



Amy Toensing for The New York Times

William Summerfield, an actor, received feedback from Lynn Borkon, producer of an orientation video on a Web site for freshman Representatives. Newly

elected members of the House will have an orientation program supplemented by a wealth of computer resources in Washington.

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FOUR DOLLARS

Late National Edition
Midwest: Cold, Great Lakes, cloudy, snow showers and squalls. Ohio Valley, a few snow showers or flurries. Plains, partly to mostly cloudy. Weather map appear on page 23.

THE WELCOME

New House Members Get On-Line Aid

By ERIC SCHMITT

When the more than 70 newly elected House members arrive in Washington this week, a cyber Welcome Wagon will be waiting to help them become familiar with their new jobs.

For the first time, each freshman Representative will receive an on-line primer on how to cope with the initial days of a new Congress; a list of how-to's on setting up a Congressional office, ordering furniture and stationery and boning up on parliamentary procedures.

House techno-wizards have even photographed the labyrinthine corridors beneath the Capitol and House office buildings and put the pictures on computer home pages, giving the lawmakers a virtual reality subterranean tour and helping them avoid becoming lost on the way to that important first committee meeting.

The goal of House administrators is to translate the venerable informal culture of how Capitol Hill works into an easy-to-follow on-line check list to help the newcomers and maybe allow them to serve their constituents more efficiently.

"The freshmen in 1997 will be a little better prepared than in the past," said Richard Shapiro, executive director of the Congressional

A high-tech Welcome Wagon for the election winners.

Management Foundation, an organization that helps teach new lawmakers. "It may not be visible in significant ways. But a freshman Congressman should be in position by January to answer mail and deal with case-work requests. In the past that could have taken until March."

The 15 new Senators will also have access to information on the Internet. But a comprehensive on-line orientation is probably two years away, Congressional aides said.

The welcome is just one of several changes awaiting at least 71 House Republican and Democratic freshmen — the fate of potentially several more hinges on the outcomes of undecided races and runoffs — who will arrive in Washington in advance of their swearings-in on Jan. 7.

Freshman orientation has been moved up three weeks, to begin on Thursday, mainly to prepare the leg-

islators faster, said Lauren Sims, a spokeswoman for Speaker Newt Gingrich of Georgia.

The House Oversight Committee is providing each freshman with a laptop computer loaded with special House home pages and access to the World Wide Web, so the freshmen can take the machines home over the holidays and study before the 105th Congress officially starts.

Much of the information on the home pages has been available from published manuals and first-day handouts or from longtime aides. But the new computer format aims to appeal to incoming members' who are more likely to have used computers than previous freshman classes.

"That, of course, is the big assumption," Mr. Shapiro said. "Will these new members, and their aides, use the new technology?"

House administrators are betting that they will. More than half the members of the 104th Congress had home pages, and the House, in particular, is pushing ahead with new computer systems for internal use and with links to the Internet.

Much of the new on-line information is mundane but essential. "It's things like, who do you call to get a pencil or have a computer hooked up in your office?" said Ben Lusby, a top aide to the Chief Administrative Officer of the House, who is overseeing the new effort.

With a few taps on their keyboards, lawmakers or their aides will be able to find out how to obtain passports, where the nearest postage stamp counters are or how to set up office payrolls. Some information bases like the Congressional Research Service's home page are already in operation and only had to be organized with the new sites.

Members interested in holding receptions can call up an inventory of Capitol banquet rooms. The Web site will show the room's dimensions, its capacity, when it was last renovated and even a picture of the space.

Lawmakers can review wares for sale in the House Gift Shop from their computers: House of Representatives trivets, \$21 each, and House golf balls, \$5.82 for a package of three.

The sites include restaurant and real estate listings in the Washington region and an employment board for spouses and other family members who are looking for jobs.

And if lawmakers and their aides still run into problems — or get cold feet about using the new technology — the House has assigned each legislator a troubleshooter as a guide through the stumbling blocks of the first few months in office.

"We're trying," Mr. Lusby said, "to do everything we can to make theirs an easy transition from successful candidate to successful member."