

## HOUSE MEMBERS ANNOUNCE PLANS FOR COMBATING NATION'S "DIGITAL DIVIDE"

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HOUSE MEMBERS ANNOUNCE PLANS FOR COMBATING NATION'S "DIGITAL DIVIDE" WASHINGTON, D.C.-- Members of the Congressional Black Caucus, Congressional Hispanic Caucus, the New Democratic Coalition, the Blue Dog Coalition as well as members of the Progressive Caucus held a press conference on Capitol Hill today to announce that they have jointly drafted a legislative proposal aimed at closing the nation's "digital divide."

The group of House members also announced their intent to push for the Clinton Administration's education technology agenda as budget negotiations progress in this session of Congress. The members in attendance were: Rep. John B. Larson (CT-01), Rep. Major Owens (D-NY), Rep. Edward Markey (D-MA), Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX), Rep. Max A. Sandlin, (D-TX), Rep. Silvestre Reyes, (D-TX), Rep. Juanita Millender-McDonald (D-CA), and Rep. Sheila Jackson-Lee, (D-TX). Martin Luther King III was also in attendance at the press conference.

Congressman Owens also presented a letter from the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights signed by more than 40 technology industry and civil rights leaders urging the members of the House and Senate to take action on certain digital divide legislation. Specifically, those who signed the letter urged the members of the House and Senate to take action designed to accelerate "the understanding, acceptance and use of information technology among underserved communities," through funding certain programs contained in the Department of Commerce's Appropriations Bill (H.R. 4690).

Among those who signed the letter were Geoff Ralston of Yahoo!, Milton J. Little, Jr. of The National Urban League, Kweisi Mfume of the NAACP, Patricia Ireland of the National Organization of Women, George Bell, CEO of Excite@Home, Steve Westly of eBay, Peter Schwartz, CEO of the Global Business Network, Laura Murphy of the Washington Bureau of the ACLU, Mike Seidenberg of Desktop.com and many others.

"Bridging the massive technology chasm that exists in America is something that demands attention in this session of Congress, as well as in future sessions," said Larson. "It would be shortsighted for the United States to allow the distance between those with access to technology and those without it to grow any farther apart. Currently, Americans are divided along racial, geographic, gender and especially socioeconomic lines and the gap is only growing. To pave the way for low-income and disadvantaged people to have greater access to technology in schools as well as at home, is to expand the boundaries of opportunity for millions."

A report to Congress on the subject of the digital divide this week by the CEO of the Gartner Group, Michael Fleisher, stated: "Not surprisingly, the higher one's socioeconomic status, the more likely an individual is to have internet access and thus access to some of the most important information and tools necessary for social mobility," and that "The lower people are socioeconomically, the less likely they are to have internet access and thus the harder it is to improve their lot in life." The report suggests that a strategic, rather than a tactical solution is needed to focus on bringing access to people at "home, in school and at work." The report states: "While programs that provide Internet access in the classroom are good stopgap measures, access in the home should be the long-term goal." It also stresses the importance of encouraging business strategies that help close the divide.

"Now is the time for us to ensure that the digital divide does not grow so large that it becomes unmanageable in the future. Investment and partnership with the private sector as well as state and local government will help lead to a better educated technology workforce in the future, and better technologically trained recruits for our military," said Larson.

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Attached:

- The outline of the Strategic Education, Economic and Defense System Initiative.
- White House budget requests for education technology programs.
- Executive summary of the Gartner Report on the digital divide is available at:  
<http://gartner5.gartnerweb.com/public/static/home/home.html>