



# Jesse White

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## SECRETARY OF STATE

# NEWS

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### **WHITE ANNOUNCES NEW BILL AND MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION GRANTS FOR MANY ILLINOIS PUBLIC LIBRARIES**

SPRINGFIELD—Secretary of State and State Librarian Jesse White has announced that the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is returning to Illinois with a new grant program that will benefit many public libraries.

White said the “Opportunity Online” hardware grant program will assist libraries and their communities in developing long-term capacity for free computer and Internet access in public libraries. As many as 400 public libraries may be eligible to receive a grant. The Illinois State Library will administer the program in Illinois. In 2003, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation provided grants that allowed more than 400 Illinois public libraries in low-income areas to install public access computers for patrons.

“The initial Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation grants our libraries received five years ago did so much to help bridge the ‘digital divide’ and allow thousands of library patrons to have email, Internet access and other technology tools that they could not have obtained anywhere else,” White said. “These new grants will help libraries obtain the hardware to sustain high-quality technology services for years to come. The state of Illinois is extremely grateful to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for their generosity and vision in recognizing how important public access computing is to our public libraries and their patrons.”

The State Library recently notified many public libraries that they might be eligible to obtain one of the new hardware grants. The Gates Foundation will make the eligibility determination for each participating library and announce what libraries are eligible next spring. Libraries must meet two criteria to receive funding: economic need and a poverty based need for public access computers.

Public libraries that have demonstrated economic need must also show that their computer and Internet services are not vulnerable to becoming obsolete. Libraries do this by running a TechAtlas computer inventory of their public access computers to assess their hardware vulnerability. Among other benefits, participating libraries will receive funds to add or replace public computer workstations, contingent upon local funds being secured to match the grant. The minimum grant is for two public access computers.

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