

Editorial from Congressman Bruce Braley: We must save our rural post offices

Written by Alexandra Krasov
Tuesday, 10 May 2011 14:19

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For hundreds of years, Americans have relied on their local post office as their main form of communication. Before Facebook, text messages, emails, and even cables, we had letters and packages, thanks to the postal service that delivered them to our door and our town. Postal workers and letter carriers were, and still are, the driving force to ensure that every American has access to consistent, reliable mail service. But now that service is in jeopardy as Washington politicians put more and more rural post offices on the chopping block.

In my own family, my wife's grandfather worked as a letter carrier. After serving in World War I, he came home and went to work as a letter carrier for the post office in Dubuque, Iowa. He was so well regarded and respected among his fellow letter carriers that he was presented with a gavel made out of timber from the White House. Now, that gavel – and the pride in one's work and community that it symbolizes – is a prized possession in our household.

During the Second World War, my father relied on the post office as his only form of communication with his family. Half a world away, he was only 18 when he served at Iwo Jima, but he was still able to send and receive letters from his mother and his loved ones. If it weren't for the hardworking employees of the United States Postal Service (USPS), these letters would never have made their way to him. And on Mother's Day in 1945, while he was recuperating on Guam, my father used the mail to send flowers to his mother in Iowa.

Today, many Iowans still rely on their local post office for their main form of communication. Whether you use the post office to write letters to loved ones far away or to send and receive packages, the post office continues to be a reliable and necessary service. And even in the age of electronic communication, small-town post offices serve as the heart of so many communities across Iowa. Going into your local post office is about more than just

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getting the mail – it's about catching up on the local gossip, checking in on friends and neighbors, and staying connected to your community. Our local post offices provide good-paying jobs to Iowans and they remain a strong presence in many small-town economies.

Unfortunately, in recent years we've witnessed the closing of many post offices across the state. In towns like Volga, St. Olaf and Arlington, post offices have already been closed. And now communities like Evansdale and New Hartford are facing closures of their own. Some of these closings have come so abruptly that communities don't even have a chance to make their protests heard or rally to save the post office.

But now, bending to political pressure, the USPS is planning to close even more small-town post offices. The USPS has proposed new regulations that would consolidate or close many small town post offices.

That's not the way we treat our neighbors in Iowa, and I will continue to make sure our rural communities have a voice when it comes to issues that affect them. That's why, just this week, I sent a letter to Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe expressing my grave concern over these new proposed regulations. I urged the Postmaster General to reconsider and not to issue new government regulations that would lead to the closing of even more rural post offices in our state. I strongly believe that these closings would lead to job loss and would cause many headaches for Iowans in rural communities who rely on their local post office. But I also know that if we stand together and make our voice heard, we can prevent these closings.

After the 2008 floods devastated parts of our district, the post office in Greene was in danger of closing. The post office was badly damaged because of the floods, but as the people of Greene rallied to repair and revive after the flooding, I was pleased to work with the community to help prevent this post office from closing. And just like I did then, I intend to keep fighting for all the post offices in my district.

With our growing national deficit, we certainly need to look at all the ways we can save money. But closing post offices that so many small towns and rural communities rely on will not solve the financial troubles of the USPS or the U.S. government – it will serve as a financial and moral blow to Iowans who can least afford it. The United States Postal Service has a long and proud history. Shuttering the post offices that serve as the hearts and souls of our small towns would be a devastating closing chapter.

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