The unofficial motto of the United States Postal Service (USPS), “Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds,” is derived from a quote by Herodotus, an ancient Greek historian.

However, of all the impediments to mail delivery envisioned, Herodotus never could have imagined the enormous financial obstacles facing the Postal Service today.

Despite the importance of postal service in rural communities, USPS faces significant short- and long-term challenges. New technology has decreased the volume of mail, and USPS does not have the flexibility to adjust to a declining market. As a result, USPS missed a $5.5 billion retiree health care payment on August 1 and defaulted on a $5.6 billion obligation on September 30.

In the coming months, Congress may consider passing a short-term measure so USPS can pay its bills, but ultimately the Postal Service needs robust reforms to address its long-term solvency. These reforms could include allowing for advertisement sales on postal vehicles, and moving to cluster box delivery in both rural and urban communities.

Without reform, USPS’ debt will balloon to nearly $100 billion by 2016, and taxpayers will be stuck with the bill.

Some support giving taxpayer dollars to USPS while others have called for closing or consolidating more rural post offices. Neither of these approaches would resolve USPS’ structural problems, and focusing cuts on rural post offices would run counter to the Postal Service’s mission to serve all Americans.

According to the Postal Regulatory Commission, closing all of the 10,000 smallest post offices in the country only would save seven-tenths of 1% of the USPS’ operating budget.

To prevent rural post office closures, I have urged the postmaster general and the House leadership to consider the impact on communities, jobs, and urgent mail delivery. To this end, I

have sponsored an amendment to the House postal reform legislation (H.R. 2309) which would cap rural post office closures at no more than 5% of total closures in any given year, and ensure USPS is taking public opinion into consideration, like those views expressed at more than 30 meetings held throughout the state over the past year.

The Postal Service also is considering reduced retail hours at 13,000 post offices nationwide, including many in Nebraska's Third District. While preferable to closures, implementation of this proposal should not threaten rural service.

Fortunately, USPS is conducting an evaluation process of the proposed reduced hours over the next two years. The evaluation will include a customer survey mailed to affected zip codes and a public meeting. No changes will be made until after the evaluation process is complete.

I encourage all residents who may be impacted by these changes to complete the USPS survey. Doing so will allow the Postal Service to determine the best path forward for individuals and businesses in every community.

The Postal Service is facing hundreds of billions of dollars of debt over the next decade, and difficult decisions will have to be made to save this service for millions of Americans who depend on it. Whatever shape postal reform ultimately takes, I will continue to work to prevent cuts in service disproportionately aimed at rural communities to ensure the Postal Service upholds its original mission to serve all Americans.