

RELAY NORTH CAROLINA

Video Transcript for Springfest Keynote Speaker – Chris Egan

Video Title:

Chris Egan | Keynote Speaker | Relay NC 35th Anniversary

Transcript:

A stage with black railings in front of speakers with lights. A collection of pink, teal, and purple balloons decorate the back railing along with two big metallic gold balloons that spell out the number 35. To the left of the stage, in a purple shirt and gray slacks is a sign language interpreter. To the right of the stage is keynote speaker Chris Egan.

Good morning, everyone. So nice to be with you today. My name is Chris Egan I'm assistant secretary for Employment and Community Access with the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services.

I am wearing a dark blue suit, am medium height or average height I suppose, brown hair and a little bit of a scruffy face. [The audience laughs.] Intentionally so. Again, it's so good to be here and Tony, thank you.

I really appreciate Tony's leadership and his relationship building skills, but I also appreciate your story. Thank you for sharing your personal story as well as your experiences with relay and your journey.

I am very appreciative of the invitation to join you today for this very important celebration 35 years of telecommunications relay services for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, DeafBlind, and speech disabled North Carolinians and I also bring greetings and well wishes from our North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services secretary Devdutta Sangvai. You'll notice in your program that he has shared a letter with you all and also Deputy Secretary Mike Blaze.

This is also the 35th year of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and title four of the ADA mandates that a nationwide system that enables Deaf, Hard of Hearing, DeafBlind, and speech disabled people to be established with the expectation for people to be able to communicate using relay services 24 hours a day 7 days a week. This was a significant and important mandate and a major paradigm shift supporting people to become more independent and rely less on others to make calls and communicate with others.

Before this, those who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, DeafBlind, and those with speech disabilities would often need to ask family, you all know this, friends, neighbors, perhaps sometimes even strangers to help them make phone calls. Even calls that were very personal in nature. And the passage of title 4 of the ADA and telecommunications relay services was the beginning of the increasing safety for people protecting themselves and information.

So we think back, and it was empowering.

If we think back, what was communication technology like in 1990? Which, by the way, does not feel that long ago to me and maybe to some of you. Landline telephones were the primary mode of communication. The internet existed primarily as a research and academic network tool. The World Wide Web was in its infancy with very few websites and very limited public access. Personal computers were becoming more common in businesses and some homes and were primarily used for tasks like word processing, spreadsheets, and basic gaming. Networking was not a standard feature. Data storage - floppy disks. They had limited capacity. Television was the main form of

visual entertainment with limited channels and no closed captioning. VHS tapes were the dominant form for watching movies at home. From a messaging standpoint, postal mail was a common method for written communication over long distances. Fax machines were used in businesses for transmitting documents and pagers were used by some professionals to receive short messages.

So where are we now in a short 35 years later? A very quick 35 years later?

Smartphones serve as powerful handheld computers. They offer high quality voice and video through cellular networks and Wi-Fi. Features include internet search access, a multitude of apps, cameras, GPS and more. And for me, personally, since having a cell phone I can't remember anyone's phone number anymore. They're all in the cell phone. So if I lose the cell phone, I'm lost. I can't get anywhere because I use the GPS to go everywhere. Things have changed. Landline still exists, but they're less common. We have high-speed internet which is widely available and is a central part of daily life. Information access, communication, commerce, entertainment and more. Wireless internet is prevalent and expanding. Personal computers have evolved by leaps and bounds and laptops, desktops, and tablets are common for work, education, and leisure. They're powerful, portable, and seamlessly connected to the internet and other devices for the most part. Data storage has changed completely. On the entertainment side of things, streaming services for video and music have largely replaced physical media and captioning is generally available. Smart TVs and other devices provide access to a vast library of content on demand. Online gaming is a popular form of entertainment and even social engagement. The range of communication avenues now includes instant messaging apps, and email, and social media platforms, and text messaging for quick communication. As you all know, video conferencing is now common for both personal and professional interactions and covid sped that up for us.

Today, relay services continue to operate strongly for 48 million people in America and 1.35 million people in North Carolina who have hearing loss. And they have the opportunity to make calls and communicate via telecommunication in ways that work best for them because of the service. From a rights perspective, full and equal communication access is not simply a matter of convenience or accommodation but a fundamental human right and a crucial aspect of equality that requires providing the necessary supports and accommodations to ensure the individuals can achieve equal outcomes.

North Carolina has a longstanding and proactive history in providing and supporting telecommunications relay services. Thank you. And from the early establishment of Relay North Carolina to the continuous adaptation and expansion of services, the state has and is dedicated to ensuring equal access to communications for individuals. The involvement of the Department of Health and Human Services and the Division of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, our legislative mandates, and the ongoing outreach efforts highlight this enduring commitment. I want to thank all of the employees past and present at the Division of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and all the contractors past and present that have provided these critical services for making this available to North Carolinians by providing telecommunications technology, education, and training. And most importantly passion, commitment, and continued advocacy. I fully agree with the secretary Sangvai in our confidence that North Carolina will continue to provide invaluable telecommunications relay services for years to come. Again, it's been a pleasure to join you that this morning. Thank you for being here. Thank you for all you do, and I hope the whole day goes really wonderfully for you and all of us. What a celebration.