

# Senate's new small business leader says SBA deserves Cabinet status

By Elizabeth Newell [enewell@govexec.com](mailto:enewell@govexec.com) December 17, 2008

Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La., newly appointed leader of the Senate Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee, on Wednesday urged President-elect Barack Obama to return the Small Business Administration to the Cabinet-level status it had under President Clinton.

Landrieu, who will replace Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., as leader of the committee, said in a Dec. 17 letter to Obama that SBA's "role was inadvisably diminished in recent years."

"If empowered by a return to proper rank, the SBA administrator can be a more effective champion for our small businesses," she wrote.

Landrieu, who also is a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, noted that both funding and staffing for SBA were cut dramatically during the Bush administration. Her letter cited outgoing chairman Kerry's calculation that the agency's funding was slashed by \$499.5 million, or 26 percent, since 2001.

"I am committed to working with your administration to end this downward trend," Landrieu told Obama. "For this agency to truly realize its mission -- particularly in supporting our small businesses through the current economic crisis -- SBA needs funding increases to carry out its lending, technical assistance and entrepreneurship programs."

As Landrieu began making appeals to the incoming president, small business advocates were turning their attention to her.

Molly Brogan, vice president for public affairs at the National Small Business Association, said the group feels "really good" about Landrieu assuming the leadership spot.

Brogan said Landrieu has shown a willingness to reach across the aisle, which is particularly important for the committee. "Kerry and [ranking member Olympia] Snowe made a firm commitment to that and we expect it to continue," Brogan said. "It's a bipartisan committee; it shapes how the committee operates and how they look at small business issues ... which are neither Democratic nor Republican."

Snowe noted similar expectations in her statement on Landrieu's appointment.

"I look forward to working with [her] in the committee's long-standing bipartisan tradition on the issues that matter most to our nation's small businesses, including promoting access to capital, establishing a meaningful women's contracting procurement program, and ensuring that enterprises are able to get back on their feet quickly following a natural disaster," the Maine senator said.

Snowe also has called for SBA to regain its Cabinet designation; she wrote a letter to Obama in early December with the request.

Landrieu laid out several other small business priorities in her letter to the president-elect, including a renewed focus on women-owned and minority businesses and on the role of small businesses in disaster recovery.

Margot Dorfman, chief executive officer of the U.S. Women's Chamber of Commerce, said she hoped Landrieu would take urgent action on a [women's procurement program](#) that has yet to be implemented more than seven years after its creation.

In the coming months, "hundreds of billions will be spent to energize the economy," Dorfman said. "Without the women's contracting program, women will continue to be left out."

Landrieu wrote that small businesses should be an important part of the economic stimulus package that will be considered in 2009, including ensuring sufficient contracting opportunities for infrastructure work.

"I believe that small businesses are the backbone of our economy," she wrote. "Now more than ever, we need an SBA that is truly a champion for America's small businesses and entrepreneurs. A strong SBA is essential to spurring our economic recovery and laying the groundwork for future prosperity."