

Remarks Announcing the Electronic Commerce Initiative *July 1, 1997*

Thank you very much, Mr. Vice President. For those of you who did not know what he was talking about, we went to a Broadway show last night, and there were three guys in the show who did the macarena in the show. So after it was over, I thought it only fair when the Vice President spoke they come up and do the macarena while—it was sort of background music, you know. *[Laughter]*

Lou Gerstner, thank you for being here. That was a remarkable statement, and the Vice President gave you a remarkable introduction. I never before thought of you as a gazelle, but I always will now. *[Laughter]*

Thank you, Macdara MacColl, for the work you do and for the fine words you spoke. To the members of the Cabinet and the administration and people here from industry and consumer groups, I thank all of you. I especially want to thank for this remarkable report all the agencies who worked on it and in particular Ira Magaziner, who did a brilliant job in bringing everybody together and working this out over a very long period of time. And we thank you for what you did on that. Thank you all. I thank the Members of Congress for being here, Congressmen Gejdenson, Gordon, Markey, and Flake, and for their interest in these issues.

I had two disparate experiences in the last few days that would convince a person of limited technological proficiency, like myself, that the world is changing rather dramatically. You have to remember now, the Vice President coined the term “information superhighway” 20 years ago, back when I didn’t even have an electric typewriter. *[Laughter]* But anyway, I had these two experiences which were very interesting to me. It’s sort of a mark of how our world is changing.

As you may have seen in the press, the oldest living member of my family, my great-uncle, passed away a few days ago, and so I went back to this little town in Arkansas where I was born. And when I got there late at night, I drove out in the country for a few miles to

my cousin’s house where the family was gathering. And she has a son who is in his mid-thirties now who lives in another small town in Arkansas, who, after we talked for 5 minutes, proceeded to tell me that he played golf on the Internet several times a month from his small town in Arkansas with an elderly man in Australia who unfailingly beat him. *[Laughter]* An unheard of experience just a few years ago. He knows this guy. He’s explaining to me how he finds this man.

Then he says, “My brother likes to play backgammon on the Internet, and it got so I couldn’t talk to him. But now I know how I can go get him out of his game, and he can go find a place to come have a visit with me, and they can hold the game while we have an emergency talk.” I mean, these whole conversations, the way people—it was just totally unthinkable a few years ago.

And then Sunday, the New York Times crossword puzzle—I don’t know if you saw it, but it was for people like me. It was entitled “Technophobes.” *[Laughter]* And I’m really trying to overcome my limitations. I’m technologically challenged, and I’m learning how to do all kinds of things on the computer because Chelsea is going off to school, and I need to be more literate. But you ought to go back and pull this, all of you who are now into cyberspace, and see if you can work your way back to another world because they had high-tech clues with common answers. Like “floppy disk” was a clue; the answer was “frisbee.” *[Laughter]* “Hard drive” was a clue; the answer was “Tiger’s tee shot.” *[Laughter]* “Digital monitor” was the clue; the answer was “manicurist.” *[Laughter]*

So, anyway, we’ve come a long way. And I’d like to give you some sense of history about this, because interestingly enough, this gathering at the White House, which I think is truly historic, is in a line of such developments in this house that has shaped our country’s history of communications and networking. One hundred and thirty-nine years ago, here at the White