

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.