

to be an instrument of empowerment, education, enlightenment, and economic advance and community building all across America, regardless of the race, the income, the geography of our citizens. And thanks to these people, we're going to be closer to achieving that goal.

Thank you very much.

Russia and the Situation in Chechnya

Q. Mr. President, there seems to be a divide with President Yeltsin this morning. He has given you something of a long-distance tongue lashing, saying that you've forgotten that Russia is a great power and has a nuclear arsenal. And he accuses you of taking an anti-Russian position.

The President. Well, I'll say again what I said yesterday. I don't think what they're doing will help them to achieve their goal. Their goal, their legitimate goal, is to defeat the Chechen rebels and to stop their terrorism within Russia, to stop their invasion of neighboring provinces like Dagestan. And I don't think displacing hundreds of thousands of civilians will achieve that goal. I don't know what else to say.

I haven't forgotten that. You know, I didn't think he'd forgotten that America was a great power when he disagreed with what I did in Kosovo. I mean, we can't get too serious about all the—let's not talk about what the leaders are saying and all these words of criticism. Let's focus on what the country is doing. Is it right or wrong? Will it work or not? What are the consequences?

I think—I don't agree with what's going on there. And I think I have an obligation to say so.

Thank you. I've got to go.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:12 a.m. on the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Boris Yeltsin of Russia.

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 computers 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**

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