



## ***Executive Director's Message***

**Claude L. Stout**

***“Put your tax dollars  
to work, exercise  
your purchasing power  
in the marketplace,  
and vote  
at your local precinct.”***



***About this Issue***

..

## **Your Responsibility in a Democracy**

As I approach my eighth year as Executive Director with TDI, permit me to share one of the most important lessons in advocacy. Democracy is not a “spectator sport” – we must participate. We are constantly reminded to actively participate in policy-development for equal access. In short, it is critical that when we experience limited access or no access, that we file a complaint with a government agency or a company. And it is equally important that if we see GOOD access, we need to comment about it.

Access is a basic civil right for us – just as equal with the rest of society. However, to have equal access for any given situation, we must work to achieve it. Our efforts must be ongoing and consistent in order for us to enjoy full access today, tomorrow and in the future.

The Americans with Disabilities Act ensures, among many other things access to telecommunications relay services (TRS). Thanks to the FCC’s guidance, TRS has evolved from just traditional TTY/voice service to being a vital communication service today with a variety of features such as Internet Relay or IP-Relay, Video Relay Services (VRS), Speech-to-Speech (STS), Hearing Carry-Over (HCO), Voice Carry-Over (VCO), many of these services are available in Spanish and French in addition to ASL or English.

This past summer, the FCC changed the proposed per minute reimbursement rate for VRS vendors from \$14.023 to \$7.751. As a government agency, the FCC’s responsibility is to review comments from the public, including both consumers and industry and make decisions that they believe are fair. Consumers tell the FCC what they need and expect, and industry reports on their capabilities to address these needs and expectations. Sometimes the FCC has to look at other sources in their attempts to reach a “fair” decision. As a result, the vendors have reduced their service hours and they now have a smaller group of qualified video interpreters available to answer VRS calls. The vendors have also cut back on marketing and R&D activities as well. When the FCC announced the VRS reimbursement rate, they added that they could reconsider the VRS reimbursement rate if they receive more data.

These events related to VRS illustrate the need to develop AND maintain ongoing relationships with policymakers and industry leaders. It is better to share your needs with your elected officials while laws and regulations are being developed than to complain after the vote has been passed. If you want to send a positive comment, you may do so at anytime.

In a TDI-L eNote survey last August, many of the consumers who use VRS responded that vendor cutbacks affected their ability to make a video relay call with limited times and longer waits for interpreters. For those of you who use VRS, or any other TRS services, and seen a marked drop in quality of service (continuing for more than one day), do NOT sit back and do nothing. I challenge you to SEND E-MAILS OR LETTERS IMMEDIATELY to the FCC or the appropriate agency along with the service provider and let them know how you feel about their service. Let them know you expect good service on TRS or VRS such as 24-hour access, more qualified interpreters, multi-translation services, and clear, uninterrupted video with more broadband. This is also true for our privileges as Americans to enjoy first-class access to quality TV captioning, full access to 9-1-1, and TTY payphones in public areas. Check [www.fcc.gov/cgb/complaints.html](http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/complaints.html) on how to file a complaint or a comment with the FCC. If you have any questions, let us know and we will help you. Also, as you file any complaints or comments, be sure to send a copy to TDI.

Today, as disasters increase, rapid technological changes, and shrinking government budgets, it becomes even more important that we make our access needs heard loud and clear at national, state, and local levels. It is up to us to communicate regularly with officials of a governmental agency or a business and advocate for our needs. Put your tax dollars to work, exercise your purchasing power in the marketplace, and vote at your local precinct. Only when our voice is adequately heard, will equal access be provided to our complete satisfaction. After all, America is the “land of the free and the home of the brave.” **SK**