

of a dirt road in Pennsylvania or Vermont or a wealthy CEO on Wall Street, people get their mail 6 days a week.

The American people, by the way, pay for this service at a cost far, far less than anywhere else in the industrialized world. But if Congress doesn't stop the Postmaster General from making these devastating cuts, it will drive more Americans away from the Postal Service and will lead to what we call a death spiral. The quality of service deteriorates, fewer people use the Postal Service, less revenue comes in, and the process continues to deteriorate.

Despite what some in this country have been hearing in the media, and despite what some in the Postal Service have been saying, the Postal Service is not going broke. We hear that every three months—people telling us the Postal Service is going broke. That is not true. The major reason the Postal Service is in bad financial shape today is because of a mandate signed into law by President George W. Bush in December 2006, during a lameduck session of Congress, that forces the Postal Service to prefund 75 years of future retiree health benefits over a 10-year period. This burden is unprecedented in any other government agency or any private sector company in the United States of America. It is a burden that every single year costs the Postal Service \$5.5 billion, and that one provision—that one provision—is responsible for all of the financial losses posted by the Postal Service since October 2012—just that one provision.

Over the past 2 years, the Postal Service has made an operating profit of nearly \$1 billion. Let me repeat that. Over the past 2 years, the Postal Service has made an operating profit of nearly \$1 billion, excluding this prefunding mandate that must be gotten rid of. Further, before this prefunding mandate was signed into law, the Postal Service was also profitable. In fact, from 2003 to 2006, the Postal Service made a combined profit of more than \$9 billion. So when we hear that the Postal Service is in financial difficulty, the key reason—the overwhelming reason—is this onerous, unprecedented burden of coming up with \$5.5 billion every year to pay for future health retirees.

Given the improved financial condition of the Postal Service, it makes no sense to me to close down mail plants, destroy jobs, and slow mail delivery. Our job right now is to make the Postal Service an agency that functions efficiently in the 21st century. We have to give them the tools to effectively compete. But the way we do that is not by cutting, cutting, and cutting. That is a path toward disaster.

So I hope the Members of the Senate and the Members of the House of Representatives will stand together and prevent these 82 processing plants from shutting down and come up with some legislation which expands the capa-

bility of the Postal Service to compete and protects the American people who want high quality Postal Service.

With that, I yield the floor to the Senator from Wisconsin, Ms. BALDWIN. The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TESTER). The Senator from Wisconsin.

Ms. BALDWIN. Mr. President, I am delighted to join the senior Senator from Montana and the Senator from Vermont on this important topic.

The issue of postal processing facility closures greatly impacts my State of Wisconsin, and it greatly impact States across the country, I must say.

Since 2012 the Postal Service has closed or consolidated 141 processing facilities throughout the United States. In June the Postmaster General announced plans to consolidate up to 82 mail processing facilities, and eliminate 15,000 jobs in 2015. Four of these facilities are in the State of Wisconsin: Eau Claire, La Crosse, Madison, and Rothschild in the Wausau region of the State of Wisconsin.

When postal processing facilities close, that impacts service standards, which really boils down to the time it takes for a piece of mail to get from point A to point B. At this moment, I can't tell my constituents, my Wisconsinites, how long these delays will be because the Postal Service has yet to study this impact. These closures are set to begin within a month. So for small businesses who rely on the Postal Service to get their goods to market and for seniors such as the veteran who was described earlier by the senior Senator from Montana who gets his medicine through the mail, there is really no way for them to know at this moment how these closures are going to affect them, and sometimes what is in the mail is a lifeline for them.

In fact, the inspector general found the Postal Service failed to follow its own rules, which require the Postal Service to study the impacts these consolidations will have on their service standards—again, the time it takes for a piece of mail to get from point A to point B. They are also supposed to inform the public of these impacts and, additionally, to allow affected communities to provide input before a final decision is made. However, this simply didn't happen. That is why I was proud to join Senator McCASKILL in a bipartisan letter to the Postmaster General requesting that the Postal Service delay these proposed closures and consolidations until they have a fair, complete, and transparent process in place.

The Postal Service exists to serve all Americans, and my constituents and the consumers who fund the Postal Service deserve to have their voices heard in this process. They are stakeholders in this process. While there are certainly process and transparency problems with these closures, another issue that concerns me is the fact that these shortsighted cuts are harming the very thing that makes the Postal Service unique. The major strength of the U.S. Postal Service is its signifi-

cant network which can reach every community in America. Whether one is in an urban city such as Milwaukee, WI, or in a rural town such as Prentice, the Postal Service reaches these Wisconsin communities. But by continually chipping away at the substantial service network, the Postal Service is developing into an urban package delivery system at the expense of rural Americans and rural Wisconsinites.

Proponents of this idea of closures and consolidations say it is counterproductive to delay these closures because they should happen as soon as possible. They say Congress has failed to act and that the Postal Service has been left with no alternative but to close more processing facilities.

I agree on one point; that is, that Congress has, indeed, failed to act. We must. Congress has failed to act. I do not know how many have sort of heard this in relation to bills to try to fix problems. Have you ever seen someone present an idea and they say, look, everybody who is a stakeholder hates this so it must be a good bill?

Well, I kind of disagree with that proposition, that it has to be that way. I can tell you there is another way forward. That path involves working with, not against, Postal Service employees and customers. It relieves the Postal Service of congressionally mandated overpayments. It maintains service standards for all communities. It provides Postal Service customers with certainty on postal rates.

I am going to continue to fight on this issue. I am delighted and proud to be joining my colleagues here today on the floor to raise this immediate issue of postal process facility closures, this pending issue, but also to renew our commitment to the longer range, broader postal reform that gives our constituents, whether rural, suburban, or urban, the confidence and service they deserve.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. NELSON. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. HIRONO). Without objection, it is so ordered.

“ORION” SPACECRAFT

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, I wish to share with the Senate the fact that we are about to do the first flight test of the new NASA human spacecraft, called *Orion*.

As a matter of fact, it was attempted earlier this morning. There was a launch window between 7:05 and 9:44 eastern time. In fact, a combination of some weather concerns plus some questions of valves opening on some of the fuel lines in the rocket and trying to rework those valves ultimately led to the decision to scrub the mission today.

The spacecraft looks like a capsule. If we recall the Apollo capsule that took us to the Moon, it carried three astronauts. It was 12 feet in diameter. *Orion* is 16.5 feet in diameter and is being designed to carry four astronauts. But it is the forerunner to the space systems that will eventually—in 20 years—carry us to the planet Mars.

It will be launched today on an existing workhorse. We have two major workhorses in our stable. The Delta—the Delta IV and this, configured with additional boosters, is called the Delta IV Heavy.

The other workhorse in the stable getting so many of our payloads into space, including our military satellites, is the Atlas V. Both of them are proven workhorses and have been almost flawless. This particular spacecraft, for its first flight test, is going up on a Delta IV Heavy.

As such, what it will do is first to put it into low Earth orbit, and from there it will be projected out 3,600 miles from the Earth and come back as if it were on a mission to the Moon or to an asteroid or coming back from Mars in a trajectory, coming through the Earth's atmosphere, creating quite a few g's and creating—at about 20,000 miles an hour as it is coming back into the Earth's atmosphere—about 4,000 degrees Fahrenheit on the heat shield.

So the flight test today is to test the structural integrity of the spacecraft as well as to test the viability of the heat shield. That has now been postponed until tomorrow. It was my expectation Senator THUNE would be able to go. As it turns out, he has to go back to South Dakota. I will be there at the Cape, and we will report on the launch later on to the Senate next week.

But it will all be done in 1 day, and it will splash down in the Pacific, somewhere in the region of the State of the Presiding Officer. They are actually going to have television coverage of the splashdown because we have a Predator that will be over the Atlantic. That is why we have to have the weather there, as well as the weather at the Cape, to be exactly right so we can record the splashdown, because this is a flight test.

We are developing a new spacecraft to take humans to missions far beyond low Earth orbit. A lot of people think the human space program was shut down after the space shuttle. No, we are just going into the new design of new spacecraft that can take us on a mission out of Earth's orbit as we explore the Earth's heavens. I will give a report to the Senate next week.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

LAND CONSERVATION

Mr. MURPHY. Madam President, this is a picture of Wike Brothers' Farm in Sharon, CT. Sharon is located in the very northwest portion in the great

State of Connecticut. It has been an active farm held by the same family, the Wike brothers, for about 150 years. It is about 144 acres. It is a pasture now for free-range chickens, pigs, and cattle.

The farm's roadside store, which is used by people from Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New York—given that it sits right at the crux of those three States—sells beef, pork, sausages, eggs, apple-smoked bacon, and maple syrup, to name a few.

We are able to know, confidently, that this piece of iconic farm land that is producing for the neighboring farms and States is going to be able to continue as a farm because of something that Congress did.

Congress passed, enacted in 2006, a land conservation incentive in our Tax Code that gives a small tax incentive to farmers who decide to put a conservation easement on their land to make sure it doesn't fall into the hands of developers. Further, we provide a slightly smaller discount, a slightly smaller tax incentive to private non-farm, nonagricultural landowners who want either to donate their lands or who want also to put a conservation easement on their land to make sure that it doesn't get developed.

This has been of enormous benefit in the State of Connecticut. We have preserved 11,000 acres of land in Connecticut just since this tax incentive went on the books. That is a 45-percent increase over the previous period of time before we put that tax incentive on the books.

It is a wonderful bipartisan policy because we are able, by discounting people's taxes, to keep land as open space without it, frankly, going into the hands of public land owners, which is often met with resistance from a lot of Members from our Western States.

Land stays in the hands of the private landowner or, in this case, in the hands of the Wike brothers, who have been farming it for a century and a half. But we know, because of that conservation easement, it will be maintained as open space.

As bipartisan as that idea is, the entire genesis of land conservation is a bipartisan idea, and maybe even to an extent it is a partisan or Republican idea. It was Teddy Roosevelt who quadrupled the acreage in our national forests, invented the National Wildlife Refuge System, and proclaimed 18 national monuments. He said in 1910: "Conservation is a great moral issue, for it involves the patriotic duty of insuring the safety and continuance of the nation."

It was Richard Nixon who created the EPA and signed into law the Clean Water Act. In 1970 he said: "Clean air, clean water, open spaces—these should once again be the birthright of every American."

While there aren't a lot of Democrats coming to the floor and quoting Ronald Reagan, he had some very impressive things to say about this country's commitment and his movement's commitment to conservation, as well.

Ronald Reagan said:

What is a conservative after all but one who conserves, one who is committed to protecting and holding close the things by which we live. . . . And we want to protect and conserve the land on which we live—our countryside, our rivers and mountains, our plains and meadows and forests. This is our patrimony. This is what we leave to our children. And our great moral responsibility is to leave it to them either as we found it or better than we found it.

I am on the floor to speak in favor of the continuance of the land conservation tax incentive program that we hope will be in whatever tax extension deal gets passed by the Congress, as many proponents of the provision in that tax extension package would like.

It would be better if this were permanent. It is very difficult to do long-term planning for owners and operators of big farms such as the Wike Brothers' Farm if they don't know the tax incentive is going to be there for them. It is very difficult to do this retroactively, but it is important, nonetheless, to get this extended because this isn't the only property in our State that has been affected.

The Towner Hill Farm in Sherman, CT, is an 80-acre property that would not have been protected if it weren't for the Federal tax deduction which was available to the owner in 2008. He offered it to the town of Sherman at less than the value that he might have gotten at a private land sale because he knew he was going to be able to get this tax incentive. Now it is home to one of the most popular hiking areas in all of that area in Sherman, CT.

The Vanishing Geese Farm in Durham, CT, the center of the State, has a 42-acre farm that has been in the Scott family since the 1970s. They desperately wanted to continue farming, but the ability to have a conservation easement purchased from them put money in their pockets that allowed them to continue to farm but also gave them piece of mind, knowing that this piece of land that they love is going to be able to stay as open space.

Mr. Scott said, in his own colloquial way: "Having worked the land, cut my firewood from it, raised sheep on it, and hayed it, I have developed a lot of affection for it."

In regard to the donation of the easement on his family's property, he said:

I told my kids that my chest was puffed out a little more and when I walked out in the snow, it was nice to know that this land will never be developed. I feel that I've kind of kept faith with the land and with the critters on it.

This is a very important tax incentive that, as I said, has resulted in tens of thousands of acres being preserved in the State of Connecticut. It is maybe the most important legacy that we leave—to recognize that part of the true greatness of this country is the land upon which we live, the open spaces that define what it is to be an American.

I mean, the Industrial Revolution powered us to global greatness but