

August 6, 2020

The Honorable Gary C. Peters, Ranking Member  
Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs  
United States Senate  
Washington DC 20510-6250

Senator Peters,

I write to provide you information from my state about the impact of recent changes to United States Postal Service procedures and operations on post offices and processing centers. Maine press, postal customer constituents, and postal workers have all informed my office about recent changes they have noted. The USPS is of no-less-than-vital service to my constituents in Maine. As the nation's oldest and one of its most rural states, the services USPS provides support essential commerce, communication, and health for the people of Maine. Any attack on or attempt to damage USPS services constitutes a harm to the people I represent.

According to the *Portland Press-Herald*, "The delivery of first-class and priority mail is being intentionally delayed so that letter carriers can prioritize the delivery of Amazon packages, according to letter carriers at the Portland post office and an official complaint lodged with the Office of Inspector General."<sup>1</sup> The complaint claims that the local postmaster instructed postal clerks to sort and deliver Amazon Fourth-Class parcels ahead of First-Class mail and Priority parcels, resulting in the delayed delivery of 1,500-2,000 First-Class and Priority packages on each of at least three occasions. The complaint claim was filed by three postal service employees, including the president of the Maine State Association of Letter Carriers.

It is not just media outlets making these claims. In a number of cases, I have heard directly from postal employees claiming that they are being "harassed if I arrive a minute too early" or that they are being threatened with termination if they "leave a minute off the clock to finish my job." While postal employees say they are following new policies to leave tasks undone at the end of their regular shift—even if their facility is short-staffed and could not complete its "normal" work with the available employees—they are suspicious of the motivation behind these new "orders" that "come from the very top." These employees report

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<sup>1</sup> Reuben Schafir, "Amazon gets priority while mail gets delayed, say letter carriers," *Portland Press-Herald*, 21 July 2020, <https://www.pressherald.com/2020/07/21/first-class-and-priority-mail-delayed-in-favor-of-amazon-parcels-according-to-portland-letter-carriers/>.

that the new directives target the symptom (overtime) rather than the root causes of mail delivery challenges.

Further, some postal employees in Maine express concern about USPS's ability to handle the anticipated crush of mail we expect from the general election. They report that they feel personally responsible but institutionally unsupported for their role in the health of our democracy. (We can share more details confidentially with staff to protect the individuals who have come forward, or we can put investigators in direct contact with constituents.)

Since June 15 of this year, more than 700 Maine people have contacted my office to express concern about the financial stability of the USPS, interest in Congress acting to issue it (reasonable) relief, and concern about impacts of cuts to service. Since the issue of USPS stability arose in the spring, as a result of the pandemic, more than 4,500 people have contacted my office regarding these issues. A typical message along these lines says,

*Please support the USPS financially as it tries to cope with current circumstances relating to the pandemic just as the looming election makes its performance more vitally important than ever. The USPS is the most benign and popular arm of the Federal Government. No politician can go wrong giving it all the support it needs. The Postal Service should never be politicized nor PRIVATIZED.*

In a related vein, over 1,200 people have contacted my office since June 15 to encourage me and Congress to make sure mail-in voting is organized, funded, and ready for the election in three months.

The USPS isn't a business – it's a public service, designed to facilitate commerce in every corner of our country. Its goal is not to make profits, but rather to facilitate universal communication and give businesses across the country the opportunity to succeed. If we tear down this infrastructure, those businesses and the customers that rely on them will suffer greatly. Even more important in these final three-and-a-half months before the November 2020 election, the USPS will be a buttress of one of our most important civic acts—the vote—and it has essential work to do to protect and fulfill the promises of our democracy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Angus S. King, Jr." The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized initial 'A'.

Angus S. King, Jr.