



National League of Postmasters Legislative White Paper Postmaster Hours and Post Office Management Practices.

January 28, 2010

As is well known, the Postal Service is facing difficult financial times. The economy has had a damaging effect on the Postal Service, and there will not be much relief until next year.

No one knows this better than America's Postmasters. Postmasters are on the front lines and see and feel the effects of the recession on operating budgets and employee complements more than anyone. Throughout this crisis, Postmasters have responded heroically to the challenge.

Shifting Hours.

In FY 09, the Postal Service cut over a million work hours. While some of those hours are hours saved because mail volume is down, the vast majority of the time has *not* been driven out of the system, as claimed by the Postal Service. In fact, many of the so-called work hour savings are actually hours shifted to the backs of Postmasters who must not only perform their job, but also perform much of the job of clerks and carriers. Over the last several years, the Postal Service has failed, by design, to adequately staff post offices, or the Postal Service has deliberately failed to budget sufficient work hours to adequately operate a post office. The result has been that either the Postmasters took up the slack, or the system crumbled.

For example, instead of having five or six clerks or carriers work two to six additional hours per week, that 10 to 36 hours of work has been shifted from those clerks or carriers who get paid by the hour to the one person who does not get paid by the hour—the Postmaster. The result, as this example shows, are six (sometimes seven) day work weeks, that range from 50 hours to 76 hours per week for Postmasters. Critically, instead of being occasional occurrences, this practice has become standard operating procedure, month in and month out, throughout the country.

Additionally, in those offices that are supposed to have supervisors, the Postal Service initiated a freeze on the hiring of supervisors. In some cases, this left Postmasters little choice but to do two or more jobs where supervisor vacancies opened up or existed. In other cases, where extra hours by supervisors were needed, those extra hours were denied by upper level management, since supervisors are entitled to be paid for *all* hours worked. Again, the Postmaster had to make the time up, since the work did not disappear and service had to be maintained.

For the past 3 or 4 years, this has become an increasingly popular strategy in the Postal Service. During this same time period, the Postal Service also willfully shifted work from other employees to Postmasters. As the Postal Service eliminated or reduced different functional groups in districts, such as Finance, Human Resources, and Training and Development, Postmasters had to take up the slack as best they could, because there is no one else to do so.

Although Postmasters are accustomed to regularly and routinely working extra hours each week, when needed, the situation has escalated to where it is not unusual for many Postmasters to work fifty, sixty or seventy hours a week, week after week, month after endless month.

This additional workload is taking a tremendous toll on many Postmasters. A recent League survey shows that 60% of FLSA Exempt Postmasters are working 50 or more hours a week. This same survey reports that 45% of Postmasters are working 2 or more weekends a month. These Postmasters are men and women trying to raise families and play active roles in their churches, schools, communities, and other local organizations. Their overloaded workweek is negatively impacting their families, personal lives, and health. Ultimately it is affecting the postal service.

The survey reports that almost 73% of Postmasters state their health is directly suffering from their workload, including bouts of depression, insomnia, high blood pressure, anxiety attacks, ulcers and other problems.

Inefficient and Ineffective Post Office Management Practices by Upper Level Management.

In many districts the working climate for Postmasters is destructive. Every facet of a Postmaster's day and operation is micromanaged. Chasing numbers has cultivated a climate where verbal abuse and threats from senior managers are now in vogue. Not long ago, a high-ranking manager was quoted as saying "those non-performing supervisors should be taken out and executed." Management associations complained about this inappropriate comment. Our complaint was ignored; nothing was done.

Many Postmasters live in fear of their district leaders and are reluctant to speak up on important district issues. Often, small office Postmasters, who are entitled to overtime pay and not represented by unions, refuse to claim those overtime hours because of intimidation from senior managers who do not want overtime to appear on district reports. That is not only morally wrong, it is illegal. Postmasters are even being "disciplined" for the inadvertent errors of their employees. A Postmaster who employs

one hundred mail carriers may be suspended if one of his carriers fails to scan even one collection box.

Another pressing issue is that Postmasters have been saddled with a pay for performance program that is largely ineffective. It is supposed to be a motivator; it is anything but. This is not a bonus program; it is the only avenue through which a Postmaster can get a raise. Last year, because of the manipulation of the program and revenue goals being set artificially high, tens of thousands of hardworking Postmasters were termed “non-contributors” and received no raise while practically every other postal and federal employee received something. If management is going to be honest and respectful of its employees, it should say that there will be no increases, regardless of pay for performance results, and not “fix” the system so that everyone fails. That is neither honest nor respectful.

Finally, the Postal Service has failed the American people, especially those in rural communities, by not filling Postmaster positions in smaller post offices. In many cases, these offices have been staffed by temporary personnel for more than two years. Sometimes a series of managers have been cycled through such post offices, placing the Post Offices generally under management that is neither as trained nor as experienced as the Postmaster, and generally does not know the community as well as the Postmaster. This deprives communities of the Postmasters they deserve, and the service and continuity a Postmaster would provide. This is costing the Postal Service millions of dollars in lost efficiency each year.

For over two hundred years the Postal Service has faithfully filled Postmaster positions in these offices, but now, in 2010, it is failing to do so. The dedicated employees managing these offices deserve better from the Postal Service as do the American people in the communities these post offices serve.

This may not be a pretty picture, but it is an accurate one. Granted, the financial state of the Postal Service is not good. But that is because, as the Postal Service’s Inspector General has pointed out, the Postal Service has **overpaid** \$75 Billion into the Federal Treasury for the CSRS pension obligations. In any case, the state of the Postal Service cannot be used as an excuse to treat people poorly. Postmasters are among the Postal Service's most loyal and dedicated employees. Over the years they have worked under adverse conditions with very little complaint. The National League of Postmasters has taken every issue recounted above to Postal Service Headquarters in efforts to get relief for, or resolution to them. The Postal Service has repeatedly refused to even hear our voices.

Coming to Congress is not an easy move for Postmasters. That choice was not made lightly. But in view of the Postal Service's refusal to consider their issues—much less positively resolve them—Congressional oversight must be exercised.

Congress should open an investigation into these issues and hold hearings. Ultimately Congress should instruct the Postal Service to cease shifting workload from supervisors, clerks, and carriers to Postmasters and get them to realize that such actions are not a long term solution to anything. In doing so, Congress should instruct the Postal Service to institute and follow standards for senior management interaction, cease frivolous disciplinary action, and put into place a reasonable and less complicated pay for performance system for Postmasters.

Finally, the Postal Service should immediately fill all Postmaster vacancies. The increase in efficiency will be notable.