

The Honourable David C. Onley
Lieutenant Governor of Ontario
Launch of Communication Access Now
Toronto, February 20, 2014

Thank you very much. It is good to see you and to see so many familiar faces and wonderful to meet new people here today that I have not yet had the pleasure. It is a real honour to be with you because I have been in the communications business all my life and it is something that I have appreciated as one underappreciated aspect of accessibility.

When I became Lieutenant Governor, as mentioned, the definition of accessibility was something that I really wrestled with. I wanted people to see that accessibility meant much more than the things that we tend to take for granted - even though they were diligently and hard fought for over the last number of decades. These things include curb cuts, wheel chair ramps, automatic doors and the like, and it came to be symbolized by the wheel chair symbol. When we see that we think of physical improvements, and these improvements, as I said, were fought for by many very dedicated advocates over the last 30 years especially and I remember as a reporter covering some of these hearings that were going on, specifically at the TTC, battles in terms of Wheel Trans, and things like that, but again it comes back to that symbol and how the perception was that accessibility meant something that was a physical improvement.

When I became Lieutenant Governor I wanted people to understand that accessibility is much, much more than that. So the definition that I have been using for the last 6 ½ years is that accessibility is that which enable people to achieve their full potential. I wanted people to let that phrase sink in so that they could understand that it also included people with so called invisible disabilities.

I read an article today in the National Post about a long-time family friend Dr. Ron Inman, who is one of Canada's leading expert on arthritis and other diseases of

the joint and the way our bodies break down over time and through neglect, and these could be considered in many instances an invisible disability, but communications is another aspect of accessibility. In order to achieve our full potential, we have to be able to communicate with one another. This is what makes this conference so very, very important. Now, clearly for those who are deaf, for those who use American Sign Language, for those who use hearing aids, that is one kind of communications barrier. For those who are blind, it can be another very significant communications barrier. But as we are all aware, communications and difficulties in communications go far, far beyond the traditional concepts if you will, associated with those who are blind, or hearing impaired or deaf.

We live in very, very exciting times in terms of communications, especially for those who have accessibility issues related to communications, which is why I am so very pleased to have been invited to attend this Ontario launch of Communication Access Now and I would like to thank each and every one of you for being here today, for your input from your respective area as a stakeholder involved in the entire issue.

As the Queen's representative in the province, I would encourage you to continue to pursue this whole area, to continue to promote this whole concept and work with your leaders, work with my office in whatever time I have left, which may be days, weeks, months, there may be insight from someone in the room here, I don't know (laugh), but whatever that time period may be, continue to work with government and governing officials as we seek to expand the concept of accessibility to include communications and make that a part of the ongoing dialogue so that accessibility is not just the curb cuts, not just the wheel chair parking spots, not just automatic doors, not just a range of physical accessibility devices, but also includes the entire range of communications devices and what those implications are for our society, for our families, for our educational system and for our province going forward.

As your Majesty's representative in Ontario, I thank you for being here, I thank you for inviting me and I wish you the very best for the rest of your deliberations today."

The Honourable David C. Onley
Lieutenant Governor of Ontario