

## Wiring the Gaps

By Adam Clayton Powell III

**A**n article in the April 17 *Science* spawned a flurry of stories on evening newscasts and newspaper front pages describing a huge Internet gap between white and black Americans, with whites having access to (and using) the Internet far more than African Americans. The data on which the *Science* article was based, however, were far more interesting, and far more positive, than most of the stories suggested.

The report was based on Nielsen data from 1996, which in the dynamic world of online usage should be considered history (however interesting) rather than news. But even these data offered a number of surprises: African Americans were *more* likely to be on the Internet than whites once they reached a household income of \$40,000. At this income level, blacks were also far more likely than whites to work with computers on the job (77 percent vs. 59 percent).

And when the data were collected in 1996, many more blacks were online than the media had reported. "Five million African Americans have used the Web in the United States as of January 1997," wrote researchers Donna Hoffman and Thomas Novak, "considerably more than the popular press estimate of one million."

Harris Survey Unit data collected last winter and published in the April/May issue of *The Public Perspective* further confirm that racial and ethnic gaps in Internet usage

are narrowing: The racial composition of U.S. Web users was 75 percent white and 19 percent African American and Latino, which author David Birdsell described as "statistically indistinguishable from Census data on the general population."

The Web has grown from 13 million U.S. adult users in the fall of 1995 to more than 58 million, which means that 30 percent of American adults are now online. And the much-ballyhooed online "gender gap" is closing as well: Birdsell notes that while men outnumbered women in cyberspace by a 3-to-1 ratio in September 1995, by last winter 44 percent of active Web users were women.

## Just Say Newt

By Michael W. Lynch

**"T**he time has come for the war on drugs to enter a new, winnable stage," wrote House Speaker Newt Gingrich in an April 30 *Washington Times* op-ed. You may think Gingrich has again written a work of fiction, shifting genres from sci-fi to horror. But the speaker is serious: He is backing 12 bills that would increase the power of the federal government, all in the name of protecting Americans from themselves.

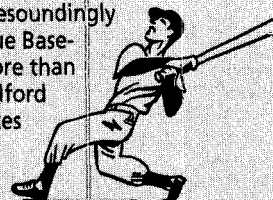
The Democrats may have won the spin wars on such issues as health care, child care, education, the environment, tobacco, and even taxes, but the Republicans dominate the drug war. The GOP's plan for total victory hinges on deterring demand, suppressing supply, and tracking the financial dealings of well-heeled drug dealers.

## Balance Sheet

By Rick Henderson

### ASSETS

- ▲ **Nature's Course?** Hopeful medical news has bio-Luddites on the run. The massive popularity of Viagra shows that men no longer consider impotence a "natural" condition they must accept. And the tumor-shrinking cancer treatment discovered by Boston physician Judah Folkman suggests that biotech may conquer the disease we fear most.
- ▲ **Welfare Relief.** North Carolinians resoundingly say no to tax handouts for Major League Baseball. (See "Squeeze Play," page 74.) More than 60 percent of voters in Forsyth and Guilford Counties reject an initiative to raise taxes for a \$210 million stadium intended to lure the struggling Minnesota Twins to the Piedmont Triad.
- ▲ **Cash Rebates.** The Congressional Budget Office estimates the 1998 budget surplus will be \$68 billion, up from a projected \$5 billion in April. Perennial presidential hopeful Jack Kemp suggests several simple, nondistortionary ways to give that money back, including: Repeal the Bush/Clinton tax hikes; increase the standard deduction for individual income taxes; and raise the income people can earn before they're kicked from the 15 percent into the 28 percent tax bracket.
- ▲ **Honor Roll.** Gov. Pete Wilson signs a bill jump-starting California's charter schools. (See "Class Acts," April.) The bill will increase the number of charters from 100 to 250 this fall, adding up to 100 additional charter schools each succeeding year. It also lets parents or teachers petition to convert existing public schools into charter facilities.



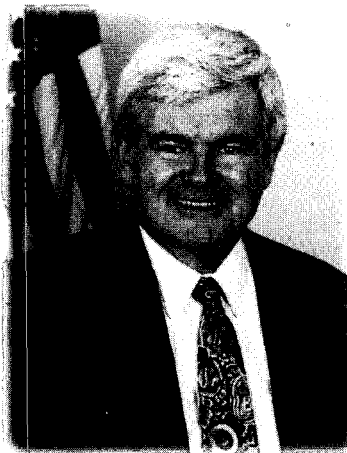
To reduce demand, Rep. Rob Portman (R-Ohio) proposes "The Drug-Free Congressional Leadership Resolution," "The Drug-Free Communities Act," and "The Drug-Free Workplaces Act." The three bills would double federal spending for local drug enforcement and pro-

vide federal money for "small and medium size businesses to implement drug-free workplace programs."

To attack the supply of drugs, "The Drug-Free Border Act" would double the Border Patrol by 2002, and "The Life-In-Prison for Speed Trafficking Act" would increase penalties for selling methamphetamine.

To keep tabs on drug kingpins, "The Drug-Free Money Laundering Act of 1998" would further erode the financial privacy of law-abiding Americans by granting federal law enforcement officials increased access to domestic and off-shore bank accounts.

Finally, Rep. Mike Pappas (R-N.J.) has taken a bold step by introducing "The Drug-Free Youth Resolution,"

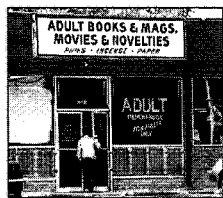


▼ **Safe Harbors?** While you contemplate summer vacation, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration works overtime. OSHA wants to require every convenience store to install bullet-proof glass and have at least two clerks on the clock during late shifts. It also plans to make contractors increase the number of porta-potties on construction sites.

▼ **Silicon Ceiling.** Asserting that lightly regulated high-tech companies treat women more shabbily than men, Rep. Connie Morella (R-Md.), chair of the House technology subcommittee, calls for a federal Commission on Women in Science, Engineering, and Technology Development. *Science* says the commission could call for new, gender-based regulations for tech firms.

▼ **Pig Feed.** House Speaker Newt Gingrich personally guarantees a corporate welfare hog stays at the tax trough. Gingrich restores the \$600 million annual ethanol subsidy through 2007. Most of the money goes to Archer Daniels Midland, a bipartisan source of campaign cash.

▼ **Dixie Dregs.** Alabama's legislature unanimously enacts the nation's toughest restrictions on adult entertainment. One provision would designate any store that sells, rents, or distributes materials that depict nudity an "adult" business subject to advertising and promotional restrictions. Cinemas may not be able to post billboards for *Titanic*; bookstores may have to keep collections of Michaelangelo's work under the counter; and newsstands may have to shrinkwrap the June issue of *REASON*.



LIABILITIES

which would put the U.S. House of Representatives on record as opposing "the distribution, sale, and use of illegal drugs by our children."

So how will the Republicans know when they've won? When they've reduced "nationwide drug use by more than half by 2002," Gingrich wrote.

## Profs' Proposals

By Nick Gillespie

With over 30,000 members, the Modern Language Association is one of the largest academic organizations in the world, filling its ranks primarily with professors of literature working at U.S. colleges and universities. Founded in 1883 to promote "the study and teaching

of language and literature," the MLA interprets that charter broadly, as can be seen from the resolutions being considered by the group's membership. For a resolution to be put to a vote, a member need only gather between 10 and 25 signatures from active members (depending on the time of year); in recent years, says an MLA official, total ballots cast have usually numbered between 5,000 and 10,000, depending on the "interest level" of the members.

Members will vote on four resolutions this spring including one that states "Whereas higher education seeks to promote a vital intellectual community that represents diverse points of view and diverse experiences... Be it resolved that members of

the Modern Language Association support the inclusion of disability as a value in academic hiring."

"Whereas, despite a falling crime rate," states another of the resolutions, "a racially structured system of forced labor is developing in the U.S. prison system; inmates perform 'outsourced' work often at less than the minimum wage; impoverished white working-class rural areas become economically dependent upon the incarcerations of largely African American, Latino, and Native American populations; and this development is justified by a rhetoric of 'getting tough on crime,' although in reality it reveals that the capitalist system cannot provide full employment at a living wage and that it promotes a politics of divide and conquer.... Whereas a recent Rand study shows that more money will soon be spent nationally on prisons than on education, and the *New York Times* (28 Sep. 1997) reports that in California almost the exact amount of funding lost to higher education (1990-97) has been expended on prisons; and...workfare has driven thousands of students—disproportionately students of color and single parents—out of bachelor's degree programs and into dead-ended, poorly compensated employment; and Whereas standardized tests contribute to racial segregation by frequently tracking low-income students, disproportionately of color, into vocational programs and community colleges and higher income students, predominantly white, into 'flagship' campuses; Be it resolved that the MLA urge its members to (1) speak out against the diversion of public funds ►

## SOURCES

**"There is no specific 'Crack Baby' syndrome....Exposing fetuses to cocaine may or may not have lasting consequences, but current research demonstrates that by the time the child reaches age five, the effect of the disastrous social situation that [the children of] many crack cocaine users share with other economically deprived children washes out any measurable effect of the cocaine itself on [his] school performance."**

—"What Happened to the 'Crack Babies'?", by Gary A. Emmett, in the February 1998 *Drug Policy Analysis Bulletin*. Edited by UCLA's Mark A.R. Kleiman, the newsletter features moderate drug policy scholars who are willing to go where the data lead. The February issue also includes articles distinguishing seven different versions of the "gateway drug" hypothesis and discussing prohibition's disproportionate impact on the poor. Back issues of the bulletin, published by the Federation of American Scientists, are available at [www.fas.org/drugs](http://www.fas.org/drugs).

Fedstats at [www.fedstats.gov](http://www.fedstats.gov) offers one-stop shopping for government statistics; includes links and compilations to dozens of federal sites and databases.

Order without design marks not only the economic and cultural marketplace but also many other real-life phenomena, to the increasing fascination of natural and social scientists. The StarLogo programmable modeling environment, based on the Logo programming language, is an MIT product "for exploring the workings of decentralized systems—systems that are organized without an organizer, coordinated without a coordinator," including "bird flocks, traffic jams, ant colonies, and market economies." It runs on Macintosh computers and can be downloaded at [www.media.mit.edu/~starlogo](http://www.media.mit.edu/~starlogo).