

**SEPARATE STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS**

Re: Telecommunications Relay Services and Speech-to-Speech Services for Individuals with Hearing and Speech Disabilities; Internet-based Captioned Telephone Service, CG Docket No. 03-123.

One of the first meetings I had with outside parties at the Commission was with members of the disabilities community. It was then that I was astonished to learn that the unemployment rate among the deaf and hard-of-hearing was an appalling 75 percent. That is national treasure being wasted. It is talent that could be used to move this country forward. I committed myself right then and there to doing something about it. What these folks told me that night was that access to communications technologies and services—functionally equivalent communications technologies and services—can make a huge difference in righting this wrong. Indeed, this is the mandate of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Such access can provide a huge assist to opening the doors of economic opportunity for these good people and, indeed, all our citizens.

By declaring Internet Protocol (IP) captioned telephone service as a type of telecommunications relay service (TRS), we expand the opportunities for consumers to realize functional equivalency. Affected consumers can now take advantage of the flexibility and portability that IP captioned telephone service offers by freeing them from having to use specialized equipment. As long as they have access to a computer or other device that can receive Internet transmissions, they can use this new service. And that translates into new jobs and opportunities and, indeed, into fuller lives.

Still, much remains to be done. We're taking this step to make sure this new technology starts benefiting consumers immediately; however, much of what we have done in this decision has been done on an interim or on a waiver basis. We need to re-commit ourselves to resolving some of the outstanding – and admittedly, difficult – issues, including mandating many of these innovative services and looking at the systemic problems associated with the TRS-reimbursement program. We can and should do more.

Special thanks go to the Bureau and the Disability Rights Office for their very good work on this item.