Statement of Judy Brewer
Before the U.S. House of Representatives Judiciary Committee
Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties
Hearing on Achieving the Promise of the Americans with Disabilities Act in the Digital Age – Current Issues, Challenges, and Opportunities
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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to talk with you again regarding accessibility of the Web. My name is Judy Brewer, and I direct the Web Accessibility Initiative[i] (WAI) at the World Wide Web Consortium[ii] (W3C).

For the Web to work, computers need to be able to talk to each other across the Internet in the same computer languages – and W3C is where those languages are agreed upon. W3C is an international standards body with over 300 member organizations, primarily web industry leaders. We are based at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the European Research Consortium on Informatics and Mathematics in France, and Keio University in Japan. W3C is directed by Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the Web, and a strong believer in the Web for All. W3C has developed over one hundred technical standards and guidelines, ranging from HTML and XML, to graphics, math, voice, rich media, mobile devices, web services, linked data, security, privacy, e-Government, internationalization, and more.

Among its other work, W3C hosts the Web Accessibility Initiative. WAI develops standards, guidelines and resources to make the Web accessible for people with disabilities; ensures accessibility of W3C technologies; and develops educational resources to support web accessibility. WAI is supported in part by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research at the US Department of Education; the European Commission; WAI Sponsors; and W3C Member organizations. My comments do not necessarily represent those of WAI's funders.

Ten years ago this Subcommittee invited me to address early questions about web accessibility. A discussion that started with many myths and misperceptions

concluded with a much clearer picture of the realities and promise of web accessibility.

In the intervening years:

- We've shown that businesses can flourish while producing accessible websites and services.
- We've shown that a multi-stakeholder process that includes industry, disability organizations, accessibility researchers and governments can develop consensus on web accessibility solutions.
- We've shown that accessibility solutions for people with different disabilities, including those with accessibility issues due to aging, are complementary, not conflicting, and are best achieved through a unified accessibility standard.
- We've developed guidelines and standards for web content, authoring tools, browsers, media players, and rich internet applications.
- In particular, we've shown that the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0:
    - are feasible for simple Mom & Pop websites, as well as for complex and dynamically-generated million-page websites;
    - are "technology neutral" – meaning that they can be applied to any web technology;
    - are more testable, yet support innovation;
    - have extensive, freely available technical support materials.
- Web developers from around the world have shown that accessible websites can be colorful, media-rich, dynamic, interactive, device independent, and international.

The Web has changed immensely in the past ten years. Many of our activities have moved to the Web – we get our education, jobs, health care, and tax forms online; buy music, clothes, and tickets; get our news, and not only buy but also read our books online. We use our mobile phones to do our banking, and our laptops to make phone calls. We do social networking with colleagues, family and friends. In contrast to ten years ago, many of these services exist only on the Web, through real-time transactions, yet are as vital to our social and economic life today as any bricks-and-mortar business of the past.

W3C's consensus-based standards development process, multi-stakeholder participation, broad public reviews, and implementation testing prior to finalization of standards have been an advantage to development of the Web as a whole, and equally to web accessibility. These processes have enabled the disability community to be present at the design table for web standards; to influence technologies that are newly moving onto the Web; and to influence accessibility of web-based interfaces as they move beyond the traditional Web into environments such as household devices and medical equipment. Development of accessibility solutions in a standards environment has ensured that web accessibility is consistent with and can evolve with the architecture of the Web. For technical communities outside of W3C and unused to the process of ensuring web accessibility in standards development, it has sometimes been a learning experience – yet this is also a reason why organizations seek out W3C as a standards development environment. W3C's accessibility guidelines respect the Web's capacity for innovation by providing a comprehensive and stable framework of principles, guidelines, and success criteria, with informative techniques to which developers can add and share innovations.

In 2008 this standards process produced the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0. The US Access Board has stated its intent to harmonize the web portions of its Section 508 regulations with WCAG 2. WCAG has been referenced in a Department of Justice ADA technical assistance manual, and in negotiated ADA settlements within the banking, retail and sports sectors. During the past year we've seen countries in Europe, as well Japan, Australia, New Zealand and many others move from other web accessibility standards to WCAG 2. This standards harmonization is immensely helpful because it creates a unified market and drives improvements in software, such as authoring tools, that can facilitate web accessibility.

Surveys of web accessibility progress continue to show barriers, the majority of which are due to failure to apply existing solutions – despite the good business case for web accessibility. Barriers include missing alternative text for images, missing captions for audio, forms that "time out" before you can submit them, images that flash and may cause seizures, text that moves or refreshes before you can interact with it, and websites that don't work with assistive technologies that

many people with disabilities rely on. The impact on people with disabilities when there is a lack of accessibility ranges from exclusion from social networks, to missed school admissions, lost jobs, and inability to access life-saving health care information.

Opportunities to improve and accelerate web accessibility include:

- publishing existing data on the compliance of federal websites with Section 508 requirements, and conducting new studies that evaluate gaps in ADA compliance across Title II and Title III entities;
- communicating the applicability of the ADA to the Web more clearly, with updated guidance reflecting the benefits of standards harmonization at international, federal, and state levels;
- promoting development of improved authoring tools that facilitate the production of accessible web content, and that include accessible templates for website development;
- continuing research and development on accessibility techniques for new technologies, improved accessibility supports for cognitive disabilities, and more affordable assistive technologies.

The Web remains a springboard for innovation, exquisitely suited to support accessibility. Digital technology has already demonstrated how it can improve lives; let's make sure that people with disabilities are not excluded from its promise.

I would like to express my gratitude to the many hard-working participants and supporters around the world in the ongoing work on web accessibility; and my sincere thanks to the Subcommittee for your continued attention to accessibility of information technologies.

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[i] Web Accessibility Initiative http://www.w3.org/WAI/
[ii] World Wide Web Consortium http://www.w3.org/