

TECHNOLOGY AND DISABILITY POLICY HIGHLIGHTS 9.03

March 2009

Overview

The nation's transition to digital television (DTV) broadcasting was of key importance this past month. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and AmeriCorps announced a joint-initiative in which hundreds of AmeriCorps members will partner with the FCC to help prepare 49 communities for the transition. The effort is designed to help prepare individuals who have not yet made preparations for the switch, including the aging and people with disabilities. Another important story this past month was the beginning of efforts to implement the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP), which was part of the recently ratified "**American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.**" About \$7.2 billion in funding has been authorized by the federal government for the deployment of broadband Internet services to unserved and underserved communities throughout the nation, including people with disabilities. The FCC, National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), and Department of Agriculture's Rural Utility Services (RUS) held public meetings this past month to determine the specifics of the program and how it will be implemented. The NTIA, the main agency overseeing the program, is currently accepting public comments regarding BTOP.

In other news, the President nominated Tom Perez as the Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. If confirmed, Perez would be responsible for the enforcement of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) within the Justice Department. Finally, the National Council on Disability (NCD) released its annual report to the Congress and the President that outlines the progress made in disability policy during the past year. The report also discusses ongoing policy needs and makes 17 specific recommendations to the President and Congress, one of which deals directly with technology issues for people with disabilities.

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Legislative Activities

Tom Perez Selected by President Obama as Head of Civil Rights Division

03.13.2009 – The President announced his intention to nominate Tom Perez as the Assistant Attorney General in charge of the Civil Rights Division (CRD) in the Justice Department. One of the main responsibilities of the head of Assistant Attorney General for the CRD involves the enforcement of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). While the Assistant Attorney General of the CRD has generally avoided taking decisive positions during the last two Presidential administrations on the accessibility of the Internet and whether website operators and software developers are bound by the provisions of the ADA, the CRD would be the office that would oversee such issues were the current administration to take a position on these matters.

Perez is a civil rights attorney and consumer advocate who currently serves as Director of Maryland's Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation. Prior to this position, he had been a prosecutor in the CRD and also served as Deputy Assistant Attorney General under Attorney General Janet Reno. Perez is a graduate of Brown University, Harvard Law School, and the John F. Kennedy School of Government.

[Source: The White House]

Additional Information:

[White House Press Release Announcing the Nomination of Tom Perez as the CRD AAG](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/President-Obama-Announces-More-Key-Administration-Posts-3-13-09/)

[http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/President-Obama-Announces-More-Key-Administration-Posts-3-13-09/]

Regulatory Activities

AmeriCorps, FCC Partnering to Help Consumers with Disabilities with DTV Transition

03.27.2009 – As part of the FCC's DTV transition assistance efforts, hundreds of AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) members are partnering with the FCC to assist individuals who may be experiencing difficulties in making the switch to DTV. Among the groups who are the focus of the FCC and NCCC's attention are low-income individuals, minority communities, non-English speaking consumers, individuals living in rural or tribal areas, senior citizens, and people with disabilities.

Under the interagency agreement, NCCC members will visit homes where individuals need help to connect their antennas and analog televisions to digital converter boxes, help consumers apply for the \$40 converter box coupons, make presentations at community events, serve at walk-in DTV help centers, and otherwise disseminate information to over-the-air populations who have not yet prepared for the transition. Teams of 8 to 12 NCCC members will serve under the guidance of FCC area coordinators and work alongside FCC employees to provide assistance in communities that the Commission has targeted as needing additional help from now until the June 12 transition.

Denver has been selected as a test market for the initiative. From there, it will expand to include 49 other at-risk communities identified by the FCC and National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA.)

[Source: FCC]

Additional Information:

Press Release: [FCC-AmeriCorps Initiative on DTV Transition \(PDF and MS Word available\)](#)

[http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-289629A1.txt]

Federal Government Begins Implementing Recently Passed Broadband Initiative

03.10.2009 – As part of the recently passed "**American Recovery and Reinvestment Act**" [**Public Law No. 111-5**], Congress and the President authorized \$7.2 billion in funding for the deployment of broadband Internet networks to unserved and underserved populations in the United States. The provision of such grants would serve those Americans, including people with disabilities, who may lack access to Internet services.

In order to implement this mandate, U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, Acting FCC Chairman Michael Copps, and U.S. Department of Commerce Senior Advisor and Acting Chief of Staff Rick Wade began a joint initiative to determine the details of the program. The U.S. Department of Commerce's NTIA and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Utility Services (RUS) are leading the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP). The two agencies held a series of public hearings from March 16th and 24th to give Americans an opportunity to discuss how NTIA and RUS should design and implement these programs. Each of these meetings featured a roundtable discussion and an opportunity for public comment.

These hearings and comments will inform the Administration's approach to implementing BTOP, which is designed to accelerate broadband deployment in unserved, underserved, and rural areas, as well as for strategic institutions focused on creating jobs or providing significant public benefits. The Request for Information (RFI) solicits comments from interested parties on a wide range of topics. Comments will be received up to 30 days after publication of the RFI in the Federal Register.

[Sources: Library of Congress, FCC, NTIA, Department of Agriculture]

Additional Information:

FCC Public Notice on Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (MS Word and PDF available)

[http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-289101A1.txt]

NTIA's Broadband Technology Opportunities Program website

[<http://www.ntia.doc.gov/broadbandgrants>]

NTIA and RUS Request for Information: Broadband Technology Opportunities Program

[http://www.ntia.doc.gov/frnotices/2009/FR_BTOP_RFI_090312.html]

National Council on Disability Issues Progress Report, Addresses Technology Issues

03.31.2009 – The National Council on Disability (NCD) released *National Disability Policy: A Progress Report*, the agency's annual report to Congress and the President. The current report discusses the progress made during the previous year in the area of disability policy for people with disabilities and makes recommendations to address ongoing policy needs. This year's report contains 17 key recommendations, and an overall call for a new, integrated approach to disability policy within the federal government.

Regarding technology issues, the NCD reiterates that because the ADA was passed before the Internet became pervasive, and the Department of Justice (DOJ) regulations do not address Internet access specifically, many websites still are not designed to be accessible by people with certain disabilities. The report goes on to note that implementation of the Section 508 Web Accessibility standards in the federal sector, as well as the global impact of the World Wide Web Consortium's (W3C) Web accessibility standards, demonstrate that the means for making websites accessible are well-established, and it concludes that a federal requirement for "full accessibility of public Web sites is long overdue." The NCD report also engages assistive technology (AT) issues, as well as digital technologies, such as DTV and digital radio.

Regarding technology issues, the NCD suggests (Recommendation 16), among other things, that the "Assistant Secretary of Education for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services should conduct an

extensive dialog with all state and territorial Vocational Rehabilitation agencies and state education agencies to determine in detail how and when they provide assistive technology, how they assess the implications of current and evolving technology for client or student assessment and goal-setting, and how they ensure that key personnel keep abreast of developments in assistive technology." The NCD also recommends that "Congress should pass legislation that requires access to telephone and television-type equipment and services available through the Internet; decoder circuitry in all video programming devices; captioning of Internet-based television; audio description of television; and access to emergency broadcasts." Similar recommendations are also offered for the FCC and Access Board.

[Source: NCD]

Additional Information:

[National Council on Disability report: National Disability Policy: A Progress Report \(MS Word and PDF available\)](#)

[\[http://www.ncd.gov\]](http://www.ncd.gov)

Other Items of Interest

Text-to-Speech for Visually Impaired Mobile Phone Users Launched by Verizon

03.12.2009 – Verizon Wireless launched a new service this past month called Verizon TALKS, a software based service that converts the text on mobile handsets into audio information for the benefit of consumers who are blind or have vision impairments. The TALKS program has audio feedback for writing and reading text messages, emails and notes, contact directories, caller ID announcement and all levels of menu. A particular feature of the service is speech rate control, which allows users to speed up or slow down the voice outputs to best suit their needs. At present, the service is only available for the Motorola Q9C. For more information, please see

[\[http://support.vzw.com/faqs/Features%20and%20Optional%20Services/talks.html\]](http://support.vzw.com/faqs/Features%20and%20Optional%20Services/talks.html).

[Sources: Verizon Wireless, *PC Magazine*]

Wireless RERC Updates

2009 State of the Technology Conference: Registration Now Open

03.01.2009 - The Wireless RERC is pleased to announce that registration is now open for the **Wireless Emergency Communications State of Technology Conference**. This event will take place at the Georgia Tech Research Institute Conference Center in **Atlanta, Georgia**, USA on **September 21-23, 2009**. Don't miss this exciting opportunity to participate in interactive sessions, weigh in on federal policy initiatives, and view promising technology demonstrations.

Speakers will include representatives from:

CTIA-- Wireless Association
Coalition of Organizations for Accessible Technology
Federal Communications Commission
Gallaudet University
National Emergency Number Association
National Telecommunications Information Administration
Research in Motion
WGBH National Center for Accessible Media

Topics will cover:

Technological solutions for accessible emergency alerting.
Barriers and opportunities for emergency alerting.
User needs to achieve accessible emergency communications.
Policy and regulatory actions needed to achieve accessible wireless alerts.
Social networks and collaborations to promote accessible mobile wireless systems.
Inclusion of people with disabilities in emergency scenarios.
Emergency management technologies for connectivity to the disability community.
Deployment strategies by emergency management or public safety entities to provide emergency alerts over wireless networks.

Special networking events will provide attendees the opportunity to meet speakers, sponsors and connect with colleagues. There are limited slots for attendees, so register now! Web address: [http://sot.wirelessrerc.org]

If you have questions, please contact:

Salimah LaForce
Conference Coordinator, Wireless RERC
404-894-8297 (office)
404-791-9692 (mobile)

Hearing Aid Compatibility Videos: Choosing a Cell Phone that Works For You

03.01.2009 – The Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Wireless Technologies (Wireless RERC) and CTIA - The Wireless Association® announced the release of a new consumer education video series, "Hearing Aid Compatibility: Choosing a Cell Phone That Works For You." Available for viewing at [http://www.AccessWireless.org], these videos will help wireless consumers who use hearing aids to identify and choose a hearing aid-compatible (HAC) wireless device that meets their needs.

Each video outlines the key information consumers need to choose a HAC wireless device. The first segment presents general HAC and wireless device information as told by a certified audiologist. The second segment demonstrates a suggested “try and buy” process between a customer representative and a consumer at an actual wireless carrier's retail store.

CTIA's AccessWireless.org hosts the video series, which is accessible to visitors through captioning, audio description and both high- and low-resolution versions. This video series may also be used by wireless carriers as a training tool for sales and customer support staff. The video series was produced by the Wireless RERC with the support of the Alliance for Telecommunications Industry Solutions (ATIS), AT&T, Audiological Consultants of Atlanta, CTIA - The Wireless Association®, Gallaudet University's Technology Access Program, the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA), Nokia, Research In Motion (BlackBerry ®), Samsung and T-Mobile USA, Inc.

Additional Information:

Hearing Aid Compatibility Videos: Choosing a Cell Phone that Works for You

[http://www.accesswireless.org/hearingaid/hac_video.cfm]

Wireless RERC Consumer Forum: My Wireless Review

[<http://www.mywirelessreview.com>]

Paul M.A. Baker and Nathan W. Moon Give Presentations at CSUN

03.17.2009 - Paul M.A. Baker, Ph.D. and Nathan W. Moon gave three presentations at the 24th Annual International Technology & Persons with Disabilities Conference in Los Angeles, on March 17-21, 2009. The conference, sponsored by California State University-Northridge's Center on Disabilities, is one of the largest conferences of its kind in the nation.

Nathan W. Moon presented “Enhancing Policy Activities among NIDRR-Sponsored Projects: Developing Collaborative Policy Networks” (Paul M.A. Baker and Nathan W. Moon, Wireless RERC). This presentation focused on the initial results of a Wireless RERC/WorkRERC project to develop a virtual network of policy experts to engage policy issues within Rehabilitation Engineering Research Centers (RERCs), Rehabilitation Research and Training Centers (RRTC), and other projects sponsored by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR). Nathan also gave a talk entitled “Improving Workplace Accommodations: Initial Results of a Policy Delphi Study” (Nathan W. Moon and Paul M.A. Baker, WorkRERC). This session discussed some of the initial outcomes of the WorkRERC's Policy Delphi on Workplace Accommodations, a study designed to discern key forecasts, issues, goals, and policy options surrounding the provision of accommodations for workers with disabilities.

Paul M.A. Baker presented “Teleworking, Disabilities, and the Socially Inclusive Workplace” [Paul M.A. Baker (Wireless RERC), John C. Bricout, Ph.D. (College of Health and Public Affairs, University of

Central Florida), Andrew Ward, Ph.D., MPH (Kansas Health Institute), and Nathan W. Moon (WorkRERC)]. This talk focused on the often overlooked social factors behind telework as a workplace accommodation for people with disabilities. For copies of these three presentations, please see [<http://www.cacp.gatech.edu>].

Upcoming Events

NARRTC 2009 Annual Conference

The National Association of Rehabilitation Research and Training Centers (NARRTC) will hold its 2009 Annual Conference on **May 4-5, 2009**, at the Holiday Inn National Airport Hotel, in **Arlington, Virginia**. The theme of the upcoming conference will be “Better Research, Better Evidence, Better Practice,” to be presented through plenary and concurrent sessions. For more information on the conference, please visit the below website.

Presentations at the conference will focus on new evidence and insights gained through such NIDRR grant work. In particular, conference organizers plan to engage the following topic areas:

- Establishing Best Practices in Disability and Rehabilitation
- Knowledge Translation Research Findings and Needs
- Qualitative Disability Research Data Analysis
- Rigor and Relevance of Disability Research Evidence
- Strategies for Using Research Evidence in Policies and Practices
- Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Disability and Rehabilitation Research
- Value and Relevance of High Quality Single Case Study Design

Additional Information:

[NARRTC 2009 Annual Conference](http://www.ncddr.org/NARRTC/)
[<http://www.ncddr.org/NARRTC/>]

DTV Transition

On **June 12, 2009**, all full-power broadcast television stations in the United States will stop broadcasting on analog airwaves and begin broadcasting only in digital.

Additional Information:

[What is DTV?](http://www.dtv.gov/whatisdtv.html)
[<http://www.dtv.gov/whatisdtv.html>]

[Converter Box Coupon Program](#)

[\[https://www.dtv2009.gov/\]](https://www.dtv2009.gov/)

i-CREATe 2009

The Third International Convention on Rehabilitation Engineering & Assistive Technology (iCREATe) 2009 will be held in Singapore, **April 22-26, 2009**. The convention promotes aging and disability technologies. This year's theme is "Accessible Tourism" centered on universal design and assistive technologies introduced in the environment. The convention includes a three day exhibition and a student design challenge.

Additional Information:

Conference Website

[\[http://icreate.start-centre.com/icreate2009/index.php\]](http://icreate.start-centre.com/icreate2009/index.php)

Technology and Disability Policy Highlights reports on national and local public policy events and recent wireless technological advances and political activities; and tracks emerging issues of interest to individuals with disabilities. *Technology and Disability Policy Highlights* is published monthly by the Wireless RERC. The Wireless RERC is a research center promotes universal access to wireless technologies and explores their innovative applications in addressing the needs of people with disabilities. For more information on the Wireless RERC, please visit our web site at [\[http://www.wirelessrerc.org\]](http://www.wirelessrerc.org).

For further information on items summarized in this report, or if you have items of interest that you would like included in future editions, please contact this edition's editor, Nathan W. Moon [nathan.moon@cacp.gatech.edu] or Paul M.A. Baker, Ph.D., AICP, CACP Director of Research [paul.baker@cacp.gatech.edu].

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