

8 November 2005

The Honorable Joe Barton, Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
2109 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-4306

Dear Congressman Barton,

As you review ways that federal resources can be used most efficiently to ensure that the US maintains its competitive edge in technology, I urge you to consider the ideas in the Digital Opportunity Investment Trust (DO IT) legislation (H.R. 2512) introduced by Congressman Regula, Congressman Markey and others. This legislation would not only represent a high-leverage investment in the future of American education, it also would be a critical new application of the revolution in broadband communications that you have championed.

Federal research investment has been essential for maintaining America's economic leadership and security for generations. It has paid enormous dividends both for the competitiveness of American firms and for national security. It was DARPA that supported work that allowed me and my colleague Robert Kahn to invent and develop the system now known as the Internet. DARPA support was sustained for a period of two decades. Norman Augustine, retired Chairman of Lockheed Martin, chaired a committee of the National Academy of Sciences released last month that concluded: "America must act now to preserve its strategic and economic security by capitalizing on its knowledge-based resources, particularly in S&T, and maintaining the most fertile environment for new and revitalized industries that create well-paying jobs." They emphasized that investment in education and training must be an integral part of any national strategy to maintain S&T leadership.

The DO IT legislation would provide the basis for systematic research, development, and evaluation of technology that can reshape learning opportunities for all Americans. It has the potential to provide Americans with access to learning opportunities that are as accurate as the latest publication and as engaging as the latest video game. Thanks to advances in communications technology, Americans of all ages can make use of the technology wherever they may live.

I concluded a recent op-ed in the Wall Street Journal by noting that "In a very real sense, today's R&D agenda determines where America will

find itself in the future.” This future depends both on how we manage broadband and other technologies, and how we ensure that the nation’s education system meets the increasing demands of the 21st century workplace. The research envisioned by the DO IT legislation can yield enormous public benefits. But the risks are sufficiently high and the benefits likely to be widely enjoyed making it difficult for private firms to justify a research investment entirely on their own. This is exactly what has motivated high-leverage federal research investments in the past.

I hope that you are able and willing to give careful consideration to the DO IT proposals both to strengthen the future of American education and to make creative use of emerging concepts in broadband technology.

Sincerely,

Vinton G Cerf
Internet Pioneer
Presidential Medal of Freedom Recipient