

they arrived, an unexpected fire-drill was underway. None of us would deny the importance of knowing how to quickly evacuate a school building, but this fire-drill was not for that purpose. It had been triggered by wiring that had been damaged as a result of a leak in the school's roof. The result was lost time in a school day. Any teacher, any principal can tell you that such unnecessary exercises are distracting and disruptive and that losing a block of time like that is not easily reclaimed. That unnecessary fire drill robbed hundreds of young students of important learning time. The same is true when students have to take added time over and over again in a school day to move from portable classrooms to other school activities.

All of this takes on added importance as we seek to maximize the tremendous potential that technology holds to broaden and strengthen education in America. This month, as a result of changes enacted by the Congress in the Telecommunications Act, schools and libraries across this nation become eligible to benefit from reduced rates for accessing the Internet. Those resources can assist both with readying schools to bring computers on line and in covering the monthly access charges that schools will need to build into their operating budgets. These reduced rates, known as the E-Rate, offer tremendous opportunities to young Americans. But the fact of the matter is that school facilities have to be up to the task. Inadequate wiring systems and overcrowding alike can severely limit or even preclude altogether schools' ability to take advantage of the opportunities that technology makes possible.

As this Forum comes to a close and you head back to Washington, I know you and

Secretary Riley will be working closely together to impress upon your colleagues in the Congress the importance of moving forward, in partnership with local school districts—like the Anaheim City School District, Santa Ana Unified, and others in this area—to put in place a serious, but fiscally responsible approach to meeting these compelling needs. Balancing the budget is not an end in and of itself. Instead, now that we are on target to meeting that goal, we must work together to ensure that essential investments are made that will enable our economy to grow. Educating those who will be the economic brainpower of the next century ranks at the top of those investments, and, as I said earlier, the task of educating all young people to high standards is made much more difficult when they are forced to learn in overcrowded or structurally deficient environments.

The task of the Congress and the Administration this year will be to ensure that the federal government does its part. Legislation will be on the table with Administration support. We need to work together to move that legislation into law.

COMPETITION IN THE LONG DISTANCE MARKETS

HON. CARRIE P. MEEK

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 25, 1998

Mrs. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I don't understand why a potential key player in the

long distance market is being systematically eliminated.

For the past two years the FCC has detracted from the process and has not assisted in making local telecommunication competition a reality.

Some long distance companies have been quoted publicly as saying that they are going to ignore the local residential market because of the limited revenue it produces. Meanwhile, they have pursued with great zeal local business markets.

Why has the FCC ignored these factors? The Regional Bell Companies are not offering long distance service today because of the FCC's misinterpretation of the 1996 Telecommunications Law. The FCC continues to reject approved recommendations from states suggesting the absence of competition in local markets. That is not correct. Competition is out there. Why has it been overlooked?

The FCC should take off its dark glasses and open its eyes to the intense competition in the local market. The Bells shouldn't be kept out of the long distance market because of business decisions made by their potential competitors. The Bells have made a good faith effort to open the market and judging from the amount of local business competition, they've succeeded. They deserve entry into the long distance market.