



Florida Public Service Commission

Consumer Bulletin

E. Leon Jacobs, Jr., Chairman



THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

More and more Americans are going online to conduct such day-to-day activities as shopping, research for work or school, job searches and recreation. As such, the Internet is becoming an increasingly vital tool in our society and being connected to the Internet becomes more critical to economic and educational advancement. Because more Americans are using the Internet on a regular basis for daily activities, people who lack access to this tool are increasingly at a disadvantage. Statistics indicate that those without connectivity disproportionately live in low-income communities. Arguably, these communities are most in need of the advantages of the Internet. Therefore, bridging this so-called "digital divide" by increasing the number of Americans using the technological tools of the digital age is a national goal, as well as a goal of the State of Florida.

The digital revolution requires learning a new vocabulary. "Dot coms," "distance learning" (i.e. taking classes over the Internet) and "broadband" (high-speed Internet) technology are among the terms to have entered into language in recent years. However, these terms have little or no meaning to digital "have-nots," who find themselves cut off from access to key information. They won't be able, for instance, to use the World Wide Web to shop for the lowest interest rate on a home mortgage, to pursue college scholarships, or to supplement a critical job search.

Recently, a report, "Falling Through The Net: Toward Digital Inclusion," was issued by the US Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA). This report documents the digital divide.

This new electronic environment has spurred tremendous changes in the telecommunications industry. This requires that you become more informed of functions and features when you acquire services for connection to

the Internet. The Florida Public Service Commission (PSC) can help.

The PSC encourages you to get connected to the Internet. If you would like a copy of the NTIA report or additional information regarding the digital divide, please contact NTIA at 1-202-482-7002. You may also contact the NTIA by e-mail at digitaldivide@ntia.doc.gov. If you have questions about any other telecommunications issue, please contact the PSC at **1-800-342-3552**. You may also contact us by e-mail at contact@psc.state.fl.us, or visit our Internet home page at <http://www.floridapsc.com>.

DID YOU KNOW?

The share of individuals using the Internet rose by a third, from 32.7 percent in December 1998 to 44.4 percent in August 2000. If growth continues at that rate, more than half of all Americans will be using the Internet by the middle of 2001. *

Low-income communities, principally where African Americans and Hispanics reside, still lag behind other communities, but have shown impressive gains in Internet access. African-American households are now more than twice as likely to have home access than they were 20 months ago, rising from 11.2 percent to 23.5 percent. Hispanic households have also experienced a tremendous growth rate during this period, rising from 12.6 percent to 23.6 percent.*

*Source: National Telecommunications and Information Administration's Report: **Falling Through the Net: Toward Digital Inclusion**

E. Leon Jacobs, Jr. is the Chairman of the Florida Public Service Commission. The PSC sets the rates utility companies charge for natural gas, electric and telephone service within the state. In 36 counties, it sets the price you pay for the water you drink, if your water company is privately-owned.