

of the most sophisticated users of IT, are 8% of our economy; from 1995 to 1998 they contributed 35% of our economic growth. There are also some indications that IT is now improving productivity among companies that only use IT.

But here is the real point. If we are going to sustain this productivity and economic growth, we have to spread sophisticated uses of information technology like e-commerce beyond the high tech sector and companies like Cisco Systems and into every corner of the economy, including small businesses. Back in the 1980's, we used to debate if it mattered if we made money selling "potato chips or computer chips." But here is the real difference: consuming a lot of potato chips isn't good for you; consuming a lot of computer chips is.

I emphasize this because too often our discussions of government policy, technology, and economic growth dwell on the invention and sale of new technologies, but shortchange the all important topic of their use. Extension programs, like the electronic commerce extension program in my bill, are policy aimed at precisely spreading the use of more productive technology by small businesses.

With that in mind, the e-commerce revolution creates both opportunities and challenges for small businesses. On the one hand, it will open new markets to them. On the web, the garage shop can look as good as IBM. On the other hand, the high fixed costs, low marginal costs, and technical sophistication that can sometimes characterize e-commerce, when coupled with a good brand name, may allow larger, more established e-commerce firms to quickly move from market to market. Amazon.com has done such a wonderful job of making a huge variety of books widely available that it's been able to expand to CDs, to toys, to electronics, to auctions. Moreover, firms in more rural areas have suddenly found sophisticated, low cost, previously distant businesses entering their market, and competing with them. Thus, there is considerable risk that many small businesses will be left behind in the shift to e-commerce. That would not be good for them, nor for the rest of us, because we all benefit when everyone is more productive and everyone competes.

The root of this problem is the fact that many small firms have a hard time identifying and adopting new technology. They are hard working, but they just don't have the time, people, or money to understand all the different technologies they might use. And, they often don't even know where to turn to for help. Thus, while small firms are very flexible, they can be slow to adopt new technology, because they don't know which to use or what to do about it. That is why we have extension programs. Extension programs give small businesses low cost, impartial advice on what technologies are out there and how to use them.

What might an e-commerce extension program do? Imagine you're a small speciality foods retailer in rural New Mexico and you see e-commerce as a way to reach more customers. But your specialty is chiles, not computers; imagine all the questions you would have. How do I sell over the web? Can I buy supplies that way too? How do I keep hackers out of my system? What privacy policies should I follow? How do I use encryption to collect credit card numbers and guarantee customers that I'm who I am? Can I electronically integrate my sales orders with instructions to shippers like Federal Express? Should I band together with other local producers to form a chile cybermall? What servers, software, and telecommunications will I need and how much will it cost? Your local e-commerce extension center would answer those questions for you. And, you could trust their advice, because you would know they were impartial and had no interest in selling you a particular product.

This bill will lead to the creation of a high quality, nationwide network of non-profit organizations providing that kind of advice, analogous to the Manufacturing Extension Program, or MEP, network NIST runs today, but with a focus on e-commerce and on firms beyond manufacturers. MEP demonstrates that NIST could do this new job well.

Similarly, this bill is modeled on the MEP authorization. It retains the key features of MEP: a network of centers run by non-profits; strict merit selection; cost sharing; and periodic independent review of each center. In addition, it emphasizes serving small businesses in rural or more isolated areas, so that those businesses can get a leg up on e-commerce too. In short, this legislation takes an approach that has already been proven to work.

Practically speaking, if this bill becomes law, I assume NIST would begin by leveraging their MEP management expertise to start a few e-commerce extension centers and then gradually build out a network separate from MEP. I also want to note that this is a new, separate authorization for an e-commerce extension program because it will have a different focus than MEP and because I do not want it to displace MEP in any way.

Mr. President, I hope my colleagues will join me in supporting this important, timely, and practical piece of legislation. Just as a strong agricultural sector called for an agricultural extension service, and a strong industrial sector called for manufacturing extension, our shift to an information economy calls for electronic commerce extension.

THE VERY BAD DEBT BOXSCORE

Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, at the close of business yesterday, Wednesday, August 4, 1999, the Federal debt stood at \$5,615,253,056,263.06 (Five tril-

lion, six hundred fifteen billion, two hundred fifty-three million, fifty-six thousand, two hundred sixty-three dollars and six cents).

One year ago, August 4, 1998, the Federal debt stood at \$5,511,741,000,000 (Five trillion, five hundred eleven billion, seven hundred forty-one million).

Five years ago, August 4, 1994, the Federal debt stood at \$4,643,455,000,000 (Four trillion, six hundred forty-three billion, four hundred fifty-five million).

Ten years ago, August 4, 1989, the Federal debt stood at \$2,811,629,000,000 (Two trillion, eight hundred eleven billion, six hundred twenty-nine million) which reflects a doubling of the debt—an increase of almost \$3 trillion—\$2,803,624,056,263.06 (Two trillion, eight hundred three billion, six hundred twenty-four million, fifty-six thousand, two hundred sixty-three dollars and six cents) during the past 10 years.

ADVANCEMENT IN PEDIATRIC AUTISM RESEARCH ACT

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I welcome the opportunity to join Senator GORTON and many other distinguished colleagues as a sponsor of the Advancement in Pediatric Autism Research Act. Autism is a heartbreaking disorder that strikes at the core of family relationships. We need to do all we can to understand the causes of autism in order to learn how to treat this tragic condition more effectively, and ultimately to prevent it. I want to commend Senator GORTON, the Cure Autism Now Foundation, and the many organizations and families in Massachusetts for their impressive leadership in dealing with this important cause of disability in children. In this age of such extraordinary progress on preventing, treating and curing so many other serious and debilitating illnesses, we cannot afford to miss this unique opportunity for progress against autism as well.

Clearly, we can do more to provide support for children and families who face the tragedy of autism. At the same time, I am concerned about certain provisions in the proposed legislation which could inadvertently cause harm to children with autism and to our system of funding research.

One provision allows use of NIH funds for health care and other services that "will facilitate the participation" in research. We must be clear that research dollars should be used only to cover costs that are required to carry out research. Insurance providers should never be able to use participation in research as an excuse to avoid paying for medically necessary health care. In addition, we must be especially careful to protect vulnerable children and families from situations in which financial incentives could affect decisions about participation in research.

I am confident that we can work together to address such issues as the bill moves through Congress. I look forward to working with my colleagues,