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OA/ID Number: 23985

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POTUS - Talking Points & Digital Divide

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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

December 9, 1999

THE CLINTON-GORE ADMINISTRATION:
WORKING TO BRIDGE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE
December 9, 1999

Today, President Clinton announced that he intends to lead a New Markets tour in the Spring of 2000 to focus national attention on the digital divide -- the growing division in the United States between information "haves" and "have-nots." This issue has also been a top priority for Vice President Gore, who has worked to bridge the digital divide by ensuring that all of our children have access to educational technology. To support this effort, President Clinton issued a Directive to members of his Cabinet to take specific actions to close the digital divide, such as expanding Community Technology Centers in low-income urban and rural neighborhoods, continuing to measure the extent of the digital divide, and helping low-income workers gain the skills they need to compete for high-paying information technology jobs. He also announced several commitments from the private sector and non-profit organizations that will help address the problem, including a commitment of the Congress of National Black Churches to make this issue a top priority, a comprehensive clearinghouse of state and local efforts to bridge the digital divide, and a partnership between the private sector and the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights that will help bring civil rights organizations into the 21st century.

The President was joined today by Duane Ackerman, Chairman and CEO, BellSouth Corporation; Michael Armstrong, Chairman and CEO, AT&T; Zoe Baird, President, Markle Foundation; Richard Brown, Chairman and CEO, EDS; Stephen Case, Chairman and CEO, America Online; Darien Dash, CEO, DME Interactive Holdings; Tessie Guillermo, Exec. Dir., Asian and Pacific Islander American Health Forum; Wade Henderson, Exec. Dir., Leadership Conference on Civil Rights; Roberta Katz, CEO, Technology Network; Susan Masten, President, National Congress of American Indians; Jorge Schement, Board Member, Benton Foundation; and Irma Zardoya, Superintendent, District 10, New York Public Schools.

Today's announcement came as Secretary of Commerce William Daley convened a summit on the digital divide with these and other prominent high-tech CEOs and leaders in the civil rights, educational, and non-profit communities.

I. FROM DIGITAL DIVIDE TO DIGITAL OPPORTUNITY

President Clinton made several announcements that will help bridge the digital divide and create digital opportunity for more Americans.

A New Markets trip to disadvantaged urban and rural communities to focus national attention on the digital divide: The President will lead a tour next spring to highlight communities that are using information technology to enhance our children's education, expand access to life-long learning, and create economic growth and high-tech, high-wage jobs. Previous New Markets trips -- to communities such as Appalachia, the Mississippi Delta, Newark, and Chicago -- have served as a catalyst for new public-private partnerships to expand opportunity in those regions of the country that have not yet reaped the benefits of America's economic expansion.

A directive to members of the Cabinet to take specific actions to

address the digital divide: President Clinton is directing members of his Cabinet (Secretaries of Commerce, Education, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, and Labor) to take specific steps to close the digital divide, including:

Continuing to measure the nature and extent of the digital divide by examining the importance of income, education, race, gender, geography and age to Americans' access to Information Age tools;

Expanding the network of Community Technology Centers to provide access to technology for those American who can't afford it;

Promoting applications of the Internet that will empower low-income families, such as the ability to start their own business; and

Upgrading the IT skills of workers in low-income communities.

3. Digital Divide Network: Companies from across the computing, telecommunications, software, and Internet industries -- as well as the Urban League and several of the nation's largest private foundations-- are coming together to launch the Digital Divide Network. The network is an Internet-based clearinghouse for information on public and private efforts to bring technology to underserved communities. For the first time, America will have a one-stop shop for tracking our progress and for learning exactly what has worked and what has not.

Digital Opportunity Partnership The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights is working with many nonprofit organizations and private-sector companies to launch a new Digital Opportunity Partnership. This initiative will empower the entire civil and human rights communities through an expanded Web site (civilrights.org), leadership forums, and even "freedom riders" who will bring high-technology to the doorstep of nonprofit organizations.

Congress of National Black Churches: The Congress of National Black Churches, representing 65,000 churches and 20 million members, is sending a letter to the President acknowledging the importance of the digital divide as a key civil rights issue for the 21st century, and committing to work with the President and with industry to help close the digital divide.

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Access to computers and the Internet and the ability to effectively use this technology are becoming increasingly important for full participation in America's economic, political and social life. People are using the Internet to find lower prices for goods and services, work from home or start their own business, acquire new skills using distance learning, make better informed decisions about their healthcare needs, and get more involved in the education of their children by communicating more frequently with teachers.

Access to computers and the Internet has exploded during the Clinton-Gore Administration. Unfortunately, there is strong evidence of a "digital divide" -- a gap between those individuals and communities that have access to these Information Age tools and those who don't. In some instances, this divide is actually widening. A July 1999 report from the Department of Commerce, based on December 1998 Census Department data, revealed that:

Better educated Americans more likely to be connected. Between 1997 and 1998, the technology divide between those at the highest and lowest education levels increased 25%. In 1998, those with a college degree are more than eight times likely to have a computer at home and nearly