for people to explain what we can do with cloud computing and actually have a tool that's going to be helpful to people with disabilities.