AUTHENTICATED
U.S. GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION
GPO



So in everything you do this year, you remember this little story I told you. And you remember that we have the chance of a lifetime that we should be grateful for. And everyone you talk to and everyone you touch and everything you say, remind people: This is our moment for making tomorrows.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:25 p.m. in the International Ballroom at the Washington Hilton and Towers. In his remarks, he referred to Robert A. Georgine, president, Building and Construction Trades Department, AFL–CIO.

## Remarks on Efforts To Bridge the Digital Divide

*April 4, 2000*

Thank you very much. First of all, Julian, I thank you for your introduction, for your remarks, and, mostly, for the power of your example. I find very often when we do these events in the White House, by the time I get up to talk, everything that needs to be said has already been said. And I certainly thank you.

I want to thank you, Senator Barbara Mikulski, for being the first Member of Congress to talk to me about the digital divide. And once I realized you were interested in it, I stopped worrying about whether we would address it—[*laughter*]—because no one will ever say no to the Senate's sparkplug of energy. I want to thank Secretary Herman for her support. And Secretary Glickman, thank you for being here. Harris Wofford, the leader of our national service movement; and Gene Sperling, my National Economic Adviser, who has pushed this whole digital divide issue so passionately.

I want to thank the Members of Congress who are here. Over to my left, Senator John Breaux, my neighbor from the Mississippi Delta, where we are very interested in the potential of the computer and the Internet. And we just had a large delegation of House Members that have come in. They've been voting, and I'm glad they're here. I hope I have all their names, but I'd like to introduce them: Representative Maxine Waters, Representative Bart Stupak, Representative Ellen Tauscher, Representative Lucille Roybal-Allard, Representative Silvestre Reyes, Representative John Larson, Representative Eddie Bernice Johnson, Representative Zoe Lofgren, Representative Ruben Hinojosa. Thank you all for being here. Did I get everybody? Thank you. And Elijah Cummings from Maryland—he's on the front row.

I'd also like to thank Governor Angus King from Maine for being here. He is working to create an endowment fund in Maine to provide portable computers and Internet access to all seventh graders, so they can actually be taken home.

There are many other distinguished Americans here who have worked on this. Bob Johnson, the head of BET, thank you for being here. And I want to acknowledge the presence of former Governor of West Virginia Gaston Caperton, now the head of the College Board. West Virginia, under his leadership, was the first State to provide computer access to all elementary school students. So we're glad to have you here, sir. And I thank you all for being here.

I want to talk about what we're doing now as we set the stage for the administration's third new markets tour, which will begin in the week of April the 16th. But before I begin, I would like to acknowledge two very important developments yesterday in America's ongoing fight to protect our children from the dangers of guns falling into the hands of criminals and children, one of them in Senator Mikulski's home State of Maryland.

Last night I called Governor Glendening and Lieutenant Governor Kathleen Kennedy Townsend to congratulate them and the Maryland Legislature for passing legislation requiring built-in child safety locks on new handguns, ballistics testing for new guns, and safety training for gun purchasers. And yesterday Massachusetts began enforcing tougher consumer product safety rules, banning junk guns and requiring trigger locks. Next week I'm going out to Colorado to support a citizen ballot initiative there that would close the gun show loophole.

These are all great efforts, and I think it's worth pointing out that they are bipartisan efforts in these States. Colorado, for example, Republican registration has gone up in the

last 6 or 7 years, and this ballot initiative today is overwhelmingly in the lead on the ballot. So this should not be a partisan issue in Washington, DC, if it is not a partisan issue in the rest of the country.

And again I say, I challenge the Congress to send me the commonsense gun safety legislation by April the 20th, the anniversary of the Columbine tragedy. We have to close the gun show loophole and require child safety locks and ban the importation of large scale ammunition clips that make our assault weapons ban a mockery. It requires national legislation, as well. So congratulations to Maryland and Massachusetts, and I thank the people in Colorado, but we still have to do our job here.

Now, I cannot imagine a better place for us to kick off our next chapter in the new markets effort than here in the East Room, for it was in this very room nearly two centuries ago that Thomas Jefferson and his personal aide, Meriwether Lewis, laid maps on this floor to chart the Lewis and Clark expedition.

Today we are here again to chart a new expedition, to open new frontiers of possibilities for America, the digital frontiers. Our mission is to open that frontier to all Americans, regardless of income, education, geography, disability, or race. This is a fortunate time for the United States. We have the strongest economy in our history, the lowest African-American and Hispanic unemployment rates on record, the lowest female unemployment rate in 40 years.

But we all know there are people and places that have been left behind. Over the last year I have traveled to many of these places. I have been to Appalachia and the Mississippi Delta, to the inner cities of Newark and Watts, to the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. Every place I have gone I have seen how we could do more to bring the benefits of free enterprise and empowerment, with private sector and community organization cooperation, for new businesses, new jobs, new training and education that will make a real difference in people's lives.

I want you to understand that while most people talk about the digital divide—and it is real, and it could get worse—I believe that the computer and the Internet give us a chance to move more people out of poverty more quickly than at any time in all of human history. That's what I believe. But it won't happen by accident. We'll have to work to make it happen.

On this upcoming new markets tour, we will focus specifically on how to pool resources to help communities get access to and take best advantage of the tools of the information age. We will visit your hometown of east Palo Alto, a community where 20 percent of the residents still live below the poverty line, to show that even in the heart of Silicon Valley there is still a substantial digital divide but that things are being done about it.

We will visit Ship Rock, New Mexico, a small town in the Navajo Nation, to demonstrate the unique challenges faced by geographically remote Indian reservations. I will speak at the influential COMDEX Conference in Chicago, where I'll talk to representatives of every major computer and Internet company in America and ask them to join our cause.

And then the following week I will go to North Carolina, where we will discuss the importance of connecting rural America to the same high-speed, broad-band networks now proliferating in metropolitan areas.

On all these stops, I will make the case that new technologies can be an incredible tool of empowerment in schools, homes, businesses, community centers, and every other part of our civic life, arguing that if we work together to close the digital divide, technology can be the greatest equalizing force our society or any other has ever known.

Imagine if computers and Internet connections were as common in every community as telephones are today, if all teachers had the skills to open students' eyes and minds to the possibilities of new technologies, if every small business in every rural town could join worldwide markets once reserved for the most powerful corporations—just imagine what America could be.

Let me say, first of all, I see Congressman Jefferson and Congressman Rush and Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee. There may be other Representatives, but as they come

in, I'll try to acknowledge them. There's a ton of interest in this.

Let me give you an example. You know, I just got back from India, a country of 900 million people with a per capita income of $450. We think we have challenges. But I saw what you could do there to close the digital divide, to use technology in an affirmative way.

I went to a little village in Rajasthan called Nayla—typical low income Indian village. And in the public building, the village's public building, there is a computer with software where the programs are in both English and Hindi and can be adapted to other local languages as the case may be. And the first thing I saw was a mother who had just given birth to a child come in. And they have all the public information from the Federal and State government on this computer.

So she goes—she brings up the Health Department's page on newborn babies. And there's so much visual—there's such a good visual component to this software that you could be almost illiterate and still work it. And she identifies the instructions that any new mother might want to have, and then she pushes a few buttons, and there's a printer. She prints it out, and she now has information just as good as she could get if her baby were born at the Georgetown Medical Center here, and she were going home.

Then I met with this women's dairy cooperative—keep in mind, in this little village in India, where every transaction, every time they brought milk in, it was all entered on the computer, what the fat content was, what the volume was, what the price was. And every time the milk was sold, it was entered, so that they got a regular computerized record of not only what they had put in but what they got out.

Then I went to Hyderabad, which is sort of a high-tech center of India. But in that whole State, you can now get 18 public services on the computer, on the Internet. Nobody goes to a revenue office to buy their license anymore. You can get a driver's license on the Internet. Now, Governor, if you do that, you can be Governor for life. They'll repeal the term limits, repeal everything. [*Laughter*]

My point is that you can see the potential of this for even the poorest people in the world is truly explosive. That's why we want these 1,000 computer centers out there, because we don't want to wait even for all the schools to do this right. We want adults in rural areas, in isolated areas, in poor areas, to be able to come in and access the same sort of services, and use them and get the same sort of information and access.

The potential of this is truly staggering. We need not see the digital divide as a threat. It is the greatest opportunity the United States of America has ever had to lift people out of poverty and ignorance.

But I will say again, if you look at the whole history of economic development, whenever there's a change in the paradigm, there's a divide that opens, because some people are well positioned to take advantage of the new economy. It happened when we moved from being an agricultural nation to an industrial nation. Some people are well-positioned to take advantage of it, and others aren't. So new divides always open when the dominant way of making a living in any society changes. But this empowerment tool gives us a chance not only to close the divide quickly but to actually lift poor people in a way that has never before been possible.

I just got back from northern California, and I learned that now—I met with some people from a lot of different computer companies, but the people from eBay told me that there are now 30,000 people-plus, making a living just trading on eBay, not working for the company, and that many of them used to be on welfare. So it's important that we see this not only for the problem it presents, but for the phenomenal opportunity that it presents, important that we see it not only as a way to close a gap so people don't fall further behind but a way to give people a tool that will enable them to leap further ahead. But again I say, it won't happen by accident. It requires government, business, educators, librarians, civil rights, religious leaders, labor union leaders—thank you, Mr. Bahr, for being here today—community-based organizations, foundations, volunteers. Everybody has got to work together.

Today I want to issue a national call for action on digital opportunity, to help us

achieve two vitally important goals. First, to bring 21st century learning tools to every school. That means we have to finish the job of connecting every classroom to the Internet, ensuring that all students have access to multimedia computers, creating more high quality educational software, helping all teachers learn how to make the best use of these tools. And this is very important.

Again, I want to thank the Members of Congress here who have supported our efforts in the aftermath of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, to create the E-rate, which has made it possible for the schools, no matter how poor they are, to have access to the Internet.

The second goal is to expand efforts far beyond our schools, to give every citizen Internet access at home, by bringing technology centers and high-speed networks to every single community, by helping adults to gain the skills to compete for IT jobs, and inspiring more people to appreciate the great value of getting on line.

Today is the opening of this national call to action. More than 400 organizations already have signed the pledge, and this is just the beginning. For the rest of the year we will try to inspire hundreds, indeed, thousands, more to sign up. We will work with Congress across party lines to build support for budget and legislative initiatives to meet these goals. And you heard Senator Mikulski outline some of them. We have to be willing at the national level to do our part. This is a worthy Federal investment.

During the new markets tour, we'll have an opportunity to announce many commitments tied to this call to action. Today I'd just like to review four of them, all of them vivid illustrations of the kind of visionary partnership and barn-raising spirit that we are working to foster.

First, to reprieve something Senator Mikulski mentioned, AmeriCorps will make an enormous contribution to closing the digital divide by marshaling the power of active citizen volunteers. Thanks to the leadership of Senator Mikulski and Harris Wofford, AmeriCorps is committing $10 million to recruit 750 new members to serve in a brand-new E-Corps. The E-Corps will be a large battalion of volunteers, trained and devoted exclusively to projects like providing technical support to school systems and teaching computer literacy to adults and children.

The Corporation for National Service will also unleash the power of students helping students by providing funds to allow 90,000 high school students to get involved in digital divide projects as part of their educational curriculum.

Most young people I know can run circles around me and most people my age when it comes to computers and the Internet. AmeriCorps is going to tap their capacity so that they can help others in their communities to close the digital divide.

Second, to help get AmeriCorps' E-Corps off to a running start, Yahoo will donate a million dollars in Internet advertising to attract potential E-Corps members with high-tech skills.

Third, in partnership with the YWCA, 3Com is launching an innovative initiative called NetPrep GYRLS—g-y-r-l-s. Currently less than 30 percent—listen to this—less than 30 percent of our computer scientists and programmers are women. NetPrep GYRLS will help to right this imbalance offering free computer network training and certification to hundreds of high school girls across our country.

Fourth, the American Library Association has pledged to greatly expand the information literacy programs of its members in at least 250 communities. So this is just the beginning, but I want to thank the people who were involved for these four initiatives. There will be many more, but I thank you very much.

I've heard Harris Wofford, who worked with Martin Luther King and who was in Selma with me the other day and was in Selma 35 years ago, when the first march took place, say that making sure all young Americans share in the opportunity and promise of America is the unfinished business of the civil rights movement.

It is appropriate that we are meeting here on this subject 32 years to the day after Martin Luther King was assassinated in Memphis. He was there working to lift the economic fortunes of disadvantaged people. I think if he were with us today, he would

therefore say closing the digital divide is a righteous cause.

In his last Sunday sermon, he ended with a prayer that said, "God grant us all a chance to be participants in the newness and magnificent development of America." That's what this is all about. We need more people Julian. We need more people like you, not only clapping for people like Julian but helping them to live their dreams.

We do that when we help young people, when we help seniors in rural America get medical advice over the Internet, when we create tools that allow people with disabilities to open new doors of possibility. We give our neighbors a chance to participate in this astonishing American renaissance. We have done something that would have made Dr. King proud. And the new technology of the digital age gives us a chance to do it for more people, more quickly, more profoundly, than at any time in human history. It's up to us to seize that opportunity.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:04 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to computer skills teacher and website developer Julian Lacey, who introduced the President; Harris Wofford, Chief Executive Officer, Corporation for National and Community Service; Robert L. Johnson, chairman and chief executive officer, BET Holdings, Inc.; Gov. Parris N. Glendening of Maryland; and Morton Bahr, president, Communication Workers of America.

## Statement on Maryland State Action on Gun Safety Legislation

*April 4, 2000*

Last night the Maryland Legislature took an important step forward to address the problem of gun violence by passing commonsense gun legislation. I commend the Governor and the legislature for their efforts to enact key gun safety measures that will, among other things, require built-in child safety locks on handguns, ballistics testing for newly manufactured handguns to help solve more gun crimes, and safety training for handgun purchasers.

Maryland joins a growing number of States across the country that are taking actions to make guns safer and to keep guns out of the wrong hands. The Congress should follow their lead and make passage of commonsense gun legislation its top priority. I challenge the Congress to enact gun safety legislation before the one-year anniversary of the Columbine tragedy on April 20th.

## Statement on the Democratic Amendment to the Budget Resolution

*April 4, 2000*

Today the Senate begins its work on its budget and, in so doing, will lay out its investment and reform priorities for the FY 2001 budget. The Senate Democrats, under the leadership of Senator Robb and Senator Daschle, will be offering an amendment to this budget resolution designed to put America's priorities in order. This amendment insists that we do first things first and modernize Medicare with an affordable, accessible, and voluntary Medicare prescription drug benefit for all seniors. Once we've done that, we can move forward with a sensible tax cut.

I commend the supporters of this amendment because I believe it reflects good policy, the will of the American people, and addresses a long-standing unmet need. We should not be recklessly spending money on an excessive tax cut before we take action to ensure that all seniors have the potentially life-saving choice of a prescription drug benefit. It is my hope that every Member of the Senate will support this critically important amendment.

## Statement on Senate Inaction on the Supplemental Budget Request

*April 4, 2000*

I am very disappointed that Senator Lott plans to deny prompt consideration of the urgent and essential needs in my 2000 supplemental request, including helping victims of Hurricane Floyd, providing energy assistance for families struggling with rising oil prices, helping keep illegal drugs out of our country by supporting the Colombian Government's fight against drug traffickers, and