



U.S. Congressman
Nick Rahall
WORKING FOR WEST VIRGINIANS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SEPTEMBER 28, 1990

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**RAHALL TESTIFIES BEFORE POSTAL OPERATIONS COMMITTEE
-- CALLS POSTAL PATRONS DAVID AGAINST THE POSTAL SERVICE GOLIATH --**

WASHINGTON, D.C. — U.S. Rep. Nick Rahall (D-WV) today blasted Postmaster General Tony Frank and his "Consistent Delivery" plan before the Subcommittee on Postal Operations saying that the postal service, "should not, having found itself unable to meet historical standards of delivering mail on time, simply reduce the standards and call it by the fancy title 'Consistent Delivery'". Our postal patrons are David, up against the Postal Service Goliath."

Postmaster General Frank has begun implementation of a program known as "Consistent Delivery." The program calls for consistently late mail delivery to replace overnight and second-day mail as long as it is delivered on a consistent basis. Along with the procedure are a number of changes to the current system.

Rahall pointed out that in addition to the new plan of "Consistent Delivery", Postmaster General Frank has:

- o reduced open window hours at local post offices by several hours on the weekend.
- o arbitrarily closed small, rural post offices.
- o declined to replace local post offices with rural delivery.
- o downgraded the size and scope of intermediate post offices, offering fewer local services.
- o proposed to raise the price of a postage stamp by 5 cents.

"Why do they get away with it," questioned Rahall. "Because our citizens are captive to the providers of public services. We cannot tell the Postmaster, 'since I don't like my service, I will take my business elsewhere. There is no place to go.'"

Rahall added that it was his understanding that the Postmaster General pointed to his sweeping policy change as one that is incrementally being implemented nationwide because it is a policy that has been effective in New York City.

"Mr. Chairman, using New York City as a yardstick for expected postal services in rural West Virginia, or Idaho, or Iowa, or perhaps Indiana is just not acceptable and it won't work," said Rahall. "The people of the Fourth District in West Virginia are first-class citizens who demand first class mail service."

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TESTIMONY
HONORABLE NICK J RAHALL, II

BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON POSTAL OPERATIONS AND SERVICES
COMMITTEE ON POST OFFICE AND CIVIL SERVICE
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 1990
AT 1:00 P.M.

MR. Chairman. First let me express my appreciation to you for allowing me to testify today on a matter of urgent importance to the Nation. The delivery of its mail.

The delivery of mail is not a "ho-hum" matter of indifference in the United States. I cannot, as a matter of fact, think of another subject of more passion and emotion than postal services -- all postal services, and the time it takes to deliver that mail is paramount.

Last April 30th, I had the honor of taking Chairman McCloskey to West Virginia for a hearing on the very passionate, emotional matter of closing small post offices in rural West Virginia. It is not a local, or a regional concern, but a national concern among Members, that the Postal Service is arbitrarily and unilaterally deciding to close small post offices, and they do it with absolute impunity.

Another matter stirring great concern in my District, and while I know this is not on today's hearing agenda, Mr. Chairman, I will just mention how very opposed my constituents, and I, are to increasing the price of a postage stamp from 25 to 30 cents. It is unconscionable and should not be allowed to happen.

I am here today to testify on what is termed as the "Consistent Delivery" plan of service implemented in July by Postmaster General Tony Frank.

Mr. Frank has apparently noticed that, whatever the reason, his postal service cannot meet the age-old standards of prompt, reliable

and efficient delivery that has been adhered to by the postal service for as long as I can remember.

Normally, when we find that federal or state standards for programs serving the general public are not being met, to be sure we do not then lower the standards in order to get a better rating on standards compliance. If a college isn't recruiting the type of students it wants, such as those with high GPA's and SAT scores, it doesn't lower its admissions standards. It takes great pains to find whether there might be something wrong with their college, or its curriculum, its student services or its faculty. But it doesn't lower its admissions standards.

The same should be true of the postal service. It should not, having found itself unable to meet historical standards of delivering the mail on time, simply reduce the standards and call it by the fancy name of CONSISTENT DELIVERY.

Who did the postal service survey anyway in reaching this decision?

Who are these people? Will we ever know, since the Postmaster General has not seen fit to provide the Congress with a copy of such a survey and its results. But I ask you, who are the people they questioned and who supposedly said:

"Why yes. I would love to receive my mail every five or ten days, I just hated vernight, or two-day delivery because every once in a while, it was late. Now that I know its going to be late, I'm ever so relieved!"

He most assuredly did not ask the American Bankers Association, who loudly objected to Consistent Delivery --but there was no body home. No body listened. No body heard.

Mr. Frank just went right ahead and put consistent delivery in motion, in spite of the strong objections of both the Postal Rate Commission and the independent Office of the Consumer Advocate.

The Postmaster General points to his sweeping policy change as one that is incrementally being implemented natinwide, because it is good for New York City.

Mr. Chairman, using New York City as a yardstick for expected postal services in rural West Virginia, or Idaho, or Iowa, or Montana, or Arkansas, or perhaps Indiana, just is not acceptable and it won't work. Imposing uniform standards called consistent delivery across the board, nationwide, has serious implications for rural areas.

I met with representatives from the Charleston Division of the U.S. Postal Service last week. I was told that consistent delivery did not apply in West Virginia at all. That not a thing has changed there, and that nothing is expected to change.

But since we know that the consistent delivery method right now only affects 8 percent of the country for overnight delivery, and the scope of the "still-to-be-decided" changes in the two day standard, who knows when West Virignia will be included in the plan and begin to receive down-graded postal services?

I have been promised a policy statement from the WV Division of the USPS on the non-effects of consistent delivery on WV. I ask the

Chair's permission to provide that policy statement for the hearing record at a later date.

The Postal Service's decision to press ahead with an unpopular decision in the face of massive opposition is an affront to all America, and a national disgrace.

The people of the Fourth District in West Virginia are first-class citizens who demand first class mail delivery services, not second class or third class -- with no puns intended.

A few years ago, I was deluged with mail from angry constituents who had been advised by a major health insurance provider that it was increasing their premiums by 50 percent, and that they were also reducing services by 50 percent. It amazes how, today, more and more providers of public services that cost the recipient out-of-pocket expense, can blatantly charge more and provide less, and get away with it with impunity.

Why do they get away with it? Because our citizens are captive to the providers of public services. They can't say "since I don't like the service, I will take my business elsewhere. There is no place to go. The same is true of postal patrons.

The same principle is in effect when Mr. Frank says I am increasing the price of a postage stamp by 19 percent, but I am also reducing the service that your 30 cent stamp is supposed to buy.

Postal patrons are David, up against the Giant Goliath.

In conclusion Mr. Chairman, I will just recite the litany that our postal patrons -- our constituents -- have heard from the Postal Service in the last year or so:

*When Postmasters retire, we won't replace them, thus effectively

closing the small local post office;

*We will reduce open window hours at local post offices by several hours on the weekend, thus eliminating postal services for most people who work during the week;

*We will arbitrarily close small, rural post offices and claim another one is only two miles away, even though local residents are the frail elderly, disabled, and without private or public transportation to the next town;

*We refuse to replace local post offices with rural delivery when we close them down;

*We will downgrade the size and scope of Intermediate post offices, offering fewer local services;

*We are increasing the price of a postage stamp by 5 cents, that will keep a lot of mail from being sent by those who can't afford them; and

*We now offer you Consistent Delivery of mail, rather than the prompt, reliable, efficient overnight, or two-day service the Postal Service has historically provided.

Mr. Chairman, it is one thing to make drastic changes when it is necessary to save money, or stop waste and abuse. But the Postmaster General does not even claim that the Consistent Delivery plan saves money -- there are no projected cost savings reflected in the current rate proposal, or the consistent delivery plan.

What then is the purpose.

I strongly believe the Postmaster, in keeping with this Administration's desires, has just implemented the first stage of the privatization of the Postal Service.

We must guard the postal service closely, Mr. Chairman, for what is easily lost is not easily regained - its true of freedom, and its true of postal services. If we permit this insidious curtailment of standards of delivery of our mail, coupled with an increase in rates, we have given away half the store. It will only be a matter of a very short time until the U.S Postal Service, acting with impunity, will downgrade what is left.

By then, the private sector will easily take over the delivery of mail in this country, and the 30 cent postage stamp will pale in comparison to what they will charge in the name of business as usual, profit being the name of the game.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.