

# THE OPINION PAGE

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OUR OPINION

## Let's keep small businesses open

By Saxby Chambliss and Kent Conrad

After America recently celebrated National Small Business Week and the hardworking entrepreneurs who form the backbone of our economy, policymakers must do more than recognize the vital contributions of small businesses.



Conrad

Indeed, Congress must redouble its determination to support small business owners and the nearly 60 million workers they employ following a year in which “the pandemic resulted in the permanent closure of roughly 200,000 U.S. establishments above historical levels.”

One critical way those in Washington can help shore up a sector responsible for almost two out of every three new jobs in the United States each year is by fortifying a keystone of its success: domestic tech tools and digital platforms.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, these tools and platforms were certainly a beneficial asset that small businesses utilized to bring their products or services to a larger audience. Per a 2018 U.S. Chamber of Commerce study on the subject, for instance, “84 percent of small enterprises [used] at least one major digital platform to provide information to customers,” while “75 percent [used] tech platforms for sales.” That same year, the robust digital economy supported

8.8 million jobs and accounted for 9 percent of GDP or \$1.85 trillion.

Yet, during the lockdowns and ever-changing COVID-19 landscape, domestic tech products were swiftly elevated from a convenient feature to a critical lifeline for scores of small business owners. It didn't take longer than a couple of months into the crisis for nearly one-third of small businesses to report that, “without digital technology, they would have been forced to close all or part of their businesses.” In all, “U.S. consumers spent 32 percent more online in 2020 than in the year prior,” with “\$1 in every \$5 spent on retail purchases happening online” in the fourth quarter alone. Meanwhile, moving forward, “43 percent of small businesses plan on expanding their businesses through digital and related technology as a response to COVID-19, and 30 percent have already added ways to deliver products and services digitally.”

And so, while each one of the foregoing 200,000 business closures certainly amounts to a gut-wrenching consequence of COVID-19, it is important to remain mindful of the fact that this figure may well have doubled without the sales, degree of interconnectedness, safety measures, and customer engagement opportunities powered by domestic tech innovators. As the same report continues, “U.S. business failures have been fewer than some economists expected. One

earlier study estimated that more than 400,000 small businesses had closed in the first three months of the pandemic.”

Given the indispensable role of America's tech innovators in buoying both the small business sector and the economy at large, it is rather confounding that some in Congress are attempting to hamstring the industry's efforts with anti-competition legislation. The package of sweeping antitrust bills before the House would hamstring the engine of growth that is America's tech edge – and, as we've previously detailed, hasten China's hope of dominating the digital landscape.

As with the best interests of small business owners, the push is also at odds with the views of voters in 32 congressional frontline districts, who believe on an overwhelming basis that breaking up domestic tech companies is a misguided solution that does more harm than good. Per a new Ipsos survey released by the American Edge Project, “there is virtually no constituency for breaking up U.S. tech companies... just 14 percent support such a move, including just 15 percent of Democrats, 12 percent of independents, and 12 percent of Republicans.

Voters have therefore made it clear that they will support candidates who keep U.S. tech companies globally competitive and reject candidates who support aggressive counterproductive regulation – and one need

not possess the acumen of a political guru to appreciate the fact that policymakers who are proposing legislation to break up our country's tech companies should consequently expect political fallout.

What's more, voters in frontline districts also believe that “without the top American companies intact, the U.S. could be less economically competitive” and “there could be unintended negative consequences like greater threats to U.S. national security and the U.S. losing its economic competitive edge.” And as it relates to the deleterious impact on what is presently a healthy entrepreneurial ecosystem, voters are rightfully worried that “American small businesses that rely on tech platforms to reach consumers could be hurt because they could be forced to buy into additional platforms to reach the same number of consumers.”

We share these well-founded concerns and strongly encourage our former colleagues in Washington to defend the future of America's global tech leadership role. Harmful policies to break up tech companies would result in alarming downstream ramifications for small businesses – and, in turn, ought to be dismissed on a sound and swift basis.

Former U.S. Sens. Saxby Chambliss, R-Ga., and Kent Conrad, D-N.D., are co-chairs of the American Edge Project's Economic Advisory Board. They wrote this for InsideSources.com.

## Mail changes needed, but concerning

Herald editorial board

The United States Postal Service is making changes that will mean higher costs for consumers with reduced service and expectations.

Before this becomes a rant against the USPS and its recent decisions, it's important to acknowledge that something must change with the agency. A report by the federal General Accountability office showed that the USPS lost \$69 billion over an 11-year span, including losses of \$3.9 billion in 2018, \$8.9 billion in 2019 and \$9.2 billion in 2020.

Obviously, no company can continue to operate at a loss, and must make changes to accommodate for revenue declines if it is to exist in the future.

So, yes, the USPS is right to take drastic measures as it tries to work itself back toward solvency, however unlikely it is to achieve that basic business objective.

But its most recent changes are causing a wave of outrage. Postmaster General Louis DeJoy has ordered a slowdown of mail delivery and an increase in postage rates. Notably, the changes will have an effect on first-class mail, including things like bills and birthday cards. In recent decades, Americans could realistically expect their first-class mail to arrive within one to three days. It now might take up to five days.

The reason: More trucks will be used and fewer planes will be flown, and trucks are less expensive to operate.

Also, rates are going up – a few cents earlier this month on stamps and as much as \$1 on some packages.

The good news is that the USPS said more than half of first-class mail will still be delivered on time. Still, some are predicting trouble.

U.S. Rep. Brenda Lawrence, D-Mich., is among them. She is a 30-year veteran of the USPS and has “grave doubts” that the changes will allow the agency to provide reliable service. Worse, she believes the changes will hit hardest among the people who most need good mail service.

“Seniors, small business owners and families across the country rely on the Postal Service for the prompt delivery of life-saving medication, important documents and packages.”

For rural residents, the trouble could be compounded.

It's difficult to fault the USPS for making notable changes as it is tasked with fixing its colossal financial woes. The USPS is saying that approximately 60% of first-class mail and more than 90% of periodicals will be unaffected by the change, and also that standards for first-class mail within a local area will continue to be two days. And we would rather see potential slower delivery and, yes, even rate changes as long as Saturday delivery is uninterrupted.

However, rather than sudden and permanent changes, it would have been better to vet the strategy for a short period before diving in head first without knowing the full effect these decisions will have on customers – particularly the elderly and those who live in rural America.

## Urge EPA to reduce methane emissions

To the editor,

For the past 11 years I have advocated regulations to curb oil and gas pollution. Oil and gas pollution hurts communities like mine by degrading our air quality and contributing to man-made climate change.

During the Obama administration, I worked with frontline communities to push the Administration to significantly cut methane emissions (pollution) from the oil and gas industry. Our effort culminated with the 2016 “methane standards,” which provided protections for communities like mine (Fort Berthold), while also cutting harmful climate change causing methane emissions. Unfortunately, these regulations were short-lived. The Trump administration went on to work to roll-back all the regulations we worked hard to pass. Luckily, through the efforts of a national coalition, we kept most of the Trump roll-backs at bay, which brings me to today.

Now is the best opportunity to get protections in place that protect frontline communities like Fort Berthold from harmful oil and gas pollution. The Biden



administration has shown a commitment to making this happen, but the jury is still out on what they will do. In addition, many oil and gas companies like Exxon, BP and others are supportive of federal regulations curbing oil and gas pollution and showed that by opposing a 2020 attempt by the Trump administration to roll-back

the 2016 methane rules.

The EPA will be starting a rulemaking to strengthen the federal methane standards in the next few months. I, along with many others, will be calling upon the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to cut methane emissions by 65% below 2012 levels by 2025. I urge anyone in North Dako-

ta that is concerned about oil and gas pollution and the climate to join me in urging the EPA to pass a rule that cuts methane emissions (oil and gas pollution) by 65% below 2012 levels by 2025.

**Lisa DeVille**  
Fort Berthold Protectors of Water and Earth Rights (POWER)

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