

## S-1854, The Digital Opportunity Investment Trust Act

This bipartisan legislation introduced by Sens. Christopher Dodd (D-CT), Olympia Snowe (R-ME), and Richard Durbin (D-IL), sets forth a plan to transform lifelong learning to meet the challenges of the information age and better prepare Americans to compete in the global knowledge-based marketplace.

**Purpose:** The legislation creates a self-funding “Digital Opportunity Investment Trust,” or “DO IT,” to enhance American competitiveness and security in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and beyond.

The Trust will:

- Finance research and development in the use of advanced information technologies to transform education, skills training, lifelong learning, and training for public safety and homeland security. DO IT will do for education, learning and training what the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health do for science and health respectively.
- Make possible the digitization of the collections of our nation’s libraries, museums, and universities, to make these riches (described as the DNA of our civilization) available to all Americans and to the rest of the world.
- Encourage America’s most able researchers, scientists, educators, and entrepreneurs to pursue advances in learning and information technology.

**Funding & Structure:** DO IT will be structured as a Congressionally originated non-governmental agency. Its nine-member Board of Directors will be appointed by the President and serve with the advice and consent of the Senate. Grants and contracts will be awarded on merit.

The DO IT Board and the Director will develop policies modeled on the tested procedures of the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health. DO IT will be subject to direct financial and budgetary oversight by the National Telecommunications Agency, and to annual review of its performance by Congress.

The Trust will be a self-sustaining fund financed by proceeds received during the years from Congressionally mandated auctions of electromagnetic spectrum (the public airways) for commercial use. Auction and license revenues from the spectrum will be dedicated to the Trust until the total reaches \$20B. Only the interest from this corpus (approximately \$1B) will be expended by the Trust each year. The corpus itself will remain an asset within the Treasury.

**Precedents/Legacies:** Legislation for the Digital Opportunity Investment Trust follows the model of America’s other farsighted investments in education: the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, which used revenue from the public frontier land to create our public el-

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ementary and secondary school system; the Land Grant College Act of 1862, which opened higher education to all, and the GI Bill of 1948, which gave 20 million American veterans of World War II the chance to pursue their a college education. Like the Northwest Ordinance, the Land Grant College Act and the GI Bill, DO IT represents a bold investment in preparing future generations to meet the challenges of the future.

**Historical Findings:** Report of the **U.S. Commission on National Security**, chaired by **former Sens. Hart and Rudman**, warned: “the inadequacies of our systems of research and education pose a greater threat to U.S. national security over the next quarter century than any potential conventional war that we might imagine. American national leadership must understand these deficiencies as threats to national security. If we do not invest heavily and wisely in rebuilding these two core strengths, America will be incapable of maintaining its global position long into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”

**Federal Reserve Board Chair Alan Greenspan:** “Workers must be equipped not simply with technical know-how but also with the ability to create, analyze, and transform information and to interact effectively with others. Moreover ... learning will increasingly be a lifelong activity.”

**Secretary of Education Rod Paige:** “Education is the only business still debating the usefulness of technology...We still educate our students based on an agricultural timetable, in an industrial setting, yet tell students they live in a digital age.”

**Undersecretary of Commerce Phillip Bond:** “We need to...create a new ‘knowledge utility’ for all, which integrates learning into all aspects of our work and our lives, making learning opportunities as ubiquitous as electricity for everybody.”

**The Congressional Web-Based Education Commission** focused on the need to “Develop high quality online educational content that meets the highest standards of educational excellence...embrace an ‘e-learning’ agenda as a centerpiece of our nation’s federal education policy... [We urge] the federal government to create a comprehensive research, development, and innovation framework for learning technology...as a central goal of telecommunications policy.”

**President George W. Bush’s Information Technology Advisory Committee:** “Our overarching recommendation is to make the effective integration of information technology with education and training a national priority.”

**Former House Commerce Committee Chairman Thomas Bliley (R-VA):** “Soon, every inner-city school will have the resources of our greatest universities and every rural clinic will be able to draw on the latest discoveries at the Mayo Clinic and Sloan Kettering...Imagine using the Internet to teach first responders – police, fire and emergency medical technicians – how better to respond to emergencies. That same technology could teach unemployed workers new job skills – on their own time, at their own pace and in their own homes. Congress and the White House must act, and soon.”