

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2602

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March 15, 2012

Mr. Patrick Donahoe
Postmaster General
United States Postal Service
475 L'Enfant Plaza SW, Room 10022
Washington, DC 20260

Dear Postmaster General Donahoe,

I am writing you to follow up on the serious misgivings about proposed degradations of rural postal service, which I brought to your attention during our meeting last week. The changes that the Postal Service is proposing nationwide would disproportionately impact rural post offices and rural postal service. Thank you for agreeing to come to Montana to see these rural post offices and communities firsthand before making decisions which would dramatically reduce rural access to reliable postal services. I ask that you follow through on your commitment to visit Montana as soon as possible.

When we met last May I emphasized to you that Montana is a rural state. Montanans travel great distances just to visit their neighbors and run their farms and small businesses. Internet service and cellular phone service can be slow, unreliable, or unavailable in many parts of the state. The Postal Service indicated last July that one criterion it used to produce the list of 3,700 post offices nationwide to be studied for closure was that 90% of the post offices on the list were within 10 miles of another post office. I want to make sure that you understand that, in Montana, about 90% of the post offices being studied for closure are 10 miles or more from another post office. For example, if the Postal Service moves forward with its proposal to close the post offices in Boyes, Hammond, and Alzada, Montana there wouldn't be a post office between Broadus, Montana and Belle Fourche, South Dakota – a 95-mile stretch of US Route 212. At the same time, there are more than 50 post offices within 5 miles of Capitol Hill in Washington, DC.

I also remain very concerned that the closures of mail processing facilities nationwide will impact mail delivery standards for rural areas more than they will impact urban areas. Consolidating mail processing from facilities in Wolf Point, Miles City, and Havre, Montana, to the Billings, Montana facility not only means that those communities will lose critically important jobs, but also that the mail will now have to travel hundreds more miles to be processed. Mail from Plentywood, Montana will have to be driven over 350 miles, the equivalent of trucking mail from Washington, DC to Akron, Ohio or Hartford, Connecticut. As a simple result of those distances, rural mail will take longer to be processed and delivered than urban mail, falling short of meeting the standard for reliable, universal service that rural postal patrons deserve. The names of these Montana communities being studied for postal closures may just look like a line on a spreadsheet, but I hope that you will more clearly understand my concerns when you visit Montana and meet the folks who rely on their local post office.

While this is a difficult time for the Postal Service, I look forward to working with you to find long-term solutions that put the organization on a sustainable and competitive path without making changes that devastate rural communities. You mentioned in May that Montana was one of the few states that you had never been to and that you would like to visit sometime soon. I strongly urge you to visit Big Sky country and get a better understanding of our wide open spaces and rural communities before you make critical decisions affecting those families and small businesses. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Max Baucus". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Max Baucus
U.S. Senator