

move this important postal reform legislation.

As my colleagues are aware, the Postal Service faces multiple challenges in our changing economy. One of these challenges is how it should manage its network of processing and logistics facilities. In order to remain competitive and maintain universal service, the Postal Service is currently studying how best to streamline its processing and logistics network and remove excess capacity. The decisions it will make as part of this process will have a long term impact on many of the communities and businesses that it serves.

Sadly, the process that the Postal Service has developed to date to study facility closures and consolidations fails to adequately allow stakeholders, key customers, postal employees or community leaders necessary input. The current process also fails to provide an open and transparent explanation to affected communities for what may be quite compelling reasons underlying the decisions to close or consolidate a facility.

I learned how completely lacking in public participation and transparency this process is from my constituents in Sioux City, IA. Until I convened a meeting with postal officials in my office last week, the Sioux City community had been unable to get any information from the Postal Service about the timing or reasons for the proposed consolidation of a mail processing and distribution center there with a similar facility in another state.

Senators COLLINS, LIEBERMAN, and CARPER have agreed to include language in S. 662 that would ensure that this does not happen. This language does not stop the Postal Service from studying consolidation options for its processing operations. What it does do is require that the Postal Service revise the area mail processing study process by which it analyzes which of its processing facilities should be closed or consolidated.

While the language does not prevent the Postal Service from proceeding with ongoing area mail processing studies on consolidation of specific facilities, it does provide that no facility closing or consolidation may actually be implemented until the Postal Service has met the requirements of public notice, transparency and public input specified in new section 302(c)(3)(D)(i-iv).

The new language requires that the Postal Service's decisionmaking process be transparent, with any analyses made available to the community upon request. It will also require that the businesses and communities affected by proposed consolidations of Postal Service facilities have the opportunity to provide input and guarantees that their concerns and advice are taken fully into account by the Postal Service before the Postal Service issues a decision on a closure or consolidation.

The first section of the amendment provides that the Postal Service notify

an affected community about the potential of a facility being closed or consolidated in their district; such notification will be provided at the beginning stage of the matter or as soon as the Postal Service makes a decision to begin reviewing the matter. The Postal Service should do their best to ensure that this notification reaches all of businesses, residents, employees, government entities, and other organizations that depend on the facility.

The second section will require the Postal Service to make available to the community, upon request, any data, analyses, or other information that is being considered by the Postal Service as part of its decisionmaking process. This will ensure that the Postal Service's decisionmaking analysis on this matter is transparent.

The third section will allow the affected members of the community ample opportunity to provide input on the proposed decision. This will ensure that the community has the chance to provide valuable input into the decisionmaking process.

The fourth section requires the Postal Service to take community input into account prior to making a final decision at the district level. Once the district level decision on consolidation is made, which includes taking the community input into account, the district level recommendation can then be forwarded to the next decisionmaking step at the regional level. It is worth noting that the community served by a postal facility can be a valuable information resource and that it should benefit the Postal Service to listen to the community's suggestions as they seek to arrive at a result that works for them, their customers and those they serve.

Mr. CARPER. While I fully support efforts by the Postal Service to rationalize its processing operations, I also believe that the Postal Service can engage in consolidation decisions that are rational and justified and can withstand public scrutiny. I believe that this language will improve the consolidation process, and I was pleased to work with my colleague from Iowa in drafting it. I believe that the language strikes the appropriate balance by not stopping the Postal Service from studying proposed consolidations of particular facilities, while at the same time requiring the Postal Service to meet some basic obligations to its customer and affected communities before a consolidation can be implemented.

Mr. LIEBERMAN. I am pleased to lend my strong support to adding this provision to S. 622 in order to improve the procedures by which the Postal Service consolidates its mail processing operations. The problems local communities are encountering from the Postal Service's consolidations hit home for me in Waterbury, CT. Connecticut residents affected by the Postal Service's decision to close its Waterbury mail processing center have a right to participate in a process that is

transparent and open. This new provision in S. 622 will help ensure that, when the Postal Service streamlines its mail processing or logistics network, it gives adequate public notice and takes other steps to be sure that those who are potentially affected—including postal customers, postal employees, and other businesses and individuals in the community—have an opportunity to understand and provide input into the Postal Service's decision before facilities are consolidated or closed.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be dispensed with.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. VITTER). Without objection, it is so ordered.

OIL DRILLING

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I wanted to call to the attention of the Senate that over the past couple of days the question of drilling for oil off the coast of Florida has been joined. Indeed, the question and the debate has accelerated.

Yesterday, the Department of the Interior offered their proposed new alignment of the Gulf of Mexico and the central planning area where drilling for oil will occur and the eastern planning area where oil drilling will not occur.

As we have speculated for some period of time, when the Department of the Interior published in the Federal Register that State boundaries were going to be redrawn so that the boundaries of the State of Louisiana, indeed, went into the waters off of the State of Florida, we could well speculate, with some justification, that indeed that was going to be the plan. That, in fact, was the plan offered yesterday by the Secretary of the Interior, Gale Norton, for the next 5 years in the Outer Continental Shelf.

The Secretary's plan increases the drilling in the eastern Gulf of Mexico off the State of Florida by 2 million acres. That was simultaneously followed by the filing of a bill by the chairman of the Energy Committee, the Senator from New Mexico, which would encompass almost the entirety of an area not included in the moratorium on the Outer Continental Shelf, known as lease sale 181.

The essence of the proposal by the Senator from New Mexico is to drill for oil and gas in an area of 4 million acres, in a bulge which bulges out from the imaginary Florida-Alabama line into the waters off the State of Florida.

This senior Senator from Florida, joined by my colleague, Senator MARTINEZ, recognizing this was coming, laid out a plan last week—a plan that would allow some drilling in a part of