

Memorandum on Narrowing the Digital Divide December 9, 1999

*Memorandum for the Heads of Executive
Departments and Agencies*

Subject: Narrowing the “Digital Divide:”
Creating Opportunities for All Americans in the
Information Age

Information tools, such as the personal computer and the Internet, are increasingly important to economic success and full participation in all aspects of American society. People with computers and Internet access can use these tools to find a job, acquire new skills, start a small business, get lower prices for goods and services, and become more informed citizens.

Currently, not all Americans are enjoying the benefits of the Information Age tools. In July 1999, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration issued a report, *Falling Through the Net: Defining the Digital Divide*, which found a growing gap between those with access to these tools and those without. Black and Hispanic households are only two-fifths as likely to have Internet access as white households. Households with incomes of \$75,000 and higher, in urban areas, are more than twenty times as likely to have access to the Internet as households at the lowest income levels, and more than nine times as likely to have a computer at home. As information technology plays an ever-increasing role in Americans’ economic and social lives, we cannot afford to leave anyone behind.

Fortunately, competition and advances in technology are driving down the cost of computers and Internet access, which will make these new Information Age tools affordable for more Americans. I believe that we should set a national goal of making computers and Internet access available for every American. Furthermore, we should explore ways of using technology to expand the economic opportunities for those Americans who have not yet enjoyed the benefits of our prosperity.

Accordingly, I am directing executive departments and agencies (“agencies”) to take the following specific actions to help Americans benefit from advances in information technology:

1. The Secretary of Commerce shall work with the private sector and others to develop a national strategy for making com-

puters and the Internet accessible to all Americans, with the goal of significantly narrowing the “digital divide.”

2. The Secretary of Commerce shall continue to measure the level of connectivity of Americans to telecommunications and information tools, and report periodically on the relationship of income, education, race, gender, geography, and age to Americans’ access to these tools.
3. The Secretaries of Education, Housing and Urban Development, Health and Human Services, Labor, and Commerce shall:
 - (a) expand our growing network of Community Technology Centers to provide access to technology for low-income Americans; and
 - (b) encourage the development of information technology applications that would help enable low-income Americans to start and manage their own small businesses.
4. The Secretaries of Education, Labor, and Commerce shall work with the private sector to upgrade the information technology skills of America’s workforce, particularly workers living in disadvantaged urban and rural communities.
5. The Secretary of Commerce, the Secretary of Education, and the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development shall highlight and disseminate the lessons learned from their grant programs and educational technology initiatives, with an emphasis on underserved citizens, to increase the number of communities across the Nation that could reap the benefits of information technologies for their residents.
6. Items 1–5 of this memorandum and my July 1, 1997, and November 30, 1998, memoranda shall be conducted subject to the availability of appropriations and consistent with agencies’ priorities and my budget, and to the extent permitted by law.
7. The Vice President shall continue his leadership in coordinating the United States Government’s electronic commerce strategy. Further, I direct that the heads of executive departments and agencies report

to the Vice President and to me on their progress in meeting the terms of this memorandum, through the Electronic Commerce Working Group (ECWG) in its annual report. To the extent that substantial new policy issues emerge, the analysis

and action on those policies will be coordinated in a manner consistent with the responsibilities of the ECWG, the National Economic Council, and the Domestic Policy Council, as appropriate.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

Remarks at a Memorial Service for Firefighters in Worcester, Massachusetts

December 9, 1999

Thank you. First, to the wonderful families of our six fallen heroes, who the Vice President and I had a chance to visit with before the beginning of this service; to their colleagues in the fire department, their friends in this wonderful community; to the thousands of men and women in uniform who have come here to join the mayor, the Governor, the Senators, the Members of Congress, the Bishop and members of the clergy; President Whitehead and members of the firefighters; especially to Chief Budd and Frank Raffa and all the grieving members of this fire department, too.

I hope you can all sense how clearly we know, in spite of our talks, that words have a poor power to alleviate the pain you feel now. But as you look around this vast hall and know that there are thousands and thousands more standing outside and other places, we hope that by our collective presence we will speak louder than words in saying that your tragedy is ours, your men are ours, our whole country honors them and you. We grieve with you, and we will stay with you.

More than two and a half centuries ago, Benjamin Franklin wrote an essay entitled "Brave Men at Fires." He might have written it last week. This is what he said: "Neither cold nor darkness will deter good people from hastening to the dreadful place to quench the flame. They do it not for the sake of reward or fame, but they have a reward in themselves, and they love one another."

Today we honor six brave men who found a reward in firefighting, who loved one another, six men who, in turn, richly rewarded this community. So they hastened to the dreadful place to save others. For them, there was no other way.

In the book of Isaiah, God asks, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And Isaiah says, "Here am I. Send me."

When the question again rang from the smoking skies last week, Paul Brotherton, Timothy Jackson, Jeremiah Lucey, Jay Lyons, Joseph McGuirk, and Thomas Spencer also answered with a single voice: Here am I. Send me.

They were firefighters to the core, heroes already, as we have heard, to their friends and loved ones, not to mention the people they saved through the years. For all six, being a firefighter was more than a job; it was in their blood. So when they went into that building that night, they were following their dream to serve, to save lives, and to stick together.

Like their fellow firefighters everywhere, they embodied the best of our Nation of commitment and community, of teamwork and trust, values at the core of our character; values reflected in the daily service not only of those we lost but in this awesome parade of men and women who have come from all over our country and from some countries beyond our borders to honor their comrades and console their families.

Too often, we take them for granted, our firefighters. In the days ahead, I hope every American will find an occasion to thank those in their communities who stand ready every day to put their lives on the line when the alarm bell rings.

In the Book of Kings, we find the wonderful story of the prophet Elijah, who climbs a mountain to seek the voice of God. A wind shatters rocks in pieces, but the Bible says, the Lord is not in the wind. Then, there's an earthquake and then a fire, but God is not in the earthquake or in the fire. But then, the Scripture says, "after the fire, a still, small voice." It is