

April 4th, 2019

**Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Committee on Energy and Commerce**

**Jan Schakowsky
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce**

Dear Chairwoman Schakowsky,

Thank you for inviting me to testify before the Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce of the Committee on Energy and Commerce at the hearing entitled, "Inclusion in Tech: How Diversity Benefits All Americans."

I'm grateful the subcommittee includes disability in the definition of diversity. I am happy to answer the follow-up questions for the record in the attachment therein.

If you, or the Subcommittee, has any additional questions, please contact Brian Horn, Executive Vice President of Disability:IN at Brian@DisabilityIN.org.

Sincerely,



Jill Houghton
President and Chief Executive Officer
Disability:IN

Attachments

Congresswoman Kathy Caster

1. How could the tech industry better integrate the needs of individuals with disabilities into their platforms?

Many technology companies are following the principles of “universal design”, or put simply, one-size-fits-all. As technology companies, such as Facebook and Amazon, become increasingly ubiquitous, their teams are designing and developing so that the product is universally used. However, universal designs might not involve the participation of excluded communities.

Leaders in technology, such as Microsoft, Adobe, and Google, are integrating the needs of individuals through *inclusive design*. As OCAD University’s Inclusive Design Research Centre defines inclusive design as: “design that considers the full range of human diversity with respect to ability, language, culture, gender, age and other forms of human difference.”

Inclusive design, contrary to universal design, was born out of digital environments. In order to implement effective inclusive design, we need designers and developers who have experienced barriers.

The technology industry as a whole should commit to building a culture of inclusion and belonging. Leading technology companies are moving away from a uniform set of individuals with specific competencies, and towards a group of individuals that can work as a team, that each can contribute a diverse perspective.

To start, technology companies should hire more individuals with disabilities. As we lean into April as Autism Acceptance Month, coalitions are forming such as the Autism @ Work Employer Roundtable, a collection of 16 companies sharing best practices on increasing hires of people on the autism spectrum. Companies recognize in order to drive innovation, their culture must be inclusive, and having hiring goals of people with disabilities is a good place to start.

Additional Resources:

“Autism @ Work | Employer Roundtable - Disability:IN.” Disability:IN, disabilityin.org/what-we-do/autism-employer-roundtable/.

Holmes, Kat. “The No. 1 Thing You’re Getting Wrong about Inclusive Design.” Fast Company, Fast Company, 16 Oct. 2018, www.fastcompany.com/90243282/the-no-1-thing-youre-getting-wrong-about-inclusive-design.

The Honorable Robert E. Latta

2. Ms.Houghton, in your written testimony you spoke about inclusion and technological innovation. Can you discuss how different technologies, like self-driving vehicles, can help individuals improve their mobility and promote their inclusion in the community and the workforce?

Self-driving cars open opportunities to people with disabilities and can provide critical transportation so that people with disabilities can find and keep jobs. According to a [report released by the Ruderman Family Foundation](#) in 2017, mitigating transportation related obstacles for individuals with disabilities would **enable new employment opportunities for approximately 2 million individuals with disabilities, and save \$19 billion annually in healthcare expenditures from missed medical appointments.**

As manufacturers plan to build more self-driving cars it is important that they build in accessibility from the beginning. Henry Claypool, an expert on this topic, [wrote in a 2018 New York Times Op-Ed](#), “of course, self-driving vehicles are not the answer to all the accessibility woes... Automakers know that people with disabilities will be important beneficiaries of driverless innovations. But without a mass-produced vehicle designed with universal accessibility features, history will repeat itself and millions will be cut out from the new innovation.”

As these technologies rise to help individuals with disabilities that are mobility-related, it's important to guide the role of the private sector and the public sector in providing equitable opportunities. At present time, many public transportation systems, such as the New York City subway, still operate many inaccessible stations.

Should mobility technology such as self-driving cars rise, companies should be aware of access and accessibility. Although ride-sharing has grown considerably, many people with disabilities living outside of populated cities may not have physical access this as a transportation option. Also, if companies choose to price their transportation services higher, it may present financial barriers to people with disabilities. Finally, if mobility technology grows, the platform in which users interact with the company should be accessible itself.

As Miriam Heyman, Ph.D, Senior Program Officer at the Ruderman Family Foundation states: There are almost two million people with disabilities in this country report never leaving their home. We need to organize around our priorities for the design of self-driving cars, to make sure that they are being **designed with users with disabilities in mind.**