Meanwhile, we do have these other States—for example, Kentucky, Alabama, and others—that have attempted to tax the transport of high-speed broadband Internet access.

In summary, the fact is, by allowing the moratorium to expire, the Senate has opened the door for States and localities to begin imposing regressive taxes on Internet access services. By taxing Internet access, States and localities are actually contributing to the economic digital divide. The more expensive we allow the State and local tax commissars to make Internet access, the less likely people are to be able to buy these advanced services, such as high-speed broadband connections. It makes it harder for them to purchase Internet protocol software, wireless fidelity, or WiFi devices, or many other multimedia applications. These applications are all made less likely to be affordable for many millions of Americans.

In a time when technology and the Internet have grown into improving almost every aspect of our daily lives, and where access to the Internet is a necessity for Americans, it just seems to me that imposing new taxes on access or levying taxes that discriminate against the Internet as a form of commerce will just never be sound policy for our country.

As a tool, what is great about the Internet is it breaks down economic and educational barriers, leveling the playing field for millions of Americans.

You will also hear some say: Let's just have a short extension. Let's have a short extension. We do not need to make it permanent. Well, going back to the business model and understanding how businesses have to invest, they like to see some certainty. If you have a short moratorium, there is less certainty, there is less predictability for investment, therefore, fewer job opportunities, and less likelihood that broadband or high speed will get out to the smaller towns and communities in rural areas.

More than ever before, with our Nation's economy finally moving forward in the right direction, the people of this country need security with regard to their financial future. Any additional tax burdens on the Internet will mean additional costs many Americans cannot afford, forcing the poorest in our society to reduce or even forego the use of the Internet as a tool for commerce, education, information, exploration, and individual responsibility and opportunity.

In a society—indeed, a world—where the quality of life and an individual's opportunity for prosperity are directly related proportionately to one's access to and the acquisition of knowledge, we as a Senate must choose to close this economic digital divide rather than exacerbate it by allowing States and localities to further tax the Internet.

I call on my colleagues to join me in supporting S. 150, the Internet Tax Nondiscrimination Act, which permanently extends the Internet moratorium on access, multiple, and discriminatory taxes.

In sum, I ask my colleagues to be leaders, leaders who stand strong for individual freedom and stand strong for opportunities for all Americans.

MODERN TELECOMMUNICATIONS SERVICES

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, last week the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation held a hearing on Universal Service, taking testimony from Michael Powell, the Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission. I want to commend the committee for examining issues affecting the preservation and advancement of universal service. This is a discussion that is of great interest to me and great importance to my State.

We have long sought to ensure that telephone service is available in rural America, through direct infrastructure programs like those of the Rural Utilities Service, through internal telephone company cross-subsidies and, more recently, through the universal service fund. The low population density in so much of our Nation makes some assistance necessary; the costs of wiring such areas is simply too high. Phone service is simply too important to our social fabric to ignore this challenge. We must keep it affordable for all Americans. That is why we need universal service.

Access to modern telecommunications services is vital to the economy of my home State of South Dakota and in rural areas throughout the Nation. It helps new businesses develop, even if they are far away from their customers or clients. Telecommuting is already allowing many of my constituents to remain in, or move back to, their home towns rather than having to leave in search of employment. That is a trend we need to encourage and build upon. But it is only possible if rural America has a modern telecommunications infrastructure.

Universal service is vital to South Dakota. Yet universal service is not just about rural America. It also supports telephone service for low-income individuals throughout the country, and telecommunications services and Internet access in our schools and libraries. I believe it is important that the country remain committed to these goals and the principle of universal service.

Despite its importance, the future of universal service is uncertain. Some question the long-term viability of the current structure, as its funding base of interstate telephone revenue declines. I believe that we will need to reevaluate the universal service structure and consider comprehensive legislation to ensure that the program remains effective and affordable in the future. I am pleased that the Commerce Committee has begun that process.

The committee includes the Senators who have been the most engaged on this front. I want to commend Senator BURNS for his leadership on the issue, along with Senator DORGAN, Senator STEVENS, Chairman MCCAIN, and Ranking Member HOLLINGS. I look forward to working with them to keep the universal service system strong and effective.

Senator GORDON SMITH has introduced legislation that addresses an important component of universal service, high cost funding for nonrural carriers. Today, I am cosponsoring that legislation, S. 1380, the Rural Universal Service Equity Act of 2003, which seeks to more equitably distribute that portion of universal service.

Today, telephone companies in only eight States receive all of these funds. Nonrural carriers in the rest of the country, even those in rural States like South Dakota, receive nothing. We should reevaluate that distribution as part of universal service reform.

I fully appreciate that S. 1380 only addresses one small, albeit significant, portion of Universal Service. It is important to focus attention on the need to understand and address it.

That point made, I favor reforming the high cost support program for nonrural companies within the context of reform of the entire system. Telephone service has developed in different ways throughout the country, with service provided to various degrees by the Regional Bell Operating Companies, independent phone companies, cooperatives, wireless, and competitive carriers. We should keep that in mind when we consider alternative approaches and look at the system as a whole, not just focus on each individual component of universal service separately.

When we do consider universal service legislation, I think the approach taken by S. 1380 shifting the basis of support for nonrural companies to costs at the wire center level, rather than statewide costs deserves consideration as part of a broader package. Using statewide costs makes it difficult for a company that serves a relatively large city to obtain support for rural areas that it serves in the same State. That can limit its ability to invest in and modernize its rural infrastructure.

I do want to raise a specific concern about S. 1380. In reallocating some universal service funding, the bill shifts funds around, creating winners and losers. I am worried that this approach pits carriers and regions against each other, rather than uniting in a common goal of protecting universal service and the people who depend upon it for affordable telephone service in rural and low-income communities throughout the country. We can and should fix that problem. That is another reason why I think the bill should be considered within the context of broader universal service reform.

I want to note a special problem with one potential loser under the bill. It shifts some funds that are currently allocated to Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico is not represented in this body. Without an advocate of its own to force attention to the Commonwealth's concerns, it is important that we all carefully consider the impact legislation can have upon Puerto Rico and its residents. When we address universal service, we should not take steps that might inadvertently reduce the availability and affordability of telephone and telecommunications services to the residents of Puerto Rico.

In conclusion, I want to again thank the Commerce Committee for focusing greater attention on the future of universal service. I look forward to working with Senators on the committee and others concerned about universal service for rural residents, low-income consumers and our schools and libraries to lay the groundwork for legislation to reform and strengthen the universal service system.

HEALTHY FORESTS

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, last week, we passed an amended version of H.R. 1904, the Healthy Forests Act.

While this bill is not everything I hoped it would be, it is an improvement over what was proposed by the President and passed by the House. The devastating fires in California and throughout the West over the past few years have added great urgency to the need to remove dangerous fuel loads from many of our forests. We need to treat those hazards now, and this bill is really the only relevant legislation that can pass Congress and be signed into law by the President this year. That is why I voted for the bill on final passage.

During the floor debate, I offered an amendment to strengthen the underlying bill's old-growth protections and I also voted for a number of other amendments. It is unfortunate that these amendments were not accepted because they would have reassured a greater portion of our citizens of the real intent of the legislation and would have made it more effective.

We don't have the funding we need to remove all the dangerous fuel loads in our forests. We should have made more funding available and ensured more resources were focused on the wildland urban interface that presents the greatest risk to property and to the lives of our firefighters and citizens.

While the underlying bill will increase authorization levels for fuel reduction activities, it does not guarantee this money will be made available. We should have passed Senator BINGAMAN's amendment that would have guaranteed the funding and stopped the raiding of fuel reduction accounts to pay for fire suppression.

Likewise, the Senate bill is an improvement over the House legislation in directing at least 50 percent of the work be conducted in the wildland urban interface, but we should have strengthened this directive by passing Senator BOXER's amendment that would have raised wildland/urban interface work to 70 percent.

Lastly, the underlying bill made an earnest attempt to provide some protection for old-growth stands in our national forests. Unfortunately, the bill leaves a couple of significant loopholes that, if abused by our forest managers, could threaten these ancient trees. That is why I offered an amendment to close these loopholes and better protect old-growth stands. Unfortunately, my amendment was defeated.

Now that the Senate has spoken on the overall bill, the House should take up this legislation and pass it unaltered. The President should drop his opposition to the increased spending associated in the bill and urge its quick passage by the House. The President's opposition to increased spending presents a real and tangible risk to every community looking to treat forests surrounding their homes, schools, and businesses.

If this bill is signed into law, the burden will shift to the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management to implement the programs in the most responsible and effective manner possible.

Again, they will need to focus on protecting communities. It will be unacceptable to treat forest stands far from human population while any community's wildland/urban interface remains untreated.

They need to focus on taking out of the forests the materials that truly threaten to generate catastrophic wildfires. We should not see large, fire resistant trees being removed from our forests under the guise of ''healthy forests.'' Any old-growth stands that are treated need to be treated in ways that protect their unique ecosystems.

Finally, in a fiscally responsible manner, the agencies need to maximize the positive economic influence these fuel reduction projects can have on our rural economies. This means not only hiring local workers and companies to conduct the work, but also looking for opportunities to use the resulting material for other economic enterprises.

The bill passed by the Senate has the potential to truly work in a manner nearly everyone can accept. Alteration by the House or poor implementation by the agencies will only threaten our wildfire endangered communities.

I am committed to making this legislation work and stand ready to assist the communities in Washington State protect their families and homes.

LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT ACT OF 2003

Mr. SMITH. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about the need for hate crimes legislation. On May 1, 2003, Senator KENNEDY and I introduced the Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Act, a bill that would add new categories to current hate crimes law, sending a signal that violence of any kind is unacceptable in our society.

On July 7 of last year, three gay friends were violently beaten by a 21-year-old man in Tampa, FL. The man later pled guilty to charges of aggravated battery and battery with evidence of prejudice. The victims were approached in a parking garage shortly after leaving a party at the Florida Aquarium, one event in a 6-day gay pride celebration. Sadly, one of the victims had to visit the dentist more than twenty times to replace teeth lost in the beating.

I believe that Government's first duty is to defend its citizens, to defend them against the harms that come out of hate. The Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Act is a symbol that can become substance. I believe that by passing this legislation and changing current law, we can change hearts and minds as well.

BREAST CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

Ms. SNOWE. Mr. President, I rise today to speak as we have just concluded Breast Cancer Awareness Month. During October, about 16,000 more women heard the news all women dread, ''You have breast cancer.'' That is over 190,000 women this year. Among women between 35 and 54 years of age, no disease claims more lives. In more personal terms, an American woman faces a one in nine chance of sitting down and hearing those words from her physician. At that moment everything changes.

We can be thankful that more women are surviving this diagnosis. Modern treatments and early detection are saving lives. Many of my colleagues have joined with me in supporting research into better diagnosis and treatment. Just last month, we learned of a new drug treatment which substantially reduced the recurrence of breast cancer. We have made great strides, and I am grateful to the many researchers who fight long hours battling this disease. And we sometimes forget the men and women who, while suffering the effects of breast cancer, have volunteered in these studies, at a time when they are already going through such a struggle. We owe all of them our gratitude for the strides we have made in fighting this disease.

Despite this progress, one in every five women diagnosed still will not survive breast cancer. Modern treatments are useless without a diagnosis. With early detection and treatment, death and injury can be so greatly reduced. I call on American women today to take the initiative. Many women have been taught to do self-exams, and while they can help, they are no substitute for a mammogram. I urge you now to ask your physician about a mammogram. Mammograms saves lives.

But maybe you have put it off: you can't miss work, or the kids have an