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Politics and the Information Superhighway

by The Honorable Congressman
Bobby L. Rush (D-IL)

The following statement was delivered on 24 May 1995 by the Congressman in support of the markup of The Communications Act of 1995:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to start today by commending you and the ranking minority member, Mr. Dingell, for providing this committee with the legislative groundwork for the information revolution which the telecommunications industry is well on its way to embracing. We are engaged in this effort in order to ensure that ALL Americans receive the benefits that modern technology has to offer.

As I indicated in my opening statements before the subcommittee on Telecommunication and Finance, I am proud to be a part of this legislative effort because I represent a part of the nation where many of the most progressive telecommunication companies serve my constituents. I also want to make very clear my concern that all players, large and small, entrepreneurs and corporations, women and men, be granted equal footing to provide telecommunications services and subcontracting needs in the new competitive marketplace we are embarking toward.

I join my friend my New York, Mr. Towns, in offering an amendment that will ensure that the concerns I have expressed will be addressed in a proceeding by the FCC. This amendment will grant the FCC authority to identify and eliminate market barriers for entrepreneurs and other small businesses in the provision and ownership of telecommunications services, including information services or in the provision of parts or services to providers of telecommunications and information services.

I want to raise two other points for the record. First, I see a bit of irony in the fact, although most schools have telephone service, that service rarely extends past the principal's office. According to a May 12, 1995 letter sent to the Chairman of this subcommittee, Mr. Fields, by FCC Chairman Reed Hundt, 88% of the nation's classrooms are without a phone line and 97% are not connected to any computer network. In other words, we are legislating for competition in the telecommunications marketplace



and yet the majority of our children are not even exposed to learning the practical uses these services have to offer. I offer a challenge to the telecommunications industry to impose a self-regulated mandate to provide our nation's schools with the necessary infrastructure, computers and programming to ensure that there is a pool of technology-literate consumers who can benefit from the competitive marketplace that the industry is asking Congress to legislate.

Second, I want to express my concern over the loss of the FCC's Tax Certificate Policy. The Commission's Tax Certificate Policy has been instrumental in substantially increasing the number of broadcast licenses owned by minorities. According to testimony by William Kennard, the FCC's General Counsel, given to the Senate Committee on Finance in March of this year, the number of broadcast licenses owned by minorities has increased more than eight-fold since 1978 and during the 17-year history of the Commission's Tax Certificate Program. The lack of access to capital was identified by the Commission in 1981 as the biggest obstacle to ownership. Clearly, the Tax Certificate Program is the reason for the gains we have seen until recently.

I wanted to express my concerns for the record on this issue and express my strong hope that we are not witnesses to a new policy trend. It was impossible to not notice that, out of all the 49 witnesses who offered testimony during the hearings held by the Telecommunication and Finance subcommittee, only one was African-American, the Honorable Larry Irving, Assistant Secretary of Commerce...a public servant.