

April 2, 2012

The Honorable Patrick Donahoe
Postmaster General and Chief Executive Officer
United States Postal Service
458 L'Enfant Plaza Southwest
Washington D.C., DC 20024-2114

Dear Postmaster General Donahoe,

It is my understanding that the U.S. Postal Service plans to suspend consolidations of mail processing facilities during peak election mailing season to avoid adverse effects on the November election. I am writing to express my concerns that this decision will have on primary elections around the country.

While this announcement is a welcome step, Montana and many other states will hold primary elections outside of that suspension period. With closures potentially beginning as soon as May 15, it is clear that primary voters in those states with summer primaries will be negatively affected by possible closures of mail processing facilities prior to that date. Indeed, at least two states hold primary elections just one week after the May 15 moratorium expires. I am concerned that any new system would not be efficient enough to address such a large volume of time-sensitive mail.

In Montana, which holds its primary on June 5, there are 634,593 registered voters, 47 percent of whom voted by absentee ballot in the 2010 federal general election. This shows growth of nearly 35 percent over the last ten years, a number that is sure to continue to increase.

I request that you delay all mail processing facility closures until the start of 2013. This delay would allow for the Montana Legislature – and legislatures in other states – to better determine if and how vote-by-mail laws should be changed to accommodate impending dramatic changes to the Postal Service.

If changes must be made which would affect Montana's primary election, I ask how you will ensure that you are protecting Montanans' right to vote? Will you consider hand-canceling ballots or providing ballot drop boxes at local post offices? Montana Secretary of State Linda McCulloch has made it a priority to make sure that all who want to vote, whether by mail or at the polls, are able to do so without undue burden. I strongly support her in this effort.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

(s) Jon Tester