

Would hurt bush—

Close 4th class PO's?

WASHINGTON—Sen. Mike Gravel, D-Alaska, today joined in sponsoring legislation to require the United States Postal Service to consider all relevant factors prior to closing many third and fourth class post offices.

Gravel also is considering filing suit against the Postal Service to stop implementation of its plan to close 12,000 of the 18,290 third and fourth class post offices in the United States.

Most of Alaska's post offices are either third or fourth class post offices, and would be subject to closure if profitability were the main criteria for keeping them open.

Gravel said, "At a time when Alaskans are complaining of poor postal service to the 49th State, the Postal Service is considering curtailing services even further."

The latest statistics available show that of Alaska's 194 post offices, 163 of them are third and fourth class facilities and could possibly be closed. Only

11 of the state's post offices fall within the first class category and 20 are second class facilities.

The bill Gravel co-sponsored would amend the Postal Service Reorganization Act of 1970 to require that five additional factors be considered before the Postal Service could close a facility because it was unprofitable.

The additional factors would include the post office's proximity to other post offices and the number of families served by it.

The substantiality of the loss of revenue to the postal service.

If the post office were closed would the alternative post office be overburdened and service hampered.

Determine the energy requirements for any additional travel by postal customers.

Would closing the post office have significant negative impact on the locality.

If after such consideration the postmaster general found that on balance the post office should remain open, not withstanding its unprofitability, the post office should not be closed.

Gravel said that, "Postal service is an essential service to the rural areas of Alaska, which all too often are cut off from communications with fellow Alaskans, and others outside the state."

If distance is considered as an essential criteria then, Gravel said, the Postal Service will have to continue service at most of the third and fourth class facilities in Alaska because residents simply do not have alternative postal facilities.

The Alaska Democrat is also considering joining with Rep. Paul Simon, D-Ill., in filing a court suit to keep the Postal Service from implementing plans to close the 12,000 post offices suggested by the general accounting office.