

**STATEMENT OF SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN ON THE INTRODUCTION OF  
THE COMMUNITY BROADBAND ACT OF 2005  
JUNE 23, 2005**

**MR. McCAIN.** Mr. President, I am pleased to join in sponsoring the Community Broadband Act of 2005. In the simplest of terms, this bill would ensure that any town, city, or county that wishes to offer high speed Internet services to its citizens can do so. The bill also would ensure fairness by requiring municipalities that offer high speed Internet services do so in compliance with all federal and state telecommunications laws and in a non-discriminatory manner.

This bill is needed if we are to meet President Bush's call for "universal, affordable access for broadband technology by the year 2007." When President Bush announced this nationwide goal in 2004, the country was ranked 10<sup>th</sup> in the world for high speed Internet penetration. Today, the country is ranked 16<sup>th</sup>. This is unacceptable for a country that should lead the world in technical innovation, economic development, and international competitiveness.

Many of the countries outpacing the United States in the deployment of high speed Internet services, including Canada, Japan, and South Korea, have successfully combined municipal systems with privately deployed networks to wire their countries. As a country, we cannot afford to cut off any successful strategy if we want to remain internationally competitive.

I recognize that our nation has a long and successful history of private investment in critical communications infrastructure. That history must be respected, protected, and continued. However, when private industry does not answer the call because of market failures or other obstacles, it is appropriate and even commendable, for the people acting through their local governments to improve their lives by investing in their own future. In many rural towns, the local government's high speed Internet offering may be its citizens only option to access the World Wide Web.

Despite this situation, a few incumbent providers of traditional telecommunications services have attempted to stop local government deployment of community high speed Internet services. The bill would do nothing to limit their ability to compete. In fact, the bill would provide them an incentive to enter more rural areas and deploy services in partnership with local governments. This partnership will not only reduce the costs to private firms, but also ensure wider deployment of rural services. Additionally, the bill would aid private providers by prohibiting a municipality when acting as both "regulator" and "competitor" from discriminating against competitors in favor of itself.

Several newspapers have endorsed the concept of allowing municipalities to choose whether to offer high speed Internet services. *USA Today* rightfully questioned in an editorial, "Why shouldn't citizens be able to use their own resources to help themselves?" *The Washington Post* editorialized that the offering of high speed Internet services by localities is, "... the sort of municipal experiment we hope will spread." The *San Jose Mercury News* stated that a ban on localities ability to offer such services is "bad for consumers, bad for technology and bad for America's hopes of catching up to other countries in broadband deployment." Finally, the

*Tampa Tribune* lectured Federal and State legislators, “don’ t prohibit local elected officials from providing a service their communities need.”

My home state of Arizona boasts the largest approved municipal broadband system in the United States, for example. The City of Tempe’s wireless system will serve all of the city’s forty square miles and a population of 159,000, including the campus of Arizona State University. Citizens will have Internet access from anywhere at any time, and police, fire, water and traffic services personnel will use the system to enhance their efficiency.

In addition to Tempe, several Native American tribal governments offer high speed Internet access services to their citizens. This bill would ensure that such offerings could continue to assist Indian country and their ability to connect to the Internet.

Mr. President, our country faces some real challenges. We need to find ways to use technology to help our citizens better compete. We need to help our businesses capitalize on their ingenuity so that they can become more internationally competitive. That is why we need to do all we can to eliminate barriers to competition and create incentives for the delivery of high speed Internet services for public suppliers of broadband services, private suppliers of broadband services, and public-private partnerships as well.

Mr. President, I hope my colleagues will join us in sponsoring the Community Broadband Act of 2005.