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Clinton – Gore Administration Accomplishments in Creating Digital Opportunity for People with Disabilities
Draft September 19, 2000

President Clinton and Vice President Gore have worked to ensure that people with disabilities will be full participants in the Information Age. Creating digital opportunity for people with disabilities is particularly important, since it increases their ability to work, gain new skills using online learning, tap in to the rapidly growing universe of electronic information, and improve their quality of life by exchanging e-mail with people with shared interests. Below are just some of the steps that President Clinton and Vice President Gore have taken to help create digital opportunity for Americans with disabilities.

- **Ensuring that the Telecommunications Revolution Benefits All.** President Clinton and Vice President Gore fought for the Telecommunications Act of 1996, which requires that telecommunications equipment and services be accessible to individuals with disabilities. In 1999, the Federal Communications Commission adopted rules implementing Section 255 of the Telecom Act, which will ensure that people with disabilities have access to telephones, cell phones, pagers, call waiting, and operator services.

- **Ensuring the Federal Government Provides Accessible Technology and Information.** In August 1998, the President signed into law the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, which included in the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998. The revised "Section 508" requires that when Federal agencies develop, procure, maintain, or use electronic and information technology, they must ensure that it is accessible to people with disabilities. Because the federal government is a large purchaser of information technology, this law will accelerate the development of accessible technologies.

- **Signing the Assistive Technology Act.** With the support of the Clinton-Gore Administration, Congress passed the Assistive Technology Act of 1998 (ATA). The ATA supports state efforts such as training, technical assistance, alternative loan programs, demonstration centers, information and referral hotlines, web sites, technology expos, and the development of informational materials.

- **Proposing a More Than Seventeen-Percent Increase in Assistive Technology Initiatives for FY 2001.** The Administration's FY 2001 budget includes $100 million (a $13.5 million increase) for disability and technology research at the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) and $41 million (a $7 million increase) for Assistive Technology Act funds to States:
  - NIDRR would launch a comprehensive technology initiative that includes technical assistance and training to elementary and secondary schools adopt accessible technology for students with disabilities.
  - The Administration's request also includes $15 million to support grants that establish or maintain alternative loan financing programs. Many people with disabilities do not have the private financial resources to purchase the assistive technologies they need. If approved, this increase would significantly enhance opportunities for individuals with disabilities to take advantage of assistive technology.

- **Developing a Strategy for the Development and Transfer of Assistive Technology and Universal Design.** In July 2000, President Clinton directed the Interagency Committee on Disability Research (ICDR) to work with the disability and research communities to identify priority areas for the advancement of assistive technologies and universal design capabilities, and to publish this information within 120 days. Following issuance of the report, each major research agency must develop a strategy for enhancing the transfer of technology that can contribute to the needs and requirements identified by the ICDR.

- **Creating the Access America for People with Disabilities Website.** On the 10th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the President announced a new website, Access America for People with Disabilities -- www.disAbility.gov -- which will serve as a "one-stop" electronic link to an enormous range of useful information available throughout the Federal government for people with disabilities and their families.

- **Advancing the state-of-the-art of assistive technology**: As part of the Administration's proposed increase for the National Science Foundation, the Administration has proposed increases in R&D that will benefit people with disabilities, such as a "seeing eye" computer that could help people who are blind, or technologies that could automatically turn speech into text for people who are deaf.

A LIST OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE INITIATIVES TO CREATE DIGITAL OPPORTUNITY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

- **Leading high-tech CEOs pledge to develop a corporate-wide policy on accessibility**: In a letter to President Clinton, the CEOs of leading high-tech companies, including 3Com, Adobe, AOL, AT&T, Bell South, Compaq, eBay, Global Crossing, Handspring, Hewlett-Packard, Macromedia, Microsoft, NCR, PeoplePC, Qualcomm, Red Hat, Sun Microsystems, and Zenith have committed to develop a corporate-wide policy within six months. Currently, very few high-tech companies have such a policy. These policies will include "best practices" such as:
  - Training their workers to develop accessible products and services;
  - Giving their developers adequate resources to design accessible products and services;
  - Identifying and fixing accessibility problems in new versions of their hardware and software; and
  - Supporting research and development to improve the state-of-the-art of assistive technology.

- **Presidents of 20 of the nation's top research universities agree to expand research and education on accessibility:** In a letter to President Clinton, the presidents of [20] of the nation's top research universities including XXXX,XXXX,XXXX have agreed to take a number of important steps to expand research and education on accessibility, including: ensuring that computer scientists and engineers receive training on accessibility; expanding the number of faculty who conduct research on accessibility; and ensuring that university online resources are accessible to people with disabilities. For example, the College of Engineering of the University of Wisconsin will create a new educational program on design and human disability that will involve the creation of additional tenure track faculty positions.

- **President Clinton will direct his Cabinet to create a task force on Medicare/Medicaid coverage of assistive technology:** President Clinton will direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services and other members of his Cabinet to form an interagency Task Force on Health Care Coverage of Assistive Technologies. Currently, the Medicare and Medicaid programs provide essential health coverage to nearly 12 million people with disabilities. The task force will be charged with examining existing Medicare and Medicaid coverage of assistive technologies, and making recommendations on how to best enhance such coverage in order to support independent living and employment for people with disabilities. This review is particularly important and timely because the historic Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act signed by President Clinton allows people with disabilities to maintain their Medicare and Medicaid coverage even after they return to work.

- **AmeriCorps will today award provide $9 million in grants to support 1,200 AmeriCorps volunteers to help close the digital divide, including people with disabilities:** AmeriCorps grants will support efforts by 1,200 AmeriCorps volunteers to help close the digital divide. AmeriCorps volunteers will be helping teachers learn how to use technology, staffing Community Technology Centers, and giving at-risk youth the skills they need to become technologically literate. Several of the projects focus on the needs of people with disabilities, such as a project in North Carolina that will give 300 blind and visually impaired students of all ages computer and Internet skills.

- **National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research will invest $2.5 million to expand partnership with industry to make World Wide Web accessible for people with disabilities:** The Department of Education's National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) will provide $2.5 million in funding over the next 5 years to the World Wide Web Consortium's Web Accessibility Initiative at MIT. This initiative will develop guidelines to ensure that Web content and Web software is accessible for people with disabilities, and will educate developers about the importance of implementing these guidelines. This work is critical because the Web now provides access to over 2 billion pages of information, and is becoming increasingly important in the workplace, for electronic commerce, and for government services.

- **Department of Education will fund new partnership to make online learning accessible to people with disabilities:** The Department of Education will provide a grant under the Administration's Learning Anytime Anywhere Partnership to a new initiative that will help make online learning accessible for people with disabilities. The project will be led by the WGBH National Center for Accessible Media and the IMS Global Learning Consortium. Industry partners include Blackboard, Inc., Educational Testing Service, Pearson Education, Sun Microsystems, PeopleSoft, and Saba Software. The project will impact the accessibility of online resources in all learning environments, including K-12 education, post-secondary education, and workplace training.

- **The C.S. Mott Foundation will fund a "Task Force on Equal Access to Technology and Opportunity.** With funding from the Mott Foundation, the Disability Network of Flint, Michigan, will create a one-year blue-ribbon commission that will bring together diverse sectors of society to address long-term challenges in the accessibility of information technologies. First, the Task Force will address the problem of affordability. Many people with disabilities are unable to afford basic computer technology and Internet access, let alone high-end and costly specialized assistive devices. The Task Force will explore financing mechanisms and strategies for building on the foundation of the Tech Act Projects. Second, the Task Force will focus on education and outreach to colleges and universities to help with improve the integration of accessibility and usability into academic curricula and university services. The Task Force will consist of 15-20 members representing industry, colleges and universities, technology experts, disability advocates, and government. It will meet four times over the coming year, issue a report, and develop model action plans for dissemination to different sectors of society.

- **Microsoft, Community Options, and other public and private partners will create a business incubator - with special emphasis on entrepreneurs with disabilities:** Microsoft, Community Options, the New Jersey Community Loan Fund, the New Jersey Technology Council, the New Jersey Association of Women Business Owners and other partners will create a business incubator targeted to low-income individuals, with priority given to people with disabilities. The New Jersey-based incubator will provide low-cost office space, customized technology support, and business planning expertise.

- **Sun Microsystems will partner with GNOME Foundation to make open source desktop software accessible for people with disabilities:** Sun Microsystems will create a new accessibility lab that will make GNOME software accessible for people with disabilities. Sun is also committed to establishing a fund that will be able to accept contributions from companies and individuals to make open source software accessible for people with disabilities. GNOME is a free, open-source desktop environment that makes it easier for people to use Linux and other similar operating systems. Open source software may be freely distributed and modified by end-users.

- **President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities will announce expansion of High School/High Tech program to 4 new cities and 3 new states:** The High School/High Tech provides opportunity for students with disabilities to explore exciting careers in science and technology. The program uses site visits, mentoring, shadowing, and paid summer internships to allow students to prepare for careers in scientific, engineering and technology-related fields. The President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities has identified local partners that will expand High School/High Tech in 4 urban areas (Atlanta, Los Angeles, Orlando, Chicago) and 3 states (Col., Wisc., and Michigan).

- **CompTIA will partner with Compaq and National Cristina Foundation to provide scholarships and training for certification in IT jobs, with some resources targeted to people with disabilities:** CompTIA, the Computing Technology Industry Association, will dedicate $1 million to create scholarships for the general population, including people with disabilities, to provide training for IT service and support positions. Compaq will match this commitment with $100,000 for scholarships

targeted specifically to people with disabilities. In conjunction with these commitments, CompTIA is partnering with the National Cristina Foundation to develop a National Computer Re-Utilization Network to provide training organizations that serve teens, veterans, people with disabilities, and other under-served communities with re-furbished technology.

- **Department of Education will award a $2 million grant to strengthen Community Technology Centers, make them more accessible for people with disabilities:** The Department of Education will award a $2 million grant to the "America Connects Consortium" to help create, improve and sustain Community Technology Centers through technical assistance. These centers provide access to technology and the skills needed to use it, typically to low-income families that do not have computers and Internet access. One of the consortium partners, the Alliance for Technology Access, will help the centers ensure that they are accessible to people with disabilities and are meeting their needs. The Department of Education is already supporting or expanding 595 CTCs; President Clinton has proposed a $100 million budget initiative in FY2001 to create an additional 1,000 centers.

- **NCR will provide free training on benefits of accessibility from a business perspective:** NCR is partnering with IDEAL at NCR and EASI (Equal Access to Software and Information) to create a workshop, "The Global Business Benefits of Designing Accessible and Usable Electronic and Information Technology." This workshop will be offered on-line to 400 participants free of charge.

- **Department of Commerce will help small community-based organizations provide Web-based services to people with disabilities:** The National Telecommunications and Information Administration's Technology Opportunities Program will provide a grant to the Pangea Foundation, based in San Diego, California. The foundation will create Web-based templates that will make it easy for organizations to enter information in a format that is accessible to people with disabilities. People with disabilities will be able to find information on local services through a central clearinghouse on the Web in a format that they can use. The Administration has proposed tripling the budget for the Technology Opportunities Program from $15 million to $45 million so that the government can support creative uses of information technology for underserved communities.

- **Center for Applied Special Technology will develop improved version of Web accessibility tool with private sector support:** CAST will upgrade its freely available tool for improving the accessibility of Web sites. The new version will have an improved ability to analyze the accessibility of web sites, and the ability to interactively repair problems that are found. Current sponsors include IBM, Microsoft, Mitsubishi Electric Foundation, Sun Microsystems, and HalfthePlanet.com.

NEXT STOP ON PRESIDENT CLINTON'S "DIGITAL DIVIDE" TRIP: DIGITAL OPPORTUNITY FOR AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES

Draft September 19, 2000

TODAY, PRESIDENT CLINTON WILL CONTINUE HIS "DIGITAL DIVIDE" TRIP IN FLINT MICHIGAN, WITH A FOCUS ON CREATING DIGITAL OPPORTUNITY FOR AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES: President Clinton will visit Flint, Michigan as part of his ongoing initiative to bridge the digital divide and create digital opportunity for all Americans. The President will visit a center that will offer access to cutting-edge technology for people with disabilities and other members of the community. He will see demonstrations of advanced technologies such as an "EyeGaze" system that allows people with disabilities to operate a computer and send e-mail using only their eyes, and an online physics course that is accessible to people with disabilities.

PRESIDENT CLINTON WILL MAKE ANNOUNCEMENTS AS PART OF 5 KEY GOALS TO EMPOWER AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE INFORMATION AGE: At a speech at Mott Community College, the President will announce concrete actions by the Administration, companies, universities and non-profits to help ensure that people with disabilities are full participants in the Information Age by:

- Increasing the accessibility and usability of existing information and communication products and services for people with disabilities;
- Improving the state-of-the-art of assistive technology;
- Ensuring that existing efforts to bridge the digital divide and create digital opportunity are accessible to people with disabilities;
- Using information technologies to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities; and
- Increasing access to technologies for people with disabilities who cannot currently afford it.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ACCESSIBLE TECHNOLOGIES:

Ensuring that information and communications technologies are usable by the 54 million Americans with disabilities is critical, since it can increase their ability to participate in the workforce, allow them to gain new skills using online learning, and improve their quality of life:

- Only 23.9 percent of people with disabilities had access to a computer at home, compared to 51.7 percent of those without disabilities (Department of Education, July 2000)
- Only 31 percent of Americans with so-called "severe" disabilities are working (Census Bureau, June 2000)
- 48 percent of adults with disabilities believe that the Internet has significantly improved their quality of life, compared to just 27 percent of adults without disabilities (Harris Poll, June 2000)

PRESIDENT CLINTON WILL ANNOUNCE COMMITMENTS BY GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE SECTOR TO CREATE "DIGITAL OPPORTUNITY" FOR AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES

- Over x high-tech CEOs will pledge to adopt "best practices" on accessibility, such as training their workers to develop accessible products and services, and identifying and fixing accessibility problems in new versions of their hardware and software.
- Presidents of more than x of the nations top research universities will agree to expand research and education on accessibility.
- President Clinton will create a task force to examine Medicare/Medicaid coverage of assistive technology.
- Americorps will provide $9 million in grants to support 1,200 AmeriCorps volunteers to help close the digital divide, including projects that help people with disabilities.
- The National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research will provide 5 years of funding to the Web Accessibility Initiative to help ensure that the Web is accessible to people with disabilities.
- The Department of Education will fund an initiative by the National Center for Accessible Media and industry to develop standards for accessible online learning.
- The Mott Foundation will help establish a blue-ribbon commission to develop additional policy recommendations for expanding access to assistive technologies.
- Microsoft, Community Options, and other partners will create a New Jersey-based business incubator with an emphasis on the needs of entrepreneurs with disabilities.
- Sun Microsystems will create a lab to make free, "open source" desktop software accessible for people with disabilities.
- The President's Committee on Employment of Disabilities will expand their High School High Tech program to 4 new cities and 3 new states, including Michigan. This program allows students with disabilities to explore high-tech careers through site visits, mentoring and internships.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CREATING DIGITAL OPPORTUNITY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Access to computers, the Internet, and other information and communications technologies are becoming increasingly important for full participation in America's economic, political, and social life. If technology is designed to be usable by people with disabilities, it can increase their ability to participate in the workforce and lead independent lives. Examples of technologies that empower people with disabilities include:

- "Screen readers" for people who are blind;
- Voice recognition for people who cannot readily use a keyboard due to physical disabilities;
- Web sites that follow the guidelines of the Web Accessibility Initiative;
- Captioning of audio and video for people who are deaf and hard-of-hearing;
- Video description for people who are blind and visually-impaired; and
- Computers that can be operated by eye movement for people who are unable to speak.

Unfortunately, people with disabilities are often on the wrong side of the "digital divide," as reflected in rates of computer ownership and access to the Internet. When information and communications technologies are not designed to be accessible to and usable by people with disabilities, isolation from the economic and social mainstream is intensified. The following statistics illustrate the magnitude of the challenge.

There are 54 million Americans with disabilities

- According to 1994-95 Census data, 54 million Americans had some level of disability and 26 million have a disability identified as "severe." [Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, "Americans with Disabilities: 1994-95," August 1997.]

People with disabilities are half as likely to have a computer as people without disabilities

- December 1998 Census data found that 23.9 percent of people with disabilities had access to a computer at home, compared to 51.7 percent of those without disabilities. [Department of Education, Disability Statistics Abstract, "Disability and the Digital Divide," H. Stephen Kaye, July 2000.]

The Internet is more likely to improve the quality of life for adults with disabilities than adults without disabilities

- According to a recent poll, 48 percent of adults with disabilities believe that the Internet has significantly improved their quality of life, compared to just 27 percent of adults without disabilities. People with disabilities report that the Internet allows them to be better informed and more connected to the world around them, and that it puts them in touch with people who have similar interests and experiences. [The Harris Poll #30, "How the Internet is Improving the Lives of Americans With Disabilities," June 7, 2000.]

Only 31 percent of Americans with "severe" disabilities are working

- In 1997, 50.2 percent of the estimated 27.7 million Americans ages 21-64 with disabilities were employed. Of those 17.3 million Americans in this age group with severe disabilities, employment reached only 31.1 percent. Nationally, 78.3 percent of all Americans 21-64 were employed. ["Employment, Earnings, and Disability – 1991/92, 1993/94, 1994/95 and 1997 Data From the Survey of Income and Program Participation", John M. McNeil, Census Bureau, June 2000.]

Roughly half of those with work disabilities earn less than $25,000 annually

- 51.0 percent of households with a disabled family member 15 years old and over, have family incomes of below $25,000 per year, as compared to only 26.9 percent of households with no disabilities. [Census Bureau, 1997 Data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation.]

THE CLINTON-GORE ADMINISTRATION RECORD TO HELP CLOSE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

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President Clinton and Vice President Gore have a strong record of working to bridge the digital divide by ensuring that every child is technologically literate. In 1994, President Clinton and Vice President Gore set the goal of connecting every classroom and library to the Internet. In 1996, President Clinton unveiled his Technology Literacy Challenge -- and has made a major commitment of resources to connect every classroom to the Internet, expand access to modern, multimedia computers; make high-quality educational software an integral part of the curriculum; and enable teachers to effectively integrate technology into their instruction

President Clinton succeeded in increasing educational technology funding by over 3,000 Percent -- from $23 million in FY94 to $766 million in FY2000. This includes:

- $425 million for the Technology Literacy Challenge Fund which helps states and local communities meet all four "pillars" of the President's educational technology initiative (computers, Internet access, teacher training, educational software).

- $197 million for partnerships between local school districts and the private sector to develop innovative approaches to using technology in the classroom.

- $75 million to help train all new teachers to use technology.

President Clinton and Vice President Gore also fought for the $2.25 billion "E-rate" to connect schools and libraries to the Internet.

- The e-rate is providing 20 percent – 90 percent discounts to connect schools and libraries to the Internet, with the deepest discounts going to the poorest schools that need it most.

- By the end of 2000, the e-rate will have funded $6.25 billion of telecommunications infrastructure and services to schools and libraries. In 1999, 82 percent of public schools (over 78,000) and 51 percent of public libraries received public funding.

Major progress has been made in reaching the goals of the President's Educational Technology Initiative.

- The number of classrooms connected to the Internet has increased from 3 percent in 1994 to 63 percent in 1999.

- The number of schools connected to the Internet has increased from 35 percent in 1994 to 95 percent in 1999.

- Grants supported by the Department of Education are training 400,000 new teachers to use technology effectively in the classroom.

President Clinton and Vice President Gore are building on their past achievements through a number of new and expanded proposals this year. In February 2000, the President and Vice President announced specific proposals in their FY2001 budget to help create digital opportunity for more Americans, including:

- $2 billion over 10 years in tax incentives to encourage private sector donation of computers, sponsorship of community technology centers, and technology training for workers.

- $150 million to help train all new teachers entering the workforce to use technology effectively.

- $100 million to create 1,000 Community Technology Centers in low-income urban and rural neighborhoods.

- $50 million for a public/private partnership to expand home access to computers and the Internet for low-income families.

- $45 million to promote innovative applications of information and communications technology for under-served communities.

- $25 million to accelerate private sector deployment of broadband networks in underserved urban and rural communities.

- $10 million to prepare Native Americans for careers in Information Technology and other technical fields.

President Clinton successfully mobilized major public and private efforts bridge the digital divide in his April 2000 trip to East Palo Alto, California; Shiprock, New Mexico; Chicago, Illinois; and Rural North Carolina

- Over 400 companies and non-profit organizations signed a "National Call To Action" to bring digital opportunity to youth, families, and communities. The call to action set goals such as ensuring that every child is technologically literate, and making home access to the Internet as ubiquitous as the telephone.

- Companies such as AOL, HP, Qualcomm and Gateway invested over $100 million in new initiatives to bridge the digital divide.

- The Kaiser Family Foundation committed to a media campaign to motivate young people to "get connected," with Public Service Announcements starring Magic Johnson and Rebecca Lobo.

- The Federal Communications Commission agreed to expand the Lifeline program so that members of Indian tribes could get phone service for as little as $1 per month.

- The deans of over 200 hundred colleges of education pledged to meet the President's goal of ensuring that all new teachers will be able to use technology effectively in the classroom, and to benchmark their progress using a self-assessment tool developed by the CEO Forum.

- Telecommunications companies agreed to provide high-speed Internet access to all businesses and citizens of North Carolina within 3 years.

- The Department of Agriculture's Rural Utilities Service committed to expand its $670 million telecommunications loan program to companies that provide high-speed Internet access to rural America.