

STATEMENT OF CONGRESSMAN RICK BOUCHER

Subcommittee on Communications, Technology and the Internet Markup H.R. 3101 The 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act

June 30, 2010

Today the Subcommittee meets in markup session for a measure introduced by our colleague Mr. Markey that modernizes the laws governing access to communications services by individuals with disabilities.

As we learned at our legislative hearing on this measure earlier this month, there are almost one million Americans who have severe or profound hearing loss and more than one million who are legally blind. Four percent of our population has great difficulty hearing, and an additional three percent are visually impaired.

And, Americans are aging. There are approximately 40 million people over the age of 65 living in the United States today, or 13 percent of the population. One estimate shows that by 2050, that number will more than double to 88.5 million, or an estimated one-fifth of the population. Naturally, this growth will be accompanied by an increase in the number of Americans who are vision or hearing-impaired and who will need accessible communications products and services.

With the explosion in Internet-delivered services, both the variety of information and entertainment offerings and the complexity and variety of the devices that receive those services have multiplied. Our challenge is to assure that all Americans can benefit from those advances, including individuals with vision or hearing impairments.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act. We have come a long way in the two decades since 1990, but we can do more through voluntary steps by industry and targeted regulation to ensure the accessibility of all technologies to persons with disabilities. H.R. 3101 is a useful contribution to that progress.

In the tradition of this Subcommittee, for the past month members and staff have been engaged in a bipartisan process to consider modifications to the bill as introduced. I want to thank and commend Mr. Stearns and his staff for their cooperation and their constructive suggestions.

I also want to thank the representatives of the hearing and vision impaired communities and of industry for their cooperative work with us.

I will be offering today an amendment in the nature of a substitute which embodies the result of the work we have done so far.

But our bipartisan collaborative efforts are a work in progress, and we will continue to modify H.R. 3101 between today's markup and the full Committee markup in July.

Today's markup is designed to expedite the process with the goal of having H.R. 3101 pass the House later this summer.

I encourage members, staff and interested stakeholders to apply themselves to the resolution of the remaining points of difference during the next two weeks.