Vice President Gore, Congressional members awarded Freedom of Information Day Awards

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) -- Vice President Albert Gore, Jr., Senators Wendell Ford (D-Ky.) and Ted Stevens (R-Alaska) and Representatives Charlie Rose (D-N.C.) and Bill Thomas (R-Calif.) have been named recipients of the 1993 James Madison Awards sponsored by the Coalition on Government Information. The announcement was made today during an award ceremony in the First Amendment Lounge of the National Press Club.

The coalition, founded by the American Library Association (ALA), presented the awards on Freedom of Information Day, March 16, which marks the birthday of fourth President James Madison, who said: "Knowledge will forever govern ignorance and a people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power knowledge gives."

The annual awards honor those who have championed, protected and promoted public access to government information and the public's right to know.

"On Freedom of Information Day, members of the ALA and other concerned organizations urge that we take time to reflect on the most precious of our freedoms -- the right to know -- and to be vigilant in protecting it," said ALA President Marilyn Miller. "The legislators we honor today have been leaders in the applications of technology to make it easier for the American people to use the government information their tax dollars have paid for."
Vice President Gore, Congressional members awarded Freedom of Information Day Awards -- add one

Vice President Gore, Senators Ford and Stevens and Congressmen Rose and Thomas received the award for their leadership in promoting public access to electronic government information. They are being recognized for their support of legislation to provide the public with access to online government information through an "electronic gateway" at the Government Printing Office.

While a member of the Senate, Vice President Gore sponsored the 1992 Gateway to Government proposal which encouraged public and library access to federal databases using such technological highways as the Internet/National Research and Education Network (NREN). He also authored the High Performance Computing Act which established the NREN and provided the infrastructure for an electronic networked world of information resources.

The recently-announced President Bill Clinton/Gore technology initiative proposes new pilot projects to connect schools, libraries and nonprofit organizations to the Internet/NREN and to promote electronic dissemination of federal information.

Senators Ford and Stevens and Congressmen Rose and Thomas worked last year to pass the GPO WINDO/Gateway Access bill to establish a single access point from which users could connect to a wide range of federal databases. They are sponsoring similar legislation this session. The Congressmen have supported increased funding for public access to government information through the Depository Library Program, pilot projects to test the feasibility of disseminating electronic government information through depository libraries and electronic publication of the Congressional Record and the Federal Register.

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Vice President Gore, Congressional members awarded Freedom of Information Day Awards -- add two

Senator Ford, chair of the Joint Committee on Printing and the Senate Rules Committee, has championed the public's right to know for many years.

Rep. Rose, chair of the House Administrative Committee, vice chair of the Joint Committee on Printing and Chair of the Joint Committee on the Library of Congress, was the initial sponsor of the GPO WINDO bill.

Senator Stevens, a member of the Senate Rules Committee and the Joint Committee on Printing, is concerned about how technology can be used to overcome barriers of distance to allow citizens of the United States -- and Alaska -- to gain timely access to government information.

Rep. Thomas, a key member of the House Administration Committee, was instrumental in securing House passage last year of a bill that would have opened online access of government information through the Government Printing Office.

"Ensuring that the public has a right to know in an electronic age is a great challenge facing the federal government," said Nancy Kranich, chair of the Coalition on Government Information and member of the ALA. "I am pleased that we have several champions in Congress and the White House who recognize that the government has an affirmative obligation to make federal information available to the public regardless of format and ability to pay."

The Coalition on Government Information is made up of nearly 50 organizations committed to ensuring equal and ready access to government information. Membership in the Coalition includes organizations with a wide range of interests ranging from law and medicine, science and consumer rights to journalism, housing and library and information services.

Among the members are the American Association for the Advancement of Science, American Society of Journalists and Authors, National Association of Counties, National Consumers League, National Security Archive and the American Physical Society.

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Vice President Gore, Congressional members awarded Freedom of Information Day Awards -- add three


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