


January 16, 1997

**MEMO**

To: Senator Dole  
From:  Alec Vachon Work: (202) 224-8220  
Home: (202) 667-1193

Re: **FYI/Good News on Telecommunications Bill**

Congratulations on the Medal of Freedom, and thank you for your kind words about my work to the President.

As you may recall, in the Telecommunications Act of 1996 you had inserted a provision that required new telecommunications technology be usable by people with disabilities. The rationale for this provision was simple: all Americans -- including people with disabilities -- rely on telecommunications (from simple devices like the telephone to the Internet) for work and otherwise. And telecommunications technologies can help people offset their disabilities. For example, we can easily imagine in a few years a telephone with a TV screen -- that would not only send images of the speakers, but automatically close caption for someone who is deaf.

Your provision also required the U.S. Access Board (a Federal advisory group) -- together with the FCC -- to convene a representative panel from the telecommunications industry, disability advocates, and other interested parties, to hammer out accessibility guidelines. The accessibility guidelines would be the basis of FCC regs. In short, all interested parties would have to work together to write the accessibility guidelines.

On Wednesday the Access Board released the accessibility guidelines. The process exceeded expectations. All major telecommunications players had joined the panel -- including big computer companies like Microsoft and Intel, together with disability advocates. The advocates came to understand the problems of industry, and industry the needs of people with disabilities. Also, for antitrust and competitive reasons, many companies had not been able to talk before about accessibility issues -- which this process both allowed and encouraged.

This process has lessons for ADA -- and future disability legislation. Looking back at ADA, one of the big complaints has been that all interested parties -- business, disability advocates, state and local government, among others -- were not equally involved in writing the regs -- or had the feeling of "ownership" in the process. Although the ADA regs might not have turned out much differently -- surely many complaints about ADA might have been avoided if the process required by the Telecommunications Act had been used for ADA as well.

January 17, 1997

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Re: John Hager

John Hager may be calling you for an appointment. He is running for Lieutenant Governor in Virginia (the primary is June 10th). I believe he wants to apprise you of this plans.

Regards.