Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

February 5, 2001

Mr. Andrew Card
Chief of Staff to the President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Card:

We write concerning certain Administration proposals addressing education technology. In particular, several proposals outlined by the Administration recently raise concern that the "E-Rate" program is in jeopardy of being eliminated.

As you may know, the Telecommunications Act of 1996 contained the E-Rate provision, which has helped thousands of K-12 schools and libraries to establish much-needed "learning links" at discounted rates. As part of our historic universal service policy for connecting America, the E-Rate required the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to identify the types of telecommunications services and equipment -- phone lines, cable connections, wireless networks, --to be made available to connect libraries and school classrooms to the Internet and thus to the future. It has been a key tool utilized in the battle against the growing "digital divide" in our country and has been enthusiastically received by teachers, parents and schoolkids across the country.

We are wary of proposals that would eliminate the right of all K-12 schools and libraries to seek discounted rates for technology. Substituting the E-Rate with block grant-style funding out of the Department of Education may not result in robust funding for high technology in the classroom nor in greater efficiency in administration of the program. Moreover, it may disenfranchise thousands of schools currently eligible for E-rate funding. We believe a more thorough analysis of any proposal to eliminate the E-Rate program will highlight the pitfalls for continued effective funding high technology for all K-12 schools at the local level.

America cannot leave kids from middle class working families out of the knowledge-based economy and still hope to retain its economic standing in a fiercely competitive global environment. The E-Rate program is a key foundation not only for success in education, but also for our nation's long-term economic prospects.

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We request that you clarify the Bush Administration's proposals with respect to the E-Rate and education technology in general. We thank you in advance for your time and attention in amplifying the Administration's policy on this important program and look forward to working with you on education policy in the coming year.

Sincerely,

Edward J. Markey

Anna G. Eshoo

Albert R. Wynn

Sheila Jackson Lee

Cal Dooley

Chaka Fattah

Tom Allen

John Conyers, Jr.

Bobby L. Rush

Major R. Owens

Donald M. Payne

Rubén Hinojosa

Karen McCarthy

Lois Capps

Lynn Brown

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Cynthia McKinney

Jim Clyburn