

SMALL BUSINESS BROADBAND AND EMERGING INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ENHANCEMENT ACT OF 2011.

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr/Madam President, I come to the Senate floor today to discuss an issue of great importance to small businesses, the drivers of this nation's economy.

In the same way the interstate highway system and the railroads revolutionized transport, connecting main streets across the nation to facilitate the stream of commerce; broadband technology has forever changed the relationship between small businesses and the customers that they serve. This is especially true for rural small businesses, which now have direct access to new customers in major cities across the globe through broadband connectivity. Over 95 percent of the world's customers are located outside of our borders, and in the United States alone, an estimated 60 million Americans use the Internet on a daily basis. With the click of a mouse, they now have access to goods and services from Main Streets around the world. With every click, our nation's small businesses are growing, and helping to create jobs as well as further innovate within the U.S. economy.

Unfortunately, too many of our small businesses are missing out on these opportunities for growth. Due to a combination of factors that range from a lack of computer literacy to the inability to access high speed or broadband internet services, many entrepreneurs have yet to capitalize on the resources available to them via the internet. In fact, it is estimated that fewer than 24 percent of our nation's small businesses routinely use e-commerce applications to sell their products online. As a result, they are missing out on opportunities to expand to new markets or find new customers. We must do more to help our nation's small businesses utilize advanced technologies like broadband so that they can best compete in the global marketplace.

As Chair of the Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, I have made increasing the ability of small businesses to access high-speed broadband internet a top priority. That is why today, I along with my distinguished colleague on the Small Business Committee, former Chairman John Kerry, am introducing the *Small Business Broadband and Emerging Information Technology Enhancement Act of 2011*. This critical piece of legislation will help to level the playing field for our entrepreneurs and small businesses by implementing key findings from the Federal Communications Commission's 2010 National Broadband Plan.

More specifically, this legislation calls on the Small Business Administration to take a lead role in helping our small businesses to access broadband and other advanced technologies. To accomplish this, the legislation requires the SBA to make three, key improvements to its core programs. First, it calls on the agency to create a Broadband and Emerging Information Technology Coordinator to facilitate the development of small business broadband initiatives within the agency, and also to act as a liaison with other federal agencies. Second, the legislation requires SBA resource partners, such as Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs), to

provide technical assistance related to both accessing and utilizing broadband and emerging information technology. Finally, the bill will improve the SBA's popular 7(a) and microloan programs by allowing borrowers to use the proceeds of their loans to finance the purchase of broadband services, equipment or other emerging technologies. Making these three simple changes will allow more of our small businesses to not only access previously untapped customers and markets; it will also allow them to become more competitive with their foreign counterparts, fostering innovation and job creation.

I have heard from a number of my Committee members and I know how important this issue is to them, and I am proud to introduce this legislation for the second consecutive Congress. I look forward to working with them in the coming months to get this legislation to the President's desk.

Thank you. I ask that my statement and a copy of the legislation appear in the Record.