



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF POSTMASTERS
OF THE UNITED STATES

TESTIMONY OF
OSCAR “DALE” GOFF, JR.
NATIONAL PRESIDENT

BEFORE THE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES SUBCOMMITTEE ON
FEDERAL WORKFORCE, THE POSTAL SERVICE,
AND
THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

APRIL 17, 2007

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Marchant, and distinguished Subcommittee members, I am Dale Goff, President of the 40,500 member National Association of Postmasters of the United States (NAPUS). I am also honored to be the Postmaster of Covington, Louisiana. Thank you for inviting me to testify, and I welcome the opportunity to share with you my thoughts regarding the new Postal paradigm, resulting from enactment of the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act – Public Law 109-435.

The relentless efforts of the Members of this Committee and its Senate counterpart were decisive in securing the postal statute, and convincing President Bush to sign the legislation into law. Passage of the PL 109-435 was a defining moment in the 232 year history of this nation's signature mail operation. Indeed, the new statute ushers in a challenging, yet necessary era for postal consumers, postal-impacted companies, postal employees, and, obviously, the Postal Service itself. History will judge the success of our collective legislative efforts by whether the \$900 billion- 9 million-employee postal industry thrives under postal reform or maintains its pre-reform death spiral. Except for misgivings of a select few, it became clear that the previous postal model was woefully obsolete, jeopardizing the capability of the government postal operation to safeguard universal affordable mail service. It also

became crystal clear that PL 109-435 offered this nation the best opportunity for continued postal viability.

Our Founding Fathers and their progeny recognized the need for a government-run postal operation that provides universal, accessible and affordable postal services. Ironically, in enumerating the powers of Congress, the U.S. Constitution lists the establishment of post offices prior to Congressional authority to declare war and to create the federal judiciary. Only a government owned and run postal operation could offer the United States a means of tying the disparate communities that comprise this country together through a universal hardcopy communications network. The value of a government run and government staffed Postal Service is ubiquity and security. American icons such as George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton and James Madison recognized this fact as they crafted the U.S. Constitution. Present day Postmasters fervently believe that Congress continues to embrace the timeless wisdom of the architects of this government.

Consequently, the managers-in-charge of approximately 26,000 post offices throughout America appreciate our immense historical and current responsibility – to continue to deliver on the promise to provide nondiscriminatory retail and delivery services to your constituents,

whether they reside or conduct business in city center, in the suburbs, or in rural areas. Moreover, as the Postmaster of Covington, I uniquely understand the importance of a community post office – especially in times of crisis, such as in the wake of Hurricane Katrina’s devastation to the Gulf Coast. My post office and those of adjoining communities were a sought-after symbol of continuity and a government presence.

Public Law 109-435 does not change the mission of the Postal Service: To “bind the nation together” with a universal letter, package and periodical communications system. Instead, postal reform renews this pledge to America. However, the law does so in new ways. Among the noteworthy aspects of the new law is a greater degree of price flexibility, an expedited rate-setting process, and relief from two unfair levies imposed on the mailing public by Public Law 108-18. Moreover, the legislation rejected attempts to relax the criteria for closing small post offices. Congress also set aside efforts to gut earned employee benefits. However, despite its well-deserved accolades, PL 109-435 is not a finished product. Since a Conference Report did not accompany the legislation, continuing clarification will be necessary regarding many of the provisions. Regulations need to be crafted that will implement the statute’s provisions, the Postal Regulatory Commission will have to explore its enhanced authority, the first rate case subject to the new rules will have

to run its course, and the Postal Service will have to recognize, exercise and exploit its new opportunities.

As the Postal Service moves forward into this fresh period, it must do so with a sense of renewal. At the same time, the agency must resist the temptation to subordinate the expertise of its homegrown dedicated postal employees – the professionals who actually provide postal services – to green eye shaded gurus who declare that the bottom line is the only line. You cannot have a Postal Service without service – a high quality service for that matter. Unfortunately, this goal tends to be marginalized by financial connoisseurs who may never have touched U.S. mail, besides depositing a birthday card in a collection box. In addition, it appears that postal privateers have allied themselves with a cadre of postal operational personnel in a quest to squeeze the lifeblood out of postal facilities – large and small – and to privatize postal functions that are, in fact, inherently governmental in nature. From a business standpoint, it is unwise and reckless to contract-out your core product – the mail delivery network – particularly in areas where established professional carrier routes already exist. This ill-conceived scheme may save money, but at what price? Postmasters know that “you get what you pay for.”

Postmasters believe that the growing post office staffing inadequacies will not be solved by hiring a private workforce to fill in staffing gaps, or assigning unqualified or ill-equipped upper level personnel to manage postal operations. Inadequate staffing, as well as unprepared staffing is degrading the quality services to which your constituents are entitled. Mr. Chairman, as you know so painfully well, inadequate staffing was a major factor in Chicago's current mail mess. Unfortunately, Chicago is not unique. Other areas have been plagued with insufficient staffing – and this negatively impacts the service provided to residential and business postal customers. As a Postmaster, let me state for the record that it is not only the number of employees assigned to particular post offices that is important; it is the number of employees who are available to do the job. Injured employees and workers assigned to reduced duties should not be included in the full staffing complement, because they cannot fully perform the requisite tasks of the position. Indeed, I am pleased that the Postmaster General recently announced the USPS will increase the number of letter carriers to serve the Windy City. I hope he will make the same commitment to other post offices that suffer from inadequate staffing.

The upshot of ignoring Postmaster staffing requests compromise mail quality and undermine consumer confidence in our postal system. It is a poorly kept secret that mail deliveries are encroaching on the evening

hours because there are not enough professional letter carriers. Upper level postal managers are leaving Postmasters with a series of bad choices: The Postmaster can make evening mail deliveries (i.e., after already putting in a full day of work), or the Postmaster can return letter carriers to the street to deliver the residual mail during the dark. Deferring mail delivery to the next day is not and should not be an option! Our customers rely on regular timely mail delivery. However, due to unmet postal staffing needs, this goal is becoming elusive.

An equally notable byproduct of the staffing inadequacies is that when a Postmaster fills the void, the time commitment reduces his or her ability to appropriately manage post office operations. While this problem could have been papered over in the past, PL 109-435 will make this problematic. The legal requirement that the USPS implement fully section 404 of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act could be compromised by Postmasters not having the resources to perform the requisite Sarbanes-Oxley functions. After all, a Postmaster's primary obligation is to get out and process the mail – that is the core mission of each post office. Inadequate staffing is a PL 109-435 compliance issue, in addition to a service issue.

Over the years, upper level postal management has asserted that it is not the number of employees; rather it is their location. The time has come to

acknowledge that the agency has had ample opportunity to distribute staff properly, reflecting the changes in postal operations and demography. Postmasters have time and time again requested adequate staffing on post office windows, in the processing area, and on the routes. However, Postmasters are finding more and more often that their requests are either rebuffed or simply ignored. Nonetheless, Postmasters are not demoralized by these slights and disregard for quality service. We believe that Postal customers will avail themselves to new tools that PL 109-435 created to hold the Postal Service accountable to particular service standards. Corporate mailers are already poised for the opportunity to turn to the Postal Regulatory Commission to complain about service problems, and it is conceivable that residential customers will do likewise. This is an adversarial proceeding that the Postal Service can and should avert – if only upper level management would listen to its Postmasters and grant postal facilities the necessary complement of employees to service its communities.

In sum, Postmasters are tasked with ensuring that their customers – your constituents – receive the postal services that they deserve and demand. The value of mail is directly related to the quality of their mail service. Irrational postal cost-cutting can and does sacrifice the very quality that is the hallmark of the Postal Service. The record productivity that has characterized postal retail and delivery services over the past

few years is attributable to frontline managers and their craft employees doing more with fewer resources. Yet, this stretch-to-the-limit strategy is taking its toll on the excellence and professionalism of the U.S. mail system. Postmasters perform the time-honored duty that began with Benjamin Franklin and continues to this day. We believe that PL 109-435 is not a panacea, but it provides opportunities. We must not squander those opportunities.

Thank you for this opportunity to share my views.