

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES—*Tuesday, June 13, 2000*

The House met at 9 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. ISAKSON).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
June 13, 2000.

I hereby appoint the Honorable JOHNNY ISAKSON to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

J. DENNIS HASTERT,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING HOUR DEBATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 19, 1999, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning hour debates. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to not to exceed 25 minutes, and each Member, except the majority leader, the minority leader, or the minority whip, limited to not to exceed 5 minutes, but in no event shall debate continue beyond 9:50 a.m.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. WELLER) for 5 minutes.

THE INTERNET AND THE NEW ECONOMY

Mr. WELLER. Mr. Speaker, today we are enjoying very good economic growth, and I am so proud this Congress played a role by balancing the budget and cutting taxes for the middle class, boosting our economy. The key part of our economy today is what many call the New Economy, the technology economy.

Let me give my colleagues some statistics that really illustrate the role of the new economy in American society. Today, over 100 million Americans are using the Internet, and 7 new people are on the Internet every second. Seventy-eight percent of Internet users almost always vote in national, State and local elections, compared with 64 percent of nonInternet users. It took just 5 years for the Internet to reach 50 million users, much faster than when compared to the traditional electronic media. It took television 13 years to reach 50 million and radio 38 years to reach the same audience.

The Internet economy generated an estimated 302 billion U.S. dollars in revenue in 1998, employing 4.8 million workers. More workers are employed in the technology economy than auto and steel and petroleum combined, and the average high technology wage is 77 percent higher than the average private sector wage elsewhere. As I noted earlier, one-third of all new economic growth is generated by the technology economy.

I am proud to say I am from a technology State. I represent the State of Illinois. Illinois ranks fourth in high technology employment. Illinois ranks third in high technology exports, so Illinois is clearly a technology State. I have had the opportunity many times to talk with friends and neighbors who are involved in the new economy, and we talk about who has access to the Internet. Over 100 million Americans have access to the Internet, are on line, and 7 new Americans go on line for the first time every second. So clearly there is a great opportunity, not only for information, but also for employment and moving up the economic ladder.

They tell me that it seems that the higher the income level of the family, the more likely that they are on line. If a family has an income of \$75,000 or more, they are 20 times more likely than a family with a lesser income to have Internet access or a computer at home. When we ask the question of why are they less likely to have Internet access or computers at home, they tell us that it is because of the cost. They would like to have a computer at home for their children to be able to do their school work, they would like their children to have access to the Internet so that they can access the Library of Congress to do their school papers, but they do not feel they can afford it.

So clearly the cost of Internet access creates what some call the digital divide, but clearly as well is the need for an agenda to provide digital opportunity.

When we look at the costs, I believe we have an important choice to make as we talk about the information superhighway and giving every American access to the information superhighway. We have to make a choice, and that choice is do we want the information superhighway to be a tollway or a freeway. Well, clearly, if we want to address the concern that lower and moderate income families have, and that is that cost is the chief bar-

rier, we need to work to make sure that the Internet, the information superhighway, is a freeway.

So many have pointed out that our new economy is growing because of a tax-free, regulation-free, trade barrier-free climate, but we need to move forward again to create more initiatives to continue to work to eliminate the toll booths on the information highway.

I was proud just a few weeks ago to introduce legislation we call the DATA Act, legislation designed to help lower and moderate-income families go on line, to become part of the new economy. Educators back home in the south side of Chicago and the south suburbs that I represent, they tell me that they notice a difference in children who have a computer and Internet access in the home versus those who do not, their ability to compete and do their homework.

I am proud to say that some major employers in the Illinois area, as well as across this country, have stepped forward to help solve that so-called digital divide by providing computers and Internet access as a basic employee benefit. What that means is the employees of Ford Motor Company, American Airlines, Delta Airlines and Intel, everyone from the janitor, the laborer, the assembly line worker, the flight attendant, the baggage handler, all the way up through middle management to senior management, will now have computers and Internet access in their homes for their kids to do their school work. It is a wonderful initiative by the private sector and I salute them and congratulate them. As a result of that, 600,000 American working families will have computers and Internet access at home, many who before never could afford it. That is a great thing.

Many in the Fortune 100 are looking to and following the lead of these 4 great companies, but their tax lawyers tell them that if they do, that it will be treated as a taxable employee benefit, meaning the employee will be taxed. I say to my colleagues, let us remove that toll booth. Let us ensure that computers and Internet access as an employee benefit are not taxed, that it is a tax-free employee benefit treated the same as an employer's contribution to a pension or an employer's contribution to health care.

☐ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., ☐ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.