

This bill has the full support of the Nation's eight national enlisted military organizations; the Air Force Sergeants Association, the Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States, the Fleet Reserve Association, the Naval Enlisted Reserve Association, the Non Commissioned Officers Association, the Retired Enlisted Association, the U.S. Coast Guard Chief Petty Officers Association, and the U.S. Coast Guard Enlisted Association.

These mid-career non-commissioned officers and petty officers are the backbone of our military. I hope that my colleagues will work with me to recognize that fact and to ensure they are provided pay table reform that is both fair and equitable.

DIGITAL DIVIDE ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY ACT (DATA)

HON. JERRY WELLER

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 13, 2000

Mr. WELLER. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join with my colleague, JOHN LEWIS of Georgia, to introduce H.R. 4274, the Digital Divide Access to Technology Act of 2000 (DATA Act). The DATA Act addresses a rather new situation which involves employers providing home computers to their employees.

Over the past couple of months, four major companies—Ford Motor Company, American Airlines, Delta Airlines, and Intel—have announced programs to provide home computers to their employees. The question before us is whether employer-provided home computers should be considered taxable income to the employees.

I believe that the government should not tax these computers and the legislation we are introducing today will ensure that these basic computers do not become a tax liability for the employees.

The DATA Act is a digital divide issue and it represents a powerful partnership between private companies and the government as we work to reduce the so-called digital divide and create new digital opportunities. These home computers will be available to employees and their families for work and personal use. Once in the home, the computers can be used by employees for Internet training, by the children for homework and research, and other family members to balance the family budget and stay in touch with far-away relatives. There are no restrictions on the use of the computers.

For tax purposes, the DATA Act treats the Internet access and first \$1,260 of the value of a computer and peripheral equipment (e.g., monitors, printers and keyboards), including software, and Internet access as a fringe benefit, not subject to income tax. For the program to qualify, employers have to provide computers to substantially all employees working in the United States and employees can receive only one computer within a 36 month time period.

If the employer offers a program allowing employees to purchase an upgraded "or deluxe" model computer, the first \$1,260 in value is still non-taxable, employees can pay for the

deluxe version if they choose. Additionally, if employees are required to pay a monthly co-payment for the computer, such as the \$5 monthly responsibility of Ford employees, this payment does not factor into the value of the computer. Let me give you an example of how this works.

The 350,000 employees at Ford Motor Company will soon receive a home computer which costs \$24.95 per month over 36 months, for a total of \$898. The employees pay \$5 per month, or \$180 over 3 years, for the computer. Ford pays \$19.95 per month for each employee, or almost \$720 over 3 years. The \$720 paid by Ford for the computers falls far below the \$1,260 exclusion provided by this legislation. This program is available to all employees working for Ford. This includes everyone from the janitor, to the union worker, to the managers, and the Vice Presidents.

Mr. Speaker, these companies are likely to be only the first of many companies to provide home computers to their employees. I strongly believe this is an important way we, as policymakers, can work with corporations to help put more computers into the hands of American families and children. This legislation will help us close the digital divide and provide digital opportunities to hundreds of thousands of families currently without this equipment which is rapidly becoming a necessity for survival in the 21st century economy.

I look forward to working with these and other employers to continue developing this legislation to make it easier for these computers to be taken home by employees. I also look forward to working with the House Leadership, Chairman ARCHER, my colleagues on both sides of the aisle, as well as the Administration to ensure that this powerful mechanism available to close the digital divide is fully utilized.

RECOGNIZING THE ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERSHIP OF THE ASPEN SKI COMPANY

HON. DIANA DeGETTE

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 13, 2000

Mr. DeGETTE. Mr. Speaker, today I recognize the Aspen Skiing Company as a leader in environmental responsibility.

This is certainly not the first commendation the Aspen Skiing Company has received. In 1999 alone, the company became the first back to back winner of the Golden Eagle Award for Overall Environmental Excellence in the ski industry. It was the first skiing company and only U.S. business to receive the prestigious British Airways Tourism for Tomorrow Environmental Award. Additionally, the Aspen Skiing Company was recognized by the National Environmental Education and Training Foundation for its outstanding environmental educational programs.

As the award judges for the Golden Eagle Award noted, "Aspen Skiing Company's programs show a wide-range and detailed commitment to an ecological perspective in every area of their business." I whole-heartedly agree that the Aspen Skiing Company has,

"without peer, established itself as an industry leader in environmentalism."

But Aspen is not resting on its laurels. The Skiing Company continues to develop innovative environmental programs and partnerships to protect the forests in which it resides and its commitment to the local community. The Aspen Skiing Company has entered into a cooperative with the Environmental Protection Agency and the Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment to develop a pollution prevention based environmental management strategy that focuses on energy and waste conservation, and solid waste reduction to be used as a model for the skiing industry. It has developed a Natural Resource Management Plan to ensure vegetative diversity and wildlife protection on its mountains. The Aspen Skiing Company founded the Environment Foundation, a nonprofit, employee-funded and directed foundation which awarded more than \$120,000 to 34 diverse local environmental groups since its inception, and continues to protect local habitat, ecosystems, and biodiversity.

Aspen Skiing Company continues to be a leader in environmentally sensitive development, not only within the ski industry, but all industry. Aspen's efforts to reduce the impact it has on the land, and conserve habitat and resources are exemplified by two of its recent projects, the Sundeck Restaurant and the Cirque Lift.

The Sundeck Restaurant, at the top of the mountain is on tract to be a fully certified "green building." The effort began with the deconstruction, rather than demolition of the old building, enabling materials to be salvaged and reused. The new building will utilize the latest "green" technology, including energy efficient windows, low toxicity paints, and recycled and recyclable materials.

When the Aspen Skiing Company decided to construct a new lift above tree line, it recognized the sensitivity of this ecosystem and proceeded accordingly. The construction of the Cirque Lift was completed without bulldozers or mechanized ground equipment. The heavy items for the lift, such as the lift poles and concrete, were airlifted by helicopter while all other supplies were carried up on foot, an astounding task at high elevation that speaks volumes to the company's commitment to protecting this delicate ecosystem. The lift itself continues that commitment, as it is the State of Colorado's first wind powered ski lift.

Aspen Skiing Company has also shown leadership in the public realm advocating for the protection of public lands and open spaces, which are so important to Colorado's wildlife and the quality of life for all Americans.

I have no doubt that the Aspen Skiing Company will continue to be a leader in efforts to protect the environment. I applaud their accomplishments.