

Prepared script for the Keynote speech at the

[Digital Accessibility Legal Summit](#)



November 1 & 2, 2022

Find out about the Summit at

www.accessibility.legal



Douglas George Towne

Chair and Chief Executive Officer



“Reality Check”

To say it is an honor for me to speak to you is an understatement.

I am not an attorney and have never even played one on television.

I want to personally thank Dr. Chris Law for taking a chance by inviting a non-attorney to address this astute gathering of legal and accessibility professionals.

A Clear and Present Danger

I actually started down the path to becoming an attorney, but not too far down that road—which I had discovered I hated—my faculty advisor suggested there were phonebooks full of attorneys I could hire. He

suggested I should go do something that I actually enjoyed. Something less paperwork driven.

So of course, I became a mortgage banker.

After that career I returned to my first love—advocacy—where I had started out as a pain-in-the-neck at the School for the Blind in New York. After spending years in the Center for Independent Living community, where I worked on accessible voting, transportation and other community needs, I moved on to work at the national level.

I became CEO of Disability Relations Group and began writing blogs. In one of these I challenged the process by which websites become accessible verses buildings and I coined the term “Access Ready”. Why do we require buildings to be accessible when they are built or renovated, but don't require Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) to be accessible under the same kind of terms.

After all, this is the age of ICT. Right?

After that blog in March of 2018 one of my friends told me this was a good idea and challenged me to do something about it.

After great discussion, Access Ready was formed to become one of the few national organizations solely focused on the accessibility of ICTs.

(I want to pause here and say a word about these virtual presentations we are all getting used to after the force of the pandemic made us look at such gatherings differently than in the past. I'm a traditional podium public speaker trained through Toastmasters. I enjoy the interplay between the speaker and a live audience which does not really happen in these digital events. I am not going to try to read word-for-word all that is included in the document version of this presentation. I'm not that good a braille reader. And, a wise politician once told me that the mind of your audience cannot absorb more than their seat can endure.)

So, Access Ready is an independent, non-profit, cross-disability education and advocacy organization promoting a policy of inclusion and accessibility of ICTs. Access Ready's strategies include technical findings, policy discussions, best practices, and advocacy efforts made available to

the public through its website,¹ its social media stream, and other public relations efforts.

Access Ready asks the question, “If physical facilities in this country must be built in accordance with accessibility standards, why not information and communication technology?” Businesses, employers, and federal / state / local governments are becoming more and more dependent on ICTs to provide goods and services. For people with disabilities, accessible information and communication technology is a necessity (not a luxury, or a convenience), which fosters independence, economic self-sufficiency, and active, meaningful participation in civic life.

As stated by Tennessee Governor Bill Lee, “For people without disabilities, technology makes life easier. For people with disabilities, technology makes life possible.”

Inaccessible ICT increasingly presents a clear and present danger to the civic, economic, and social welfare of people with disabilities.

As an advocate, and as a person who has dealt with and deals with accessibility issues and concerns on a regular basis throughout my life, I am passionate about them. And yes, I get a little (okay, a lot!) ticked off when I see the continuing flood of inaccessibility sweeping across the landscape of the business, government and nonprofit sectors—and how it treats people with all types of disabilities as though we do not matter. I get even more ticked off when I see advocates and, yes, legal professionals not to mention the very government bureaucrats charged with protecting my rights, failing to do so.

Okay now that I have gotten that off my chest, let me apologize to anyone I offended with that remark by simply saying this stuff *matters a great deal* to people with disabilities.

The pandemic showed us just how much digital accessibility matters. The COVID-19 pandemic placed the United States and the world into uncharted waters, including “stay at home orders,” self-isolation, social distancing, tremendous demands on the health care system, economic repercussions, virtual workplaces, and more. Accessible ICT became an integral part of

¹ www.accessready.org

one's existence in these pandemic times (and for what is the foreseeable future). The pandemic changed our perception of “normal”.

The transformation to a remote, virtual world is difficult in the best of situations. However, it is even more challenging for the approximately eighty-seven million adults in the United States living with a disability of some kind. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), about twenty-five percent of the population has a disability.

The Band-Aids Haven't Worked

To frame this talk, I want to begin by looking at Access Ready's—which is to say *my* —issues expressed through four areas of concern.

Over the years, the proliferation of ICT has grown exponentially, largely in ways that are not accessible to individuals with disabilities. It has locked out and discriminated especially against those with sensory, physical, and cognitive disabilities. Inaccessible ICT has, and is, preventing people with disabilities from fully, independently, privately, and easily participating in:

1. Civic life, including electoral, legislative, governance and other opportunities available to their non-disabled peers.
2. Public and private educational opportunities available to their non-disabled peers.
3. Economic opportunities available to their non-disabled peers; and
4. Social opportunities available to their non-disabled peers.

In each of these four areas of concern, the provision of an accommodation is too often used as an excuse for not providing accessibility from the outset. I understand the need for the allowance for accommodation, but by providing for this under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) we now face an unintended consequence: we gave *license* to those who will ignore “requiring accessibility” in favor of providing an *accommodation*.

This was never the intent behind the policy. We know that accommodations are in general a band-aid (and not a good brand name Band-aid either; it is one of those cheap Band-Aids you get in a generic first

aid kit). Accommodations are often an excuse to make it *look like* the provider *cares* about access.

Accommodations are often provided by front line staff who have a thousand other things to do, are poorly trained and seldom impressed with the fact that the accommodation they are tasked to provide is vitally important.

Instead, what is needed is a commitment to “universal design”—design that is usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation, specialized design, or reasonable accommodations—while still recognizing that some individuals with disabilities *may* still need a reasonable accommodation where necessary to meet their unique needs.

A lack of planning, requirements, and continuing policy implementation, has led to the inaccessible status quo, which is only maintained with each new inaccessible development in the field of ICT. The business, government, and nonprofit sectors of the community have largely failed to require accessibility in their purchasing and use of ICT, in many cases failing to comply with statutory and regulatory requirements.

In the case of the Federal government—that is supposed to comply with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973—the situation has become even more egregious. Section 508 was intended not only to set the standard for how government would purchase and provide accessibility for its employees and citizens, but it was intended to have a trickledown effect.

If vendors had to provide accessibility to the Federal government, then it followed that they would put those accessible products into the general market to provide access across the business, local, state government and nonprofit sectors.

Instead, it has become a model for how to avoid providing accessibility.

Why?

Because there are no consequences to Federal chief information and purchasing officers for choosing inaccessible products over comparably priced accessible products.

Likewise, there are no consequences when vendors certify that their product is accessible even when it is not.

The Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (VPAT) is the industry-standard form used for reporting and describing the extent to which a product does (or does not) conform to the applicable requirements in the US Code of Federal Regulations, 36 CFR Part 1194. (The word “voluntary” refers to whether the template is used for reporting the information, not to whether provision of the information is optional.)

Okay, I'm just going to say it. The VPAT provides vendors with a license to lie, and Federal officers the ability to swear to the lie, because everyone knows there are no consequences to them if they lie about accessibility.

Why isn't accessibility a requirement in the warranty provided by vendors to Federal agencies? Why aren't vendors required to fix accessibility issues when they arise?

Like I said, *there are no consequences to them.*

There *are* plenty of consequences to Federal employees and citizens with disabilities when the inaccessible junk they are selling and buying does not work.

There are further consequences when business, local, state government and nonprofit's see that this issue is not taken seriously by Federal officers.

There is also no third-party testing of supposedly accessible products at the Federal level for the most part. We hear whining about a “lack of resources and expertise” on this point.

Really?

How can this be, when The Government Services Administration (GSA) has the robust Trusted Tester program, with nearly a *thousand* highly trained and certified individuals embedded across most departments of the Federal government?²

² The Trusted Tester Program is described and linked to from the GSA web site: www.section508.gov/test/trusted-tester. The GSA's “Technology Accessibility

This group of highly qualified “Trusted Testers” are seldom looked to and even less often listened to in Federal ICT shops and purchasing departments.

(More on the Trusted Tester program later.)

ICT developers are not clean in this either. They have largely ignored accessibility concerns in their development, production, and marketing of most aspects of their products. Accessibility has been broadly de-emphasized and ignored—to the point that a niche accessible technology industry has developed to provide “band-aid” technologies at prices higher than universally accessible designs would likely reflect.

The COVID-19 pandemic that sent millions of participants in civic, economic, educational, and social life home (to vote, work, learn, teach, and play) has demonstrated, and often exacerbated, the true impact of inaccessible ICTs.

Many people with disabilities find that the systems being used successfully at home by their non-disabled peers do not provide them with the necessary access.

For example, this has prevented people with disabilities from fully participating in the electoral process in a presidential and mid-term election year.

Many have further experienced inaccessible ICT while working, shopping, and trying to take part in other forms of economic engagement from home, and participating socially with their non-disabled peers.

Let’s talk about elections for a moment.

In my opinion there is a tremendous misunderstanding where accessible election technology is concerned. Both the ADA Title II and the Help America Vote Act are clear that all aspects of election technology are required to be accessible. The problem is that Secretaries of State, election directors and local election officials in large part do not recognize this.

Playbook” contains a section (“play”) entitled “Conduct Section 508 testing” which recommends the Trusted Tester Program ([section508.gov/tools/playbooks/technology-accessibility-playbook-intro/play10/](https://www.section508.gov/tools/playbooks/technology-accessibility-playbook-intro/play10/)).

They think accessibility stops with the act of voting (and many actively undermine that as well). Few have accessible registration systems, or check-in pollbooks. Some have gone out of their way to avoid requiring or purchasing accessible pollbooks.

Companies that have invested in the development of accessible pollbooks like VOTEC for example have found few election officials who give a damn about providing that level of access to voters with disabilities.

The remote or “vote by mail” systems *are* accessible, to varying levels of success.

None of them provide equal access to voters who do not use computers. They all require the voter to have and be able to use a computer and printer as well as manage the process of signing and mailing in the completed ballot.

These are costly requirements not imposed on other voters.

If you don't have or use a computer, then you're at the mercy of others who you will need to help you mark your ballot. This clearly violates the legal requirements of a private, independent and secure ballot. What about the Deaf-blind, and those with cognitive, developmental and intellectual disabilities.

Yes. What about *them*?

When I graduated from high school the unemployment rate among the blind was 70%.

What is it today? 70%! And, for other disability groups it is even larger.

When working from home becomes difficult or impossible due to a lack of accessibility, people with disabilities have been laid off (through no fault of their own) only to find that a collapse of the largely inaccessible online unemployment system in their state prevents them from filing for benefits they have a right to obtain (“without undue hardship”).

Receiving inaccessible communications from business, government, and nonprofit leaders has put the lives of many with disabilities in jeopardy and allowed the virus to spread. As the health care system relies more and

more on telehealth and other virtual treatment options, people with disabilities are reminded how rarely accessible technology has been meaningfully adapted by hospitals, physician offices, and other facilities. While many at the staff level do what they can to assist their patients with disabilities, many medical administrators and hospital systems totally ignore accessibility concerns.

I'll repeat myself for effect: The widespread lack of accessible ICT in nearly every aspect of society presents a clear and present danger to the civic, economic, and social welfare of people with disabilities. To overcome this threat, it is necessary to (1) undertake a comprehensive review and analysis of existing policies, practices, and procedures; and (2) pursue new approaches that hold employers, federal, state, and local governmental agencies, and other businesses accountable for ensuring digital accessibility *as a basic civil right* for people with disabilities. These new approaches must include the standards and implementation strategies:

Standards

There must be adoption of accessibility and usability standards—for ICT applicable to employers and governments, comparable to the standards adopted by the Access Board in regulations implementing Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act (and consistent with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 A and AA)—that apply to the topic areas we are addressing.

As someone who works in the accessibility field, I think we need to keep pushing against the boundaries, and work towards speedier, more widespread adoption of accessibility practice across mainstream businesses government and the nonprofit sectors.

To that end, I have invested my time and energies joining the Board of Directors to begin a new nonprofit with a vital mission: Standard Accessibility Reporting, Inc. Access Ready is proud to be the first Strategic Partner of this new organization.

Our messaging centers on the current absurdity of inaccessible ICT:

- Our phones can talk, and they have for more than a decade. Now our watches can talk too. Cars are talking with us. But, can I buy a washing machine that talks so that I can change the settings? No.
- We've long since figured out how to make websites accessible, but how many of the most commonly visited websites are *actually* accessible? A measly 2%.
- You know that nutrition label on your cereal box? Wouldn't it be nice to have something like that but for the accessibility of products? Does it work for blind folks? Deaf folks? Folks with physical disabilities?

Guess what... we're making that label... with the support of people like you. Together, we can make a real change with a new approach. So, let's connect and chat, because I would very much like for you to be a part of this mission too.³

I gave that plug so Chris wouldn't yell at me! No, in all seriousness, this project that began with Chris Law is *vital* and its growth is a credit to his vision.

Implementation Strategies

So, let's talk now about the adoption of implementation strategies for holding covered entities accountable for designing, procuring, using, and/or maintaining ICT that is accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities. This needs to include putting pressure on those privateers who continue to put inaccessible products into the market.

Examples of implementation strategies across business, government and the nonprofit sectors include:

- **Adopting accessibility policies and distributing them (with sufficient explanation and education as appropriate) to all appropriate employees and contractors.** This cannot be a check-box process that just makes people “feel good”. It needs to be a requirement that is hard-and-fast, with outcome oversight imposed.

³ Standard Accessibility Reporting, Inc.: www.standardari.org

- **Designating and empowering a Digital Accessibility Officer.** In each organization this should be a person employed at the highest level (or contracted for) with access to leadership when accessibility is being run roughshod over by circumstances or the need for marketing and profit.
- **Providing meaningful training.** Again, not check-box training, but training at the same level of importance as security, or production, like that imposed through disciplines such as that offered by the International Organization for Standardization, more commonly known as ISO-9000. It should be hard to get and hard to hold on to. There should be consequences to failing to maintain it.
- **Including accessibility in performance metrics for employees and contractors who design, develop, procure, or maintain ICT.** This means real consequences. You will not have to fire many before the rest take it seriously.
- **Performing automated accessibility tests as well as (not instead of) testing by individuals with a range of disabilities.** I love engineers of all kinds because they do things that change the world. My only issue is that many of them don't know what they don't know. They often approach a product development from their own personal bias as a person without a disability (for the most part). Just like a blind engineer would approach a project from their own non-sighted point of view while possibly not considering a sighted or Deaf users' point of view.⁴ Obviously, this is an extremely exaggerated example, but you get my point. All I'm saying is that people with disabilities need to be involved in the process at all stages from conceptualization through end use. Even those Trusted Testers need to include us.
- **Providing feedback mechanisms that route to those empowered to make improvements.** Yes, this needs to take place within the buying and using entity, but wouldn't it be great if standards required this kind of testing and input at the development stage before the product or service ever leaves the drawing board? (Hey, what if accessibility

⁴ Deaf with a Big 'D' or a small 'd' – both apply here although I use the big 'D' throughout the narrative (See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deaf_culture)

was a requirement of technology financing *before* the first real investment dollar is ever spent?)

- **Requiring measures of compliance with, and implementation of, accessibility standards to be included in annual management audits.** Yes, I'm talking about the C suite review process and having the “ivory tower” take accessibility seriously enough that they actually *measure* how they are doing in terms of accessibility as part of their bottom-line evaluation. (Once upon a time we talked about triple bottom line corporate evaluations. Remember those?)
- **Requiring certification (verification) of vendor accessibility claims by third parties with material experience and expertise in accessible ICT.** No, we should not take a vendor's word that their product or service is accessible and that their people “understand how important it is”. Someone once said, “Trust but verify.”
- **Establishing complaint resolution mechanisms that allow for personal complaints and anonymous complaints on behalf of a class of users or buyers.** The complaint process must be tied to a reporting process that actually brings outcomes or the lack there of to the attention of those with the responsibility to do something about it. (This is another thing that ticks me off. Complaints about inaccessibility that go nowhere and do nothing.)
- **Adopting enforcement strategies, including sanctions for non-compliance, private rights of action, and recovery of attorneys' fees.** Now I'm not saying we should jail those who repeatedly violate the civil rights of people with disabilities through their callous disregard of accessibility needs and requirements. (Well maybe we should jail a few just to make the point?!)

When does an organizations inability to provide accessibility become not just an oversight, but an institutionalized hate crime.

Wow, “He didn't really ask that, did he?”

Of course not! We all know there is no such thing as an “institutionalized hate crime”. Right?

Well, when an institution is a provider of inaccessibility or allows its people to undermine accessibility, what else would you call it?

- **Offering incentives and tax credits, and developing grant programs for facilitating research and state-of-the-art systemic changes.** As advocates, we need to follow the money and promote this kind of dollar-based advocacy. I'll bet that if funding or massive tax credits were available for making technology accessible, industry would be tripping over themselves to get it done.
- **Internet or Digital Presence.** We need to have clarified that any employer, or government, (including an owner or operator of a website, mobile application, or online system offering goods, services, or information and data to the public—whether or not such owner or operator also owns or operates a physical space offering the same or similar goods, services, or information or data—must make their website, mobile application, or online system accessible to and usable by persons with disabilities in accordance with applicable accessibility and usability standards.

Recently, U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) and U.S. Representative John Sarbanes (D-MD-03) introduced legislation to help break down the significant barriers that Americans with disabilities continue to face when accessing website and software applications, which all Americans rely on for employment, commerce, education, public services and all other aspects of society.

The Websites and Software Applications Accessibility Act would build on the promise of the ADA passed *over thirty-two years ago* by requiring that entities currently covered by the ADA (as well as commercial providers), maintain websites and software applications that are accessible for Americans with disabilities. This legislation would also establish a clear accessibility standard as well as establish a technical assistance center

and advisory committee to provide advice and guidance on how to develop and maintain accessible websites and applications. Additionally, this legislation would authorize a study on the effects that emerging technologies have on the ability of individuals with disabilities to participate in society.

Now, we all know this bill is going nowhere fast. It is what us policy geeks call a “message bill”. It is telling industry to get its act together or Congress will act to implement the thirteen most feared words in the English language:

“I’m from the United States Federal Government and I’m here to help you.”

As advocates, we need to use this proposed law to bludgeon our way into corporate, government and nonprofit board rooms to get their attention. Then we need to keep pushing for its eventual passage anyway.

We need to look at all applicable Commercial and Consumer ICTs (including both hardware and software) meeting accessibility and usability standards. This includes any device, appliance, or future product utilized by commercial entities or individual consumers, encompassing both provider- and user-facing systems. Applicable categories of ICT include, but are not limited to: communications utilizing ICT, all one-way and two-way telecommunications, Internet-based communications, digital broadcasts, satellite communications, cable delivery systems and any future development of technologies that is to be used in commercial and consumer communications—(this also includes all software and hardware used in the delivery of such communications and the content developed to be made available over such systems.)—movies, television, audio-visual communications, emergency broadcasts, and supporting advertising including promotions (such as contests) requiring the participation of the public. All such programming must make available sign language interpreting and captioning as well as audio description of all program elements.

(Another thing that ticks me off are these contests that have visual clues that require you to be able to see to enter the contest. How about those television commercials that never actually say what they are advertising?

And then there is the tornado warning that only beeps until you turn on voice-over, if you have it and are able to turn it on before the warning goes away! Not to ignore Deaf issues... we see many broadcasts, especially live news conferences and emergency management sessions, where the local station covers the sign language interpreter or their hands with the station logo making the broadcast inaccessible to the Deaf.)

- **Point of Sale ICT.** All point-of-sale digital information technology used for financial transactions of all kinds, whether retail, wholesale, banking, or investment at a physical location or online through website-based or future technological developed services, such as credit card readers and inventory management systems (this includes seller-facing ICT as well as consumer-facing) must be accessible. (Why is it that when you try to talk to the users or providers of such systems, they act like you're asking them to strap on wings and fly to the moon?! The fact is that providing accessibility is no longer rocket science. Most of the know-how, widgets and devices needed to provide accessibility are available and waiting to be used.)
- **Educational Systems and ICT.** All software and hardware utilized in public and private education at all levels, such as remote learning software and online assignment/grading systems must be accessible. Education administrators complain about budget restrictions, but when shown that digital textbooks are not only more cost effective, up to date and yes accessible many still go to killing trees to print books that are out of date before they are even delivered, in some cases.
- **Health Care ICT.** All software and hardware utilized in public and private health care at all levels, such as telehealth/remote visit technology and patient portals must be accessible. (Inaccessible healthcare. Really? Now we all know that the healthcare industry is *poor and limping along* from year to year, with no light at the end of the tunnel. NOT!!!) In the case of healthcare like most of these cases accessibility is only a case of the buyer asking for or requiring accessible systems of their providers and they would have it.

Healthcare also falls under HIPAA (The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996). This law takes great care to protect our personal health related information when stored or transmitted through technology. Much of that technology is not accessible. So, if I go to my doctor and they hand me an inaccessible tablet to use to fill out the repetitive forms they always want, and I have to ask someone to help me is that not a violation of the very spirit of HIPAA? If the questions and my answers are asked and given verbally for all to hear is that not a violation of HIPAA?

- **Banking and Finance ICT.** All software and hardware utilized in public and private banking and finance at all levels, such as mobile banking and investment applications and online consumer account systems must be accessible. (Again, we should not feel sorry for the American banking system who has a true wealth of resources.)
- **Digital Information Technology Security, and Exemptions.** The accessibility of digital information technology must not be sacrificed to security unless it would result in undue hardship, including creating actual security problems that cannot be ameliorated. If such systems cannot be made both accessible to and usable by people with disabilities and secure, then accommodations must be made for people with disabilities. Such accommodations must provide the same level of service as is provided to others accessing the secure system. Personal information collected through the accommodation pathway must be secured in ways not unlike that protected by the secure system, with appropriately tiered levels of protection for especially sensitive information, such as passwords, financial data, and personally identifiable information including health data. No digital information technology system utilized by the business, local/state government or nonprofit sectors should be exempt unless sufficient cause can be shown that providing accessibility would impact the usability, security, or effectiveness of the system. Such an exemption could be sought through an application process established and administered jointly by the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) and the United States Access Board. We cannot let security be the roadblock to accessibility any longer. There are work

around and we must insist on them. Those work arounds must be as robust as the system used by everyone else.

Reality Checks

In conclusion I want to make just a few “reality check” points.

My first reality check is that **we're in a chasing position**. Technology is developing and it's a race to get it to market. So, accessibility is not prioritized because it is seen as slowing the development down. So, we chase it down and force it to be accessible. By that time, many technologies have had their peaks and are being overtaken by something else.

For example, we're all just starting to talk about accessibility in augmented reality and virtual reality, but those things are already rolling out without accessibility, and we haven't even figured out what accessibility means there.

Regulation and litigation are not fast enough to keep up, even though the ADA was written broadly enough that it does apply to emerging technologies and provides a practical standard. The courts cannot seem to get their heads around it.

Technology vendors have *a lot of money and little shame*, so they will ignore and fight accessibility.

We need additional tools. The civil rights movement used to use mass organization and shaming but has started to rely on lawyers and regulators. I think we need to put shame back on the table.

This is why we should advocate for the funders of new technology to require accessibility as a condition of funding. This would interrupt the “inaccessibility train” before it leaves the station.

My second reality check is **the financial power of the disability community**. According to several financial institutions the discretionary financial power of the disability community well exceeds two hundred fifty billion dollars annually in the United States and that does not include what government spends. Globally the financial impact of disability is as large, if not larger, than China.

Usually this is expressed in terms of the buying financial power of people with disabilities. But consider, instead, the power of a boycott. Yes, my friends we need to organize *boycotts* of all those who refuse to take accessibility seriously. This can be done at the national level with big organizations taking the lead, but it can also be done at the local level.

So, the next time you see a local sponsor supporting an inaccessible contest on television call them up and tell them to cut it out then get your advocate friends to call and email them as well. This will send a message to the broadcasters.

My third (and biggest) reality check has to do with the **Trusted Tester program**. Even though it is shown on the GSA website, that is not where it is housed.

“How can this be?”, you ask.

It is actually housed and administered from a much more high-profile department. It is managed through the Office of Accessible Systems and Technology's (OAST).

“And where is that housed?”, you ask.

Well, it is in the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Which must mean it is of vital interest to the *security of this nation* and the civil rights of its citizens.

Why else would it have been put in this most vital of Federal departments? To me this clearly means that accessible information and communications technology is a matter of national security. Yet it is being ignored in virtually every other department of the Federal government. (I asked our host, Chris Law, who once worked as a contractor at OAST about this, and he confirmed to me the higher level of seriousness that accessible technology holds at DHS compared to many other Federal agencies.)

Yes, digital accessibility is *a matter of national security*. We all know that no one wants to mess with that.

Think about that. “A matter of national security!”

What does “a matter of national security” mean? It means that items that rise to this level should matter to all of us. It is about the security of the very republic.

In this ICT driven world, accessible ICT is as important as everything else you can think of. The Federal government made that determination over a decade ago.

So, go forth and use that fact—that the government itself has designated accessible technology a matter of national security—in your advocacy, and legal arguments.

When they try to shut you down, just like in the movies state firmly, and with a grim look on your face, *“This is a matter of national security.”*

“Reality Check” Prepared script by Doug Towne for the Keynote speech at the Digital Accessibility Legal Summit, November 1 & 2, 2022 (www.accessibility.legal)

Thank you for your time and attention.

Remember, the accessibility of technology is a matter of national security.
Remember what that means.