

Chairmen Dingell, Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet hearing entitled "H.R. _____, Draft Legislation Enhancing Access to Broadband Technology and Services for Persons with Disabilities"

Statement of Congressman John D. Dingell, Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce

SUBCOMMITTEE ON TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND THE INTERNET HEARING ENTITLED, "H.R. _____, DRAFT LEGISLATION ENHANCING ACCESS TO BROADBAND TECHNOLOGY AND SERVICES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES"

May 1, 2008

Rep. John D. Dingell (D-MI), Chairman of the Committee on Energy and Commerce, today inserted the following statement in the hearing record at a Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet hearing entitled "H.R. _____, Draft Legislation Enhancing Access to Broadband Technology and Services for Persons with Disabilities."

Today draft legislation will be examined seeking to modernize current laws governing access to communications for individuals with disabilities. The last time we enacted legislation concerning access for those with disabilities in 1996, television was only broadcast in analog and voice communications relied primarily on wireline phones.

From a technological standpoint, the world has changed a great deal since then. The Internet now figures prominently in communications. Voice over Internet Protocol, or VOIP, service, texting, and instant messaging are just some of the new ways we communicate. Mobility and the use of data in communications are additional hallmarks of this new generation of services. One cannot walk down the hallways of this building without seeing someone texting on their Blackberry. Similarly, the world of video programming has also evolved. We are in the midst of a transition to all-digital television. Content providers have discovered a new source of viewers and revenue by putting their content on the Internet.

Though technology has rapidly evolved, our core values should remain constant. The principal of universal service has been part of our communications policy since the early part of the last century. In my view, however, service cannot be termed universal unless it can be accessed by all. It is necessary and proper that everyone has access to our communications infrastructure, including the next generation of communications and video programming.

I am sure there will be lively discussions about the best way to ensure universal accessibility of communications. Our telecommunications industry, including service providers, manufacturers, and content providers, can each point to one or more applications or devices that contain accessibility features, and I am encouraged by these efforts. In my experience, if we simply ask the innovators and engineers to ensure that technologies are designed to include all persons, no matter how they communicate, they are up to the task.

I welcome the witnesses who appear at this hearing. Thank you in advance for sharing your views on this draft legislation. I especially wish to commend Sergeant Major Acosta for his service to our country. Sgt. Maj. Acosta, his family, and countless others like him have sacrificed much for our Nation, and I am particularly interested in learning how this legislation can help him and others enjoy a fuller and more productive life.

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Prepared by the Committee on Energy and Commerce
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