

TESTIMONY OF

CHARLES W. MAPA
PRESIDENT
OF THE NATIONAL LEAGUE OF POSTMASTERS

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL WORKFORCE, POSTAL SERVICE, AND
THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA,
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

OF THE

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Chairman Davis, Ranking Member Marchant, members of the Committee, thank you for inviting us to appear before you today. My name is Charley Mapa and I am the President of the National League of Postmasters. I welcome this opportunity to appear before you today at this subcommittee's very first postal hearing.

At the outset I want to say how pleased I am that Congress has seen fit to reconstitute a Postal Service Subcommittee. The Postal Service, with its more than \$70 billion in revenue is one of the largest, most important, and oldest institutions in the Federal Government. Its health is key to the well-being of our economy, and it deserves the attention of a separate subcommittee.

PRELIMINARY

Started in 1887 to represent rural postmasters, the League of Postmasters is a management association representing the interests of all postmasters. Although we represent postmasters from all across the country—from the very smallest to the very largest post offices—rural postmasters are a sizable portion of our membership. The League speaks for thousands of retired postmasters as well.

On a personal note, I was elected President of the League last August, and before that served in a variety of national, state, and local positions with the League. I am from Gold Run California, a small community of several hundred people, nestled in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, between and Sacramento and Lake Tahoe. I have been postmaster at Gold

Run for 21 years and was privileged to have been named California Postmaster of the Year in 1998. Currently, I am on leave from my postmaster position to serve with the League, and I live here in Washington.

POSTAL REFORM

Mr. Chairman, the first thing I would like to do is to thank you and Chairman Waxman of the full Committee, as well as former Chairmen Tom Davis and John McHugh, for passing the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act of 2007 (PAEA) at the end of the last Congress. The fact that the PAEA became law is going to be a very important element in assuring the continuation of the long-term ability of the United States Postal Service to provide affordable, universal mail service to every individual, home, and business in America.

The new law has shifted the responsibility for funding the military retirement of postal CSRS retirees back to the Treasury where it belongs, and also dissolved the escrow, freeing those monies so that they may be placed in a trust account to pay for retirement benefits of postal employees. These two provisions will save rate-payers billions upon billions of dollars per year over the next decade. Each billion dollars of savings equals one cent saved off the First-Class Stamp, with comparable rate savings on the other rates. These two provisions will also ensure that our retirement benefits are pre-funded.

The League is also pleased that the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act did not negatively affect small rural or inner city post offices. As we pointed out many times during the legislative debate on postal reform, the cost of the 10,000 smallest post offices is less than one percent (1%) of the total budget of the Postal Service. Local post offices are icons in rural

America and not to be tampered with, for once a town's post office disappears, the town often shrivels up and dies.

THE FUTURE

While the long march toward postal reform is over, in some respects the most challenging task lies ahead. That task is turning the Postal Service into a more efficient and more productive delivery organization, an institution that is focused more upon serving its customers than upon “enforcing” the rules. That is a goal to which not only the League is committed, but to which I am personally committed.

From my perspective, I have seen many changes in the postal system over the last twenty years. Perhaps the biggest change has been in the attitude of the Postal Service towards its customers. From where I sit, the Postal Service is much more customer friendly than it used to be. That is a change in corporate culture that is extremely positive. I am sure we have a ways to go, but with the type of leadership that is coming from L'Enfant Plaza today, I am sure we will continue to make great progress.

To this point, a critical issue in the future is going to be how top postal management manages its mid-level managers and its mid-level resources, including most postmasters. In order for this new world to succeed, those postmasters and resources must be managed wisely. From the postmasters point of view, I know that our attitude on this issue is right on the mark, and we stand ready to do what we need to do to better help customers and the Postal Service.

In terms of postmasters relationship with top management, all three postal management groups began pay consultation talks with management last week. It is far too early to say how those are going, except to say that things got off to a pleasant start. In terms of how the Postal

Service is going to manage its mid-level managers and postmasters as the new postal order is created, it is also far too early to make any statements, much less draw any conclusions.

I do have two areas of concern. One concerns how the Postal Service manages postmasters. The other concerns the degree to which the Postal Service is increasingly having postmasters do other jobs in addition to their own, and the danger of massive burnout that this treatment is creating.

A. How the Postal Service Manages Postmasters.

The Postal Service's style of managing postmasters is becoming more and more one of intense micromanagement, with an overlay of fear and intimidation. That, it seems to me, is not good for the postmaster nor for the postal system. If you hire postmasters to manage, then let them manage. Most postmasters are quite competent. The Postal Service needs to understand that competence, embrace that competence, and put more trust in its postmasters.

Most of the problem lies in how the people who manage postmasters are trained and how they end up treating the postmasters that report to them. A postmaster's manager is called an MPOO (Manager of Post Office Operations) or a POOM (Post Office Operations Managers)—the title varies by region—and that person generally reports directly to the district manager. I will use the term MPOO throughout the rest of this testimony.

There is too often, far too often, a strong and very negative tension between a postmaster and his or her MPOO. I was lucky in my career, and had some of the best. Other postmasters are not so fortunate.

The problem is not that MPOOs tend to be bad people. They aren't. The problem is that MPOs are operations people who may have been trained on the technical side of the Postal

System, but who generally have not been sufficiently trained in either the art of leadership or how to properly manage people. MPOOs tend to be managers who get stuck in a slot, with numbers to make, and without the necessary management skills to help them get there. As a result, many MPOOs manage with a stick, and a heavy dose of intimidation. The result is often less than optimal. Those MPOOs who do well are those MPOOs who are natural leaders, and have figured out on their own that the best way to motivate people is through a professional attitude of trust, of respect, and reasonable goal-setting, the types of things that the private sector's basic and intermediate management training sessions focus upon. The MPOOs who don't do well are those who never figure that out. Unfortunately, many of the MPOOs who don't do well might have done quite well had they been given proper leadership training and some help in developing the skills necessary to effectively manage people.

If the Postal Service is to meet the expectations of greater efficiency that the PAEA envisions, and the expectations of the mailing community, it is going to have to train MPOOs in how to manage people well, and how to use positive motivation. If we can get to the point where most postmasters view their MPOO as a mentor, the Postal Service would be much improved, and much, much more efficient.

Related to this is an issue that concerns Postmaster Replacements (PMRs). A PMR is a person hired by the Postal Service to substitute for a postmaster when the postmaster is unable to function. PMRs are meant to be short-term place-holders, and generally are part-timers who are paid a bit more than minimum wage and receive no benefits. They usually have insufficient training, no career track, and no incentive to perform efficiently. Yet for cost reasons, some Postal Service districts are replacing postmasters more and more with PMRs when a postmaster slot opens up, and leaving PMRs in place to operate a post office for extended periods of time.

This practice shortchanges the community by depriving it of one of its leaders, shortchanges the PMR by not pushing him or her into a career track, and shortchanges the Postal Service by placing ill-trained people in key positions. It does not help develop the professionalism of the work force.

B. How the Postal Service Is Working Postmasters.

Mr. Chairman, generally, postmasters who are exempt from the Fair Labor Standards Act work more than the “normal” 40 hours per week and are not compensated for it, that just being what it takes to manage their offices. While all postmasters realize that their job is not tied to 40 hours per week, and realize the necessity of working longer than that, things seem to be beginning to spin out of control.

Every new change, every new report, every new program, and every new procedure add more and more to a postmaster’s day. None ever seem to take away from it. While every postmaster understands that the demands of a postmaster job go beyond the “normal” 40 hours, many districts simply ignore the normal and expect postmasters, especially exempt postmasters, to be there to work six days a week, eight to ten (sometimes 12) hours per week, day after day, week after week, year after year. This has to stop.

Working 45 hours per week, constantly, is one thing. Working 50 hours per week, constantly, is another. Working 60 hours per week, constantly, is yet another; and it is one that inevitably leads to burnout. One can simply not work ten hours a day, six days a week, week after week, without paying an enormous price. Postmasters are working at record levels and the 60-hour work week is becoming all too common. As difficult as it may be to imagine, 70-hour workweeks are appearing.

Although we do not have statistics, we are concerned that postmasters are beginning to burn out at a record rate. They certainly are retiring at a record rate, and much local institutional knowledge and efficiency is being lost with those retirees. That is not good. It is not good for postmasters and it is not good for the postal system. Burned-out managers tend to create burned-out workers. Burned-out workers are not going to create the more productive delivery system envisioned by postal reform.

Even for those postmasters that stay, hiring freezes and overtime rules are making more common scenarios in which the local postmaster makes less money yet works longer hours than the postal clerks or carriers that he or she is supervising. This creates the perverse incentive that, when a postmaster leaves and needs to be replaced, the best candidates for the job won't apply for they know that taking on the added responsibility of the postmaster means longer hours and less pay for them. And what rational man or woman wants to accept higher responsibility, longer hours, and less pay? In the private sector, promotion always means more responsibility, generally means longer hours, but it always means higher pay.

Why are postmasters working longer? Part of the problem turns upon the fashion in which higher postal management has been "keeping costs down." Rather than allocating resources to maximize efficiency—e.g., reducing them in some areas and increasing them in others—management has simply been calling upon postmasters to do several jobs at once and using them in place of a carrier or a clerk relief.

For instance, a postmaster might be forced to come in very early to sort the mail for a carrier who is sick. After finishing the sorting, the postmaster has to go out and actually deliver the route. Once that is done, he or she can come back to the office to finally start their "normal" duties. The time devoted to the normal business can be quite short, however, for postmasters

often have to go on window duty to compensate for the lack of clerk time available during peak demand. Once the window can be closed down, the postmaster gets to go back to his or her normal duties.

That means that, at the end of the day, when carriers and clerks have gone home, the postmaster gets to settle down and spend several hours finishing off much of his or her work. The pattern goes on and on until the postmaster goes home exhausted after as much as twelve hours of work, doing not only their own work, but also that of a carrier and a clerk. In the short term, the Postal Service saves money. In the long term, once the burnout sets in, it does not. There is even a formula, which varies by the level of a postmaster, for how much “craft” work a postmaster can do. There is no doubt in my mind that this formula is being widely ignored on almost a daily basis.

The problem with this management style is that it cannot work over the long term. Yet postmasters see no relief in sight. Congress and the mailing community should be concerned. The Postal Service needs to recognize the problem, and deal with it in a healthy and constructive fashion.

Finally, not all postmasters are exempt from the Fair Labor Standards Act. Some fall within the Act’s wage and hour provisions, and are due overtime pay if they work more than 40 hours a week. Those non-exempt postmasters are feeling increasing pressure to work extra time, but not to report it. That is not only not healthy, it is illegal.

CONCLUSION

Thank you for passing the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act of 2006. It is going to be critical to maintaining a healthy postal system. The Postal Service and its employees

now need to make it work. One item that will go a long way towards making the system work better is effective leadership and management training for MPOOs and POOMs.

The League is concerned about how many hours the Postal Service is now working postmasters and other mid-level managers, week in and week out, and how postmasters now are doing not only their own job but also that of a carrier and clerk—day in and day out. If the pace at which postmasters are working continues to escalate, serious burnout will occur. Already the demand for new postmaster spots appears to be diminishing, since experienced carriers and clerks know that becoming a postmaster means higher responsibility and longer hours for less pay. It is a perverse system that gives one more responsibility and longer hours, but less pay as one moves up the ladder. Something needs to be done, and resources balanced appropriately.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my remarks. I look forward to working with you, your staff, and other Members of this subcommittee this year. I want to thank you for this opportunity to appear before you today and would be pleased to answer any questions you have.

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