

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN TOM WHEELER

Re: *Video Description: Implementation of the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010*, MB Docket No. 11-43.

This week has featured action on some of the Commission's most high-profile items: the launch of the world's first Incentive Auction, the adoption of a Lifeline Modernization Order, the kickoff of a privacy rulemaking. I would contend that the least noticed item on today's Open Meeting agenda – proposed rules to increase the availability of video-described programming -- is a piece of one of the Commission's most significant – and most overlooked – achievements of the past several years: the implementation of the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010 (CVAA).

The CVAA is the most significant accessibility legislation since the Americans with Disabilities Act. This landmark law has helped ensure that accessibility is a first thought, not an afterthought as new broadband-enabled technologies emerge.

I'm proud that the Commission met every single major deadline in implementing the Act, expanding access to television, the Internet, and new applications and services.

Today's proposal would increase the amount of video-described programming available to consumers, marking another step forward in helping to make video programming accessible to Americans with visual disabilities.

Video description enables those who are blind or visually impaired to independently enjoy and follow popular television programs and better participate in the shared cultural experience that television offers. Popular television programs, such as *Modern Family*, *NCIS*, *New Girl*, *Chicago Fire*, *Suits*, and the live production of *"The Wiz"* have already utilized video description to rave reviews.

Many blind and visually impaired consumers have written the Commission calling for the expansion of video description. One consumer wrote, "It is so gratifying to be able to enjoy a movie with sighted family or friends without constantly asking questions." Another wrote, "Many of us rely on description to equally enjoy the entertainment we are paying for."

The proposals that we make today would expand these benefits to more programming and a greater audience, at what we project will be a very reasonable cost to programmers.

The NPRM tentatively concludes that the need for and benefits of providing additional video description would be greater than the costs. As required under the CVAA, we will make a final determination on this issue before adopting any new rules.

Again, these proposed rules are part of a much broader agenda to prioritize communications access issues for Americans with disabilities, some of which extend beyond the requirements of the CVAA.

Looking ahead, the Commission has also adopted rules to make emergency information in video programming and user interfaces on video devices accessible to individuals with disabilities. These rules go into effect on December 20 and will empower consumers to access talking guides and menus on a range of devices used to view video programming. Consumers will also have an easy-to-use mechanism to turn closed captioning on and off and to find audible emergency information on the secondary audio channel. The December 20 effective date is another deadline we intend to meet.

Expanding access to communications technology for the more than 50 million Americans with disabilities is one of this agency's most notable achievements and most pressing priorities going forward. Today's proposal is a notable next step in this vitally important effort.

Thank you to the Media Bureau and the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau for their work on this item.