

**STATEMENT OF REPRESENTATIVE EDWARD MARKEY (D-MA)
FCC FIELD HEARING ON BROADBAND ACCESS FOR PEOPLE WITH
DISABILITIES
KELLOGG CONFERENCE CENTER, GALLAUDET UNIVERSITY
NOVEMBER 6, 2009**

Thank you, Commissioner Copps, for your leadership on this vital issue. Gallaudet University, a world-renowned university, whose reputation in the liberal arts, research and career development for deaf and hard of hearing undergraduate and graduate students is unparalleled anywhere in the world, is an ideal location for today's field hearing.

Today's hearing is part of a broader effort to gather information from experts and consumers for the FCC's development of a National Broadband Plan. I am the author of the requirement in the recovery and reinvestment act to mandate the development of the National Broadband Plan, and I want to commend FCC Chairman Genachowski and all of the commissioners for your diligence in the development of this plan, which will serve as an invaluable roadmap as we move forward to make broadband more available and accessible across our country.

Over the last decade, we have seen a revolution in the way Americans interact, learn and conduct business. However, the wizardry of the wires and the sophistication of software programs do little for those who cannot affordably access or effectively use them. I recently introduced H.R. 3101, the Twenty-first Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act, to ensure that all Americans are offered equal access to these exciting and innovative new technologies. 17 of my colleagues in the House of Representatives have joined me to date to co-sponsor my legislation.

H.R. 3101 would amend the Communications Act to ensure that new Internet-enabled telephone and video services and equipment are accessible to, and usable by, people with disabilities. The bill also closes existing gaps in telecommunications laws. From extending hearing aid compatibility and Internet closed captioning to real-time text support for emergency services, H.R. 3101 seeks to provide a smooth migration to the next-generation of Internet-based and digital communication technologies.

The guiding principle of the Twenty-first Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act is to bring existing federal laws requiring communications and video programming accessibility up to date, to fill in any accessibility gaps, and to ensure the full inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of daily living through accessible, affordable and usable communication and video programming technologies.

This bill would not be an economic burden on the industry and consumers, just as similar assertions raised against hearing aid compatibility or against the closed captioning bill I sponsored and successfully battled to make law in 1990 proved to be erroneous. In that debate, we were told that mandating closed captioning was overly burdensome and would cost a fortune. Today, that law is indispensable, and the update this new bill would provide will be equally indispensable.

Thank you, again, for holding today's field hearing and for your work on the vital issue of accessibility.

