

Source: Jenifer Simpson, American Association of People with Disabilities

Rep. Ed Markey (MA) Receives Award for Making Telecom Accessible for People With Disabilities

On Friday, Feb. 9, 2007, the Alliance for Public Technology (APT) awarded a Susan G. Hadden Pioneer Award to Congressman Markey for all the work he has done over the past 20 years to expand telecommunications accessibility for people with disabilities.

This included his support of telecommunications relay services, closed captioning obligations, Hearing Aid Compatibility laws and Section 255, accessible telecommunications products and services. Cheering his receipt of the award were disability community leaders Paul Schroeder (AFB), Claude Stout (TDI), Jenifer Simpson (AAPD), Brenda Battat (HLAA), Jeff Rosen (NCD), Karen Peltz Strauss (CSD) and other disability community members.

Upon accepting the award from APT, Rep. Markey, chairman of the House telecommunications and Internet subcommittee, talked about the importance of including people with disabilities in the nation's communications agenda and the immediate need to expand disability accessibility mandates to the Internet Protocol (IP) environment.

"There is an array of exciting, innovative new technologies that are Internet based," Rep. Markey said, and "These technologies present new access problems for people with disabilities, but they also present new opportunities."

Rep. Markey also cited to the FCC mandates regarding law enforcement access and emergency service capabilities for VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) services and pointed out that "we do not yet have similar progress for people with disabilities," although there is a pending FCC proceeding. Rep. Markey encouraged "companies [to] ascertain what progress we can make sooner rather than later and put [this] in on [their] agenda."

APT also released a report the same day, "Achieving Universal Broadband," that recommended setting some clear national goals for broadband deployment. These included:

1. Requiring accurate reporting of broadband deployment, speeds, and prices;
2. Continuing to foster private investment and marketplace competition;
3. Requiring the companies that receive Universal Service Funds support to offer broadband services;
4. Providing tax incentives, low-interest loans, and grants to encourage broadband deployment;
5. Creation of a federal level Office of Broadband within the U.S. Department of Commerce; and
6. Utilizing nontraditional, non-telecommunications programs more effectively to promote broadband overall.

The report will be made available on the APT website at <http://www.appt.org>