

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CARPER). Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that morning business be extended until 4:30 today with Senators allowed to speak for a period not to exceed 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. REID. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### RECESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate stand in recess until 4:30 this afternoon.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 3:13 p.m., recessed until 4:31 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. NELSON of Florida).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nevada is recognized.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate stand in recess until 5:15 p.m. today.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 4:32 p.m., recessed until 5:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. JOHNSON).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. In my capacity as a Senator from the State of South Dakota, I suggest the absence of a quorum. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### EQUAL PROTECTION OF VOTING RIGHTS ACT OF 2001—Continued

##### CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

##### CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the

Standing Rules of the Senate, hereby move to bring to a close the debate on S. 565, the election reform bill:

Christopher Dodd, Harry Reid, Charles Schumer, Ron Wyden, Debbie Stabenow, Patty Murray, Tom Daschle, Jeff Bingaman, Daniel Inouye, Carl Levin, Max Baucus, Joe Biden, Pat Leahy, James M. Jeffords, Barbara Mikulski, Bob Graham, and Edward M. Kennedy.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum with respect to the cloture motion be waived.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, for the information of the Senate, I would like to announce to all Members who have amendments on the finite list of amendments that first-degree amendments must be filed prior to 1 p.m., Thursday, February 28. If Members have already submitted amendments, then it is not necessary to resubmit an amendment.

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I would like to take this opportunity to commend Senators DODD, MCCONNELL, SCHUMER, and BOND for their dedication and diligence in addressing what I believe to be an issue of critical importance to our country—protecting voting rights and ensuring the integrity of the electoral system in our nation. Especially given the events in the world today, making certain that each citizen's vote is counted and promoting public trust and confidence in our election process is crucial.

The State of Washington has a long and trusted history as a leader in election administration. Through great efforts and cooperation, the state has pioneered such programs as motor voter, provisional balloting, vote by mail, and absentee voting.

I thank Senator DODD, the chairman of the Rules Committee for his support for an amendment that I offered with Senator MURRAY's support that has been adopted. The amendment guarantees that States are able to continue using mail-in voting, while also providing new safeguards to make mail-in voters aware of how to properly fill out their ballots, and how, if needed to obtain a replacement.

Voters in my State are proud of our system that offers voters the option of voting by mail or in the polling place, and they are extremely committed to seeing it continue. The mail-in ballot, in my opinion, offers voters several advantages. First, it allows voters to cast their ballots on their own time and at their own convenience. It also allows voters to make more informed choices, as they are able to consult literature sent by the state and by the campaigns in making their decisions. Because these votes are cast without the pressure of other voters waiting in line, or without the time crunch of being late to work or to pick up the kids, voters are also less likely to make mistakes that will disqualify their ballots.

In addition, the mail-in system is very secure. Each ballot that is cast by

mail requires, that the voter sign the outer envelope. This signature is then checked against the voters signature that is kept on file and only when there is agreement that the signatures match is the ballot counted. Washington State has consistently increased the number of voters choosing to vote by mail and through provisional voting without any allegations that these types of voting have involved fraud or other misconduct. In fact, the procedures in place have consistently ensured the integrity and security of our elections and led to public confidence in our system that is unparalleled anywhere in the country.

It has not always been this way. In the early 1990s, we had several close elections that pointed out the vulnerabilities in our system. These close elections led Washington to become one of the first states to adopt statewide guidelines that ensured that each jurisdiction followed the same rules in determining how ballots are verified and counted. In addition, my State also adopted other requirements for testing and procedural consistency. It is my hope that this legislation will lead other States to follow our example and institute similar guidelines and procedures that will result in more people voting and making sure that all votes are properly cast and counted.

Our challenge, at the federal level, is to ensure that in passing legislation that reduces hurdles to civic participation across in country, we respect the role of the States in selecting types of voting that work well for their citizens and lead to maximum participation. I believe that this bill as amended does that, and I thank the chairman of the Rules Committee for his commitment to this bill and to ensuring that States have the flexibility to keep their systems in place.

This bill, by setting minimum standards and by guaranteeing the Federal Government will provide the funds necessary to purchase new equipment, takes very important steps forward in guaranteeing to every American that not only do they have the right to vote, but that when they cast their vote it will be counted.

#### MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate now proceed to a period of morning business with Senators allowed to speak therein for a period not to exceed 10 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### TRIP TO LATIN AMERICA

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, I would like to report briefly on a trip to Latin America which I made last month before the Senate went into session in January.

This trip took me to a number of Latin American countries to discuss issues of trade and drug control. The

first stop was in Havana, Cuba, where I had an opportunity to talk to President Fidel Castro about the serious situation in Cuba on the deprivation of human rights, and about the failure in Cuba to have contested elections. I urged President Castro to run in a contested election.

I had the opportunity to meet with President Castro about 30 months earlier in June of the year of 1999 and made the same points to him. However, emphatically, again, when I challenged President Castro to run against someone in a contested election, he told me he did have an opponent. His opponent was the United States of America. He said this in more of a humorous way. The United States policy toward Cuba, I think, has tended to make, if not quite a martyr, at least a sympathetic person in President Castro.

We talked about a great many things. With my background as assistant counsel of the Warren Commission, I asked President Castro if there was any connection between Lee Harvey Oswald and Cuba. There had been rumors at the time that Castro and Cuban officials may have put Oswald up to the assassination of President Kennedy. Those rumors were based upon the CIA efforts to assassinate Castro in that era. Oswald was a part of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, which had a rally in New Orleans. When I asked that of President Castro, he said he was not responsible for Oswald. He was a Marxist, and not a madman. We talked in some detail about the Cuban missile crisis in 1962 and why Castro permitted the Soviets to have missiles in Cuba. He tried to defend that, I think unpersuasively, with the threats to himself from the Bay of Pigs invasion and the CIA assassination attempts.

Before going to see him 30 months ago, I checked with the records of the Church Committee, and found, in fact, that there was evidence about efforts to assassinate Castro—maybe 8 or 9 such attempts. When I told Castro that number, he laughed, and said that there had been many, many more attempts than that—something in the 300 range. I asked him how it felt to be the subject of assassination attempts.

He said: *Muy bien.*

This is Spanish for "very good."

I said: No, no. How did it really feel when they were trying to assassinate you?

Again, he said: *Muy bien.*

I said: No. How did it really feel?

He said: Do you have a sport?

I said: Yes. My sport is squash.

He said, through the interpreter: Well, avoiding assassination is a sport for me.

I talked to Castro in some detail about his willingness to have Cuban airspace and Cuban waters used by the United States to detect drug trafficking. Toward that end, I offered an amendment to the Foreign Operations Appropriations bill a year and a half ago, which was defeated in conference.

I offered a milder bill this year which was accepted, calling for a report from the State Department. However, when Castro makes an offer to allow Cuban waters and Cuban airspace to interdict drug traffickers, that is an offer we ought to accept. Drugs are polluting a generation of Americans and they are a major cause of street crime in America, which is something that I fought against as District Attorney of Philadelphia. If we can stop the flow of drugs with Castro's assistance, we ought to take him up on that offer.

There have been some changes in U.S. policy toward Cuba. The House of Representatives submitted a bill with a provision to ease travel restrictions, which was dropped in conference. It is my view that it is a very small step which ought to be uncontested.

We then traveled to other Latin American countries. We were in Argentina, where it is well-known that there is a tremendous financial crisis. Argentina has lived beyond its means. They have the inability to pay major suppliers, after having talked to major U.S. firms, such as Exxon-Mobil, IBM, and General Motors. They cannot withdraw money from their bank accounts to pay their suppliers. The International Monetary Fund is working on the matter.

It would be my hope that the United States would provide some leadership and some expertise to try to bring Argentina out of this economic crisis. I think a good bit of the record from the United States and the International Monetary Fund has been too harsh. I think we can make our point without language which borders on arrogance or borders on insults because Argentina is a very important country in Latin America.

One of the problems with Latin America is the frequency of the dictatorships, such as Juan Peron in Argentina, as well as those in Chile and Brazil. It is just a way of life there. Trade with the United States, I think, is very important to promote democracy.

In Peru there was great concern regarding the trade agreement with the United States that had lapsed in December. It is my hope that this trade bill will be acted upon by the Congress at an early date.

In Chile they are waiting for a trade bill to be enacted, with some ten rounds of negotiations. The President of Chile is willing to have an agreement, even if it is not fast tracked, and even if there would be amendments offered on the floor of the Senate or the House of Representatives.

In Uruguay we met with the distinguished President Jorge Batlle. We have a very distinguished U.S. Ambassador there, Martin Silverstein, a Pennsylvanian. We took a look at the coastline, with the attractive apartment houses in Montevideo. Uruguay is quite a contrast to the barren coastline of Havana, Cuba, showing what free enterprise and democracy can do if it is permitted to operate.

Mr. President, I would just like to add another comment or two about Brazil, where we met with the equivalent of our National Security Adviser. There is a little area where Paraguay, Brazil, and Argentina meet where there are supporters of Hezbollah posing quite a threat to that area. In Buenos Aires, we met at the Jewish Community Center with leading Jewish officials there and were told, in detail, about the bombing of the Jewish Community Center in 1994 and the attack on the Israeli Embassy. I was pleased to note that the Brazilian officials are looking into this issue as to the potential terrorist activity arising out of this group in that little section where Paraguay, Brazil, and Argentina meet.

On January 2, 2002, we arrived in Havana, Cuba for two days of meetings with human rights activists, religious leaders, medical researchers, our U.S. country team, and President Fidel Castro. When we arrived in Cuba, we were met by the U.S. country team, who briefed us on the current situation in Cuba.

We began by meeting with a delegation of human rights activists, all of whom had been jailed during the Castro regime on various charges. When asked why he was jailed, one of the dissidents, Oswaldo Paya Sardinias, President of the Christian Liberation Movement, expressed the general sentiment of the group that he was jailed for the anti-Castro opinions he publicly expressed. When I asked them their opinion on the embargo, the group of Cuban dissidents was split on the advisability of continuing the U.S. embargo with Cuba.

Next we traveled to the Finlay Institute in Havana, a research center dedicated to the development and testing of vaccines. Our briefing on the Finlay Institute's work was conducted by a team of researchers including Dr. Concepcion Campa, Director of the Institute and leader of the team that developed the vaccine for meningitis B. Supported entirely by the Cuban government, the Finlay Institute, which I had previously visited in June 1999, is one of the forty-five biotechnology facilities supported by government funds. The Cuban government has demonstrated a commitment to medical research and cooperative agreements, such as the one the Finlay Institute entered into with GlaxoSmithKline in 1999, licensed by the U.S. Treasury Department. This agreement represents a positive and productive relationship with this ostracized nation.

The next morning we met with a delegation of Cuban officials, including the Minister of Justice Roberto Sotolongo and Oliverio Montalvo, the Drug Enforcement Chief. Minister Sotolongo responded to my question regarding the advisability of cooperation between the U.S. and Cuba on the drug issues with his hope that the issue not be politicized. He further stated that exchanges of information between the U.S. and Cuba could net real results in preventing drugs from entering

the U.S. through this region. The Ministers wanted us to know that Cuba is actively involved in intercepting and destroying contraband found in Cuban waters en route to the U.S. and elsewhere.

Minister Sotolongo detailed the 1996 incident involving the Limerick, a successful joint U.S.-Cuba drug interdiction operation. The Limerick, carrying 6.5 tons of cocaine drifted into Cuban waters and was impounded. All the evidence was turned over to the United States, and those involved were tried and convicted in a court with the participation of Cuban officials.

Our time in Cuba concluded with a meeting with President Fidel Castro, which lasted six and one-half hours. Many issues were discussed, including our earlier meeting with the dissidents. President Castro did not directly respond to the merits of the dissidents' issues, but chose instead to reprimand our congressional delegation for holding meetings independent of the schedule that his functionaries had in mind for us. We flatly rejected his objection.

Our conversation with President Castro began with a wide-ranging discussion on drug interdiction. President Castro suggested a formal relationship with the U.S. in order to make progress on drug interdiction efforts in the area. This was a suggestion made to me by General Barry McCaffrey, former head of U.S. drug policy in the previous administration. When asked if he wanted the embargo against Cuba lifted, President Castro responded, "Can you doubt that?"

We spoke of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on America and President Castro was asked to condemn Osama bin Laden. While making general statements against terrorism, President Castro would not condemn bin Laden, feigning a lack of evidence in his possession to make such a condemnation. The President also offered that he had not heard of Osama bin Laden prior to September 11, 2001 incidents and closed our meeting with a call for a bilateral agreement with Cuba to fight terrorism.

As we arrived in Cuba, the United States' decision to transfer detainees from Afghanistan to Guantanamo Bay was being announced publicly. President Castro had issued a press release saying that the Government of Cuba had too little information to comment on the U.S. plan to use Guantanamo Bay for Afghan detainees. At the news conference on January 4, 2002, before our departure, I was asked about the issue and said that my appraisal was that President Castro was not going to object to the U.S. plan to use Guantanamo Bay because if he had an objection, he would have already expressed it. My meetings with President Castro, religious leaders, human rights activists, and medical researchers lead me to believe that we must continue to support and expand our people-to-people relationships with Cuba. There are many areas of mutual concern between

our two countries, including drug interdiction and medical research.

On January 4, 2002, Senator CHAFEE and I traveled to Lima, Peru and were met by Ambassador John Hamilton. Our meeting with President Alejandro Toledo included Foreign Minister Diego Garcia Sayan, First Vice President and Minister of Industry and Trade Raul Diez Canseco, Trade Vice Minister Alfredo Ferrero, and drug czar Ricardo Vega Llona. We first exchanged welcoming statements and our expressions of sympathy to Peru for the tragedy that took place just a week before our arrival in downtown Lima. A fire, stemming from fireworks, had set ablaze a shopping district and killed over 250, according to reports at that time.

The President made clear his desire for a renewed and expanded Andean Trade Preference Act (ATPA) and for continued assistance in combating the drug trade. President Toledo expressed concern that the trade agreement between the United States and Peru had lapsed on December 4, 2001, and urged that the Congress give it prompt consideration. He said that Peruvian farmers would be tempted to grow products for drug production instead of textile production, if the agreement was not extended. I told him I would urge prompt consideration by the Congress. The President and Ministers made the case that eliminating the coca trade in Peru is essential to combat terrorism, and spoke strongly to the elimination of the narco-terrorism as a "matter of national security." With regards to the general state of the Peruvian economy, the President reported that they were coming off of three years of little or no growth, further reporting that the Peruvian economy is affected by the overall world economy. Senator CHAFEE and I were further debriefed on the state of the Peruvian economy by the Minister of Economy and Finance Pedro Pablo Kuczynski.

The President further described his "full commitment" to reform of the Peruvian judicial system. In a separate meeting, I queried the drug czar and his colleagues further on the progress of the drug war in Peru and the region. There was general agreement with my point that progress is difficult without a reduction in the demand for drugs. Meeting participants reiterated the need for the Andean anti-drug plan, which offers increased intelligence sharing, regional air coverage, and maritime cooperation among the Andean nations. Further, it was emphasized that an alternative crop or industry to drug crops was essential for local farmers.

From Lima, Peru, Senator CHAFEE and I traveled to Santiago, Chile on January 6, 2002. After our meeting with President Ricardo Lagos, I wrote a letter to President Bush and Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill expressing President Lagos' strong support for the U.S.-Chile Bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA) without linkage to passage

by the U.S. Congress of trade promotion authority. President Lagos expressed his concern that ongoing congressional negotiations with the White House regarding trade promotion authority may further delay consideration of the Bilateral FTA with Chile. The President further stated that Chile wants "trade not aid."

Additional topics discussed included the potential F-16 sale to Chile, as well as the Pinochet and Letelier/Moffitt cases. On December 27, 2000, the Chilean Ministry of Defense announced that the Government of Chile had authorized the Chilean Air Force to initiate discussions on the purchase of ten Lockheed Martin F-16 Fighting Falcons, Block 50, from the United States. The F-16 was chosen over the French Mirage and the Swedish Gripen on its merits in a competitive, transparent selection process.

Regarding the Letelier/Moffitt case, which involved the 1976 car bomb murder in Washington, D.C. of former Chilean Ambassador the U.S. Orlando Letelier and his American citizen assistant, Ronnie Moffitt. I told the President that the jail sentences of six, seven, and eight years, which were given to those involved in this terrorist act on U.S. soil, were not sufficient in my opinion and asked his opinion on the extradition of those individuals to the U.S. for trial. President Lagos responded that he cannot take a position that would appear to pressure the Court, but that his impression was such that the Court, on its own, might well order extradition.

Concerning counter-terrorism and the events of September 11, 2001, the President expressed strong condemnation of the terrorist attacks. This expression is in keeping the Lagos Administration's action immediately following the terrorist attacks in the U.S. As head of the RIO Group of Latin American countries in 2001, Chile leads the coordinated counter-terrorism efforts for the Group.

On January 8, 2002, Senator CHAFEE and I arrived in Buenos Aires, Argentina, just one week after the latest President was installed during this tumultuous time in that country. Newly-installed President Eduardo Duhalde, the fifth president in thirteen days, is confronted with a bankrupt government and a citizenry deeply dispirited after four years of a worsening economy and recent political instability. It is unclear at this time if this administration is capable, or willing, to put together a viable long-term economic plan to pull Argentina out of its very serious economic situation.

President Duhalde told us that his administration would have a new budget passed within fifteen days with a plan to retire his country's industrial debt, which could then justify further aid from the International Monetary Fund. Corporate representatives from Bank of Boston, General Motors, IBM, and ESSO detailed the extremely difficult business environment, including

a freeze of all bank that precluded the paying of suppliers and subcontractors. This issue, along with the ongoing currency crises, made for an extremely precarious business environment as described by the executives.

Senator CHAFEE and I visited the Jewish Community Center and the site of a 1994 terrorist attack that killed eighty-four people. Upon our arrival to the Community Center, it was explained to us that the line in front of the building was persons visiting the visa office applying for travel to Israel as an escape from the Argentine economic situation.

On January 10, 2002, Senator CHAFEE and I proceeded next to Montevideo, Uruguay for meetings with President Jorge Batlle and the Chief of Staff and National Drug and Anti-Terrorism Coordinator Leonardo Costa. We were accompanied by Ambassador Martin Silverstein, a Pennsylvanian, who is serving with distinction.

We met with President Batlle for over one and one-half hours discussing Argentina, International Patent Rights (IPR), free trade issues, and narcotics. Regarding the Argentine economic crisis, the President was generally optimistic, providing that the new government follows the programs of the newly-installed Economic Minister Jorge Lenikov. President Batlle stated that President Duhalde appeared to have a strong majority within the Parliament.

On International Patent Rights, the President expressed disagreement with the U.S. Government's approach to IPR legislation. While he favors drug legalization, he would not implement such a policy without an international consensus. I took the opportunity to praise the President's support for Free Trade Area of the Americas and free trade, pointing out that this seemed to contrast with the government's unwillingness to enact a strong copyright bill, which is an essential tool for attracting investment.

On January 11, 2001, we traveled to Brasilia, Brazil where our first meeting was with representatives from the Brazilian Ministry of Health to discuss the government's response to HIV and AIDS. A comprehensive presentation by Claudio Duarte da Fonseca and Rosemeire Munhoz with the Health Ministry detailed Brazil's national response to their growing numbers of HIV and AIDS cases. Governmental lead efforts include prevention campaigns, mass media campaigns, behavioral interventions, condom distribution, and a policy of universal and free-of-charge access to ARV drugs.

Our meeting with General Alberto Cardoso, the counterpart to our National Security Adviser, provided assurances of cooperation from his country with the U.S. and Israel efforts to oppose financing of Hezbollah terrorism from an enclave at the border of Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil. There was no reason to believe that support has come from residents of that area

for the bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Argentina in 1992 and the Jewish Community Center in Buenos Aires in 1994. With the worldwide focus on cutting off terrorist funding, the tri-border area is under international scrutiny.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut is recognized.

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, first of all, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business for 2 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### THE LATIN AMERICA TRIP

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, I wanted to commend our colleague from Pennsylvania who took a trip to Latin America. He talked about it and I commend him for doing that. A lot of attention is being focused—rightfully so—on Southwest Asia because of events since 9-11. I think it is refreshing that a couple of colleagues took the time to visit this hemisphere and the countries they did and to bring back to the U.S. Senate their own observations about events in Cuba, Chile, Uruguay, and Brazil.

I commend our colleague from Pennsylvania. I believe our colleague from Rhode Island, LINCOLN CHAFEE, was along on that trip, and others may have been there also. I thank him for reporting to us on their observations.

#### CLOSING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Mr. BIDEN. Mr. President, I rise today, as we near the end of Black History Month, to focus attention on the widening gap between those Americans who use or have access to telecommunications technologies, like computers and the Internet, and those who do not. Surprisingly, there are those naysayers who suggest that the "digital divide" does not exist, that it is a myth or fabrication of consumer and civil rights advocates. Perhaps it is because the term "digital divide" has been so over-used and, in some instances, mis-used that it causes some to doubt its existence. Perhaps the term has so thoroughly infiltrated our everyday discourse that it causes skeptics to under-estimate its very real and powerful consequences.

No matter the reason for these naysayers' doubt, the unequivocal answer to their question "is there really a digital divide" is a resounding "YES." A series of reports issued by the U.S. Department of Commerce not only confirms that the "digital divide" exists; it suggests that, while the number of Americans accessing the Internet has grown rapidly in recent years, the technology gap between poor and minority communities, on one hand, and other Americans, on the other, is actually widening.

Take this seemingly encouraging example: from December 1998 to August 2000, the percentage of African-Amer-

ican households with Internet access more than doubled, from 11.2 percent to 23.5 percent—an encouraging development, by any measure. But during that same time period, the percentage of total households nationally with Internet access soared to 41.5 percent. And the access rates for White Americans and Asian-Americans/Pacific Islanders—46.1 percent and 56.8 percent, respectively—significantly outpaced that national average. As a consequence, the already substantial gap between African-American Internet usage and national usage grew 3 percentage points. The gap was even greater when comparing African-American usage with that of White Americans or Asian-Americans and Pacific Islanders. Similarly, during that same 20-month period, the gap between Hispanic households with Internet access and the national average grew 4 percentage points.

The effect: What was once a gap is now swelling into a chasm. Just this morning, the Wall Street Journal reported that, in 1997, ten percent of Americans earning less than \$25,000 a year used the Internet, compared with 45 percent of those earning more than \$75,000. By 2001, despite increased usage by both groups, the "gap" had grown to 50 percentage points.

Yes, the "digital divide" exists, and that fact should concern us greatly. In today's information age, unequal access to the national information infrastructure affects nearly every part of our lives. Access to these networks increasingly dictates the ease with which we can pursue education, conduct our financial affairs, apply for a job, or participate in the political process. Lack of access will only reinforce and magnify already existing inequalities in these important areas of life.

Against that backdrop, I am shocked by the Bush administration's apparent efforts to dismantle many programs designed to eliminate the inequality of access to technology. These programs, including the popular E-Rate Program, have a demonstrated record of success connecting roughly 1 million public school classrooms and 13,000 community libraries to modern telecommunications networks. Moreover, the vast majority of the funding is dedicated to low-income communities, and significant dollars flow to schools under the Bureau of Indian Affairs. By all accounts, these initiatives are working, yet the Administration is maneuvering to eliminate them one by one.

Don't be fooled: This is not a debate about electronic gadgets or computer megabytes. It is a debate about who gets to speak and who gets to listen. At its heart, it implicates the very nature of our democracy.

It is a debate about who among us, as the information revolution takes off, will be left behind. Electronic commerce has become a critical factor in determining future economic development and prosperity. Communities and individuals without access to the Internet will be excluded from that growth.