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Willard Hotel Lobby
(about 1901)

Lobby Reform and Postal Advocacy

After the U.S. Civil War, political job-seekers would trudge to Washington in an attempt to buttonhole government officials in the lobby of the Willard Hotel. The hotel, located 1/8 mile southeast of the White House, served as the transition residence of newly elected Presidential administrations and the Washington home of many leading Members of Congress. Although the primary beneficiaries of the Willard Hotel lobby were Americans looking for appointed positions in the government, notably positions in the U.S. Postal Department, paid representatives of interests unable to travel to Washington also loitered in the hotel lobby. Hence, the term “lobbyist” is rooted in the venue where the trade was first practiced – the Willard Hotel Lobby.

The growth of the “lobby industry” mirrored the growth of our nation, the federal government and the Congress. It became increasingly less possible for U.S. citizens to take time off from their work and travel from their hometowns to exercise their Constitutional right to “petition the government for a redress of grievances.” This right is established in the First Amendment, alongside freedom of the press, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and freedom of religion. Indeed, the right to advocate a position on legislation is an entitlement secured by our Founding Fathers. Proximity to the U.S. Capitol or the importance of one’s livelihood should not undercut this fundamental right.

Nonetheless, the recent Washington lobbying scandal has ensnared Congress, the White House, and possibly the USPS. The work of former lobbyist Jack Abramoff has forced government officials to rethink how legislative advocacy should be conducted. More to the point, how advocacy should be plied in a more ethical manner. Unfortunately, the postal community has been drawn into the investigation by virtue of financial transactions made by the Magazine Publishers Association (MPA) to and upon the recommendation of Abramoff. According to numerous press accounts, the MPA sought to derail a postal rate increase. In 2000, The MPA hired Abramoff’s team to achieve that result. The cost was between \$1.8 and \$1.4 million. The *NY Times* reported that a portion of the MPA fee was “funneled to Mr. Abramoff’s political allies.” In addition, at the instruction of Abramoff, the MPA made a \$25,000 contribution to a non-profit group closely tied to Abramoff that in turn used the money to cover the nonprofit group’s employment of the wife of a former senior aide to Rep. Tom DeLay (R-TX). It is unclear how successful the MPA’s efforts were since periodical postage increased by 10% in mid-2002.

What is clear to many observers, including NAPUS, is that disclosure and ethical conduct in legislative advocacy is essential to be effective – not just in the short-term, but over the long-haul. NAPUS practices what we preach. For this reason, NAPUS has always elected to file our PAC statements with the Federal Elections Commission on a monthly basis, rather than on a quarterly or semi-annual schedule. Moreover, NAPUS PAC does not spend our valuable PAC

resources on expenses that are not directly related to support congressional allies and postmaster-friendly candidates. NAPUS PAC does not contribute to non-profit organizations, or retain outside lobbyists. NAPUS' Government Relations Department staff members are fulltime employees of NAPUS; they are not supported by PAC funds. Moreover, we file twice a year with the Clerk of the House and the Clerk of the Senate, disclosing how NAPUS finances postmaster advocacy and what specific issues we promote. Most importantly, our close relationships with Members of Congress are built upon firmly established individual postmaster interactions with the elected representatives, and the frequency with which NAPUS members communicate with their elected leaders. After all, this is what lobbying is all about.



John S. Gardner
USPS Governor

New Governor for the Postal Board

On January 6, President Bush recess appointed John S. Gardner to the USPS Board of Governors. Bush selected him to fill the remaining term of Legree Daniels, who passed away recently. The term expires in December 2007.

Most recently, Gardner served as general counsel of the U.S. Agency for International Development. The agency provides economic and humanitarian assistance to developing countries. He has also served in the White House for President George W. Bush and his father, and held positions in the Department of Health and Human Services and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). It is interesting to note that Board Chairman Jim Miller formerly served as chairman of the FTC. So, Gardner and Miller have a lot in common.

PMG Potter Offers Cautionary Note About 2006

At the January 10, Board of Governors meeting PMG Potter shared his views about the challenges and opportunities that the USPS will face over the next year. While acknowledging the great strides the USPS has made in productivity and cost-cutting, the PMG reiterated his concern about developing new business and raising revenue. He indicated to the Board that the *Strategic Transformation Plan* serves as "a roadmap for 2006 and the next 5 years."

However, PMG Potter also stated that there are "a number of unknowns that add layers of complexity to the business model this year and over the next few years." He identified legislative reform as the first unknown. The second referenced unknown is the continual decline in First Class Mail volume. An interesting footnote to the PMG's statement is that he said, "Had that volume not migrated, *we would not have had to raise rates last week* – nor would we be facing difficult decisions about rates for 2007." This apparently new and after-the-fact justification of the 5.4% January 8 rate increase is curious, since the USPS has stated consistently that the reason for the rate increase was the legal requirement that the USPS fund the CSRS escrow account. In fact, funding the escrow was the sole reason for the rate increase that the PMG provided to the Postal Rate Commission last spring.

Mailers wonder whether this is a USPS attempt to undermine the one universally accepted rationale for postal reform. That being, to eliminate the escrow account and resolve the military retirement credit issue contained in PL 108-18. These items continue to be a priority for the entire postal community.

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