



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF POSTMASTERS
OF THE UNITED STATES

TESTIMONY OF

DALE GOFF

PRESIDENT

POSTMASTER OF COVINGTON, LA

BEFORE THE

POSTAL REGULATORY COMMISSION

WASHINGTON, DC

JULY 10, 2008

Mr. Chairman, distinguished Commission members, my name is Dale Goff. I am President of the 40,000-member National Association of Postmasters of the United States (NAPUS). But, more important, I am the proud Postmaster of Covington, LA, a town that resisted Hurricane Katrina's assault against our nation's Gulf Coast. Within my dual capacity, as President of NAPUS and as Postmaster of Covington, I fervently believe that I am uniquely qualified to assist the Commission in its examination of a "universal Postal Service" and the essential "universal service obligation."

The Commission has heard from four NAPUS members, three of whom testified on behalf of NAPUS, and one who spoke on behalf of the U.S. Postal Service. Each of these dedicated members of our Postal family has a unique and vital relationship with the communities they serve. Postmaster Mike Larson (St. Paul, Minnesota) gave the PRC a wide-angle perspective of serving a metropolitan area and the operations that are needed to deliver quality service; Postmaster Dennis O'Neill (Chokio, Minnesota) spoke of the social and economic importance of post offices to small rural communities; Postmaster Jeannie Schnell, of Monhegan, Maine, passionately and articulately explained the dependence that isolated communities have on their Post Office; and retired Postmaster Lyle Puppe educated the Commission about what happens to communities when Post Offices are closed or suspended, and to what the lengths communities will go to protect their beloved Post Offices. These are personal and frontline perspectives of how universal retail postal service affects America – whether rural, suburban, or urban; whether on the U.S. mainland or non-contiguous areas of this nation. These Postmaster views must

resonate with the Commission. Therefore, I need not repeat the Postmasters' articulate explanation of the role that post offices play in providing universal service.

Indeed, the approximately 27,000 independent post offices are the bedrock of a universal postal system; they serve as outposts of commerce and connectivity to countless towns and hamlets across the American landscape. Our Founding Fathers recognized the importance of post offices to our national postal system when they enshrined this inherently governmental facility in the U.S. Constitution (Article I, Section 8). Congress has consistently and unambiguously reinforced the inherent linkage between the community, its post office and universal service. In 1976, Senator Jennings Randolph proposed an amendment to Title 39 of the United States Code, which is still applicable. Section 404(b) requires local participation in determinations to discontinue post offices or consolidate them, and that such determinations may be appealed to the Postal Rate Commission – now the Postal Regulatory Commission. This provision is unique to post offices; Senator Randolph justified the amendment when he stated: “It is important that the independence and integrity of communities continue and that good mail service be maintained” – 122 Congressional Record 6314 (1976). The premise underlying Section 404(b) is the association between an independent post office and the quality of an area's mail service.

Congress has consistently acknowledged the importance of post offices, especially to small communities and rural areas. Additionally, postal accountability to postal customers is tied to the local post office, and its Postmaster. Throughout Congressional

deliberations over PL 109-435, the commitment to post offices as integral to universal service did not change. In this regard, I urge the Commission to carefully consider the comments that Rep. John McHugh's submitted on June 30. His remarks are instructive as to his intent in advancing his legislation, the measure that authorized this proceeding.

The PRC must recognize that universal service and the Postal Service's obligation to provide it should be viewed in a broad social and political context, not purely in economic terms. Economic expediency must not define universal service. If economists circumscribed the postal footprint, the institution would not be where it is needed most. I hope that Postmasters O'Neill, Schnell and Puppe sufficiently illustrated this point to the Commission. From my vantage point, as a Postmaster, a universal Postal Service, heralded by post offices, fortified Louisiana communities in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, and strengthened Illinois, Iowa and Missouri communities inundated by Mississippi River flooding. In contrast, when profit-motivated businesses sauntered into many of these devastated communities, the citizens were exploited by privateers. The PRC must not be seduced into the misguided belief that for-profit entities can provide the same level of non-discriminatory service that the Postal Service can. It is not borne out by the facts, whether on our shores or countries with, so-called, liberalized postal regulations. By the same token, the Postal Service itself must not be permitted to deviate from its universal service obligations by understaffing postal facilities, thereby denying communities a uniform level of universal service.

Universal service – to be credible – must be consistently high-quality. Inferior or unpredictable service does not fulfill our nation’s expectations of a universal postal service, or the federal government’s obligation to provide it. Bestowing high volume areas with U.S. Post Offices, and turning over postal operations in low volume areas to “privatized” or “depersonalized” postal units is not universal service. The common denominator of universal service has been and must continue to be the post office. The Postal Service and this Commission must do everything in their power to maximize the opportunities for post offices to generate revenue and provide necessary public services. This includes appropriate staffing and the flexibility to offer a wide variety of postal products. This is the essence of our postal heritage and our postal future.

The commitment to universal service is not fulfilled when an excessive number of Postmaster slots remain vacant, and Postal Service statements indicate that Headquarters has no intention of filling those positions. As you may recall, retired Postmaster Lyle Puppe testified to this unfortunate situation at the PRC’s St. Paul hearing. I have just one tidbit to add. I have been advised that a District Manager publicly told Postmasters at their Minnesota Convention that he had no intention of filling 50 Postmaster vacancies in his district. It is abundantly clear that the failure to replace a Postmaster renders the individual post office ripe for closure. In addition, as retired Postmaster Puppe mentioned to the Commission, so-called “temporary emergency suspensions” have become a much-too-often used ploy to close post offices. I am pleased to note that the Commission has taken a keen interest in Postmaster vacancies and suspensions. The USPS’ unfortunate and ill-advised tactics undermine universal service

Indeed, in July 2003, the New York Times underscored the importance of Post Offices to universal service:

It is no mere metaphor to say that for many rural communities, the coming of the post office was a symbol of establishment, an essential connection with the fact and ideal of America. And in most communities – towns that have lost rail service and bus service and lack high-speed Internet connections – that symbol of establishment still means what it always has. Unless you have lived in a town whose only real business is its post office – hardly larger than a garden shed in some places – it is hard to know how vital that one business can be. To lose the post office feels, literally, like being erased from the map. In much of back road America, the presence of a post office is a benign symbol of the larger web of governance, of national community as a whole. That is a bond worth keeping, a building worth keeping open.

I hope that the Commission agrees with the wisdom of the NY Times.

Thank you.