

Statement of Mr. Edmund A Carley

National President

United Postmasters and Managers of America

Before the United States House of Representatives, the Subcommittee on Government Operations of the Committee on Oversight and Reform

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Thank you, Chairman Connolly, Ranking Member Hice, and members of the Subcommittee. On behalf of the United Postmasters and Managers of America (UPMA), my name is Edmund Carley, and I am the National President. UPMA is a management association representing more than 24,000 active and retired Postmasters, Managers, Supervisors, and many associate members (clerks, carriers, and others who want to be in postal management). UPMA members oversee the delivery of over 500 million pieces of mail every day to 161 million households and businesses of all sizes in the United States.

I began my postal career in Springfield, Illinois, on August 14, 1999, as a part-time city Letter Carrier. I graduated from the Associate Supervisor Program in May of 2006 and became a Supervisor, Customer Service in Springfield. On July 4, 2008, I was promoted to Postmaster at the Lincoln, Illinois, Post Office.

Before being elected as National President of the United Postmasters and Managers of America, I served in various offices on the Illinois Chapter level, including Legislative Chairman, and four years as Chapter President. I also served as National Legislative Chair and National Vice President from 2015 to 2018 and National Executive Vice President from 2019 to 2021.

On November 1, 2021, I became the second elected National President of UPMA. Our organization is recognized statutorily under Title 39 of the US Code. The statute directs that we consult with the United States Postal Service to participate directly in the planning and development of pay policies and schedules, fringe benefit programs, and other programs relating to supervisory and other managerial employees. I am committed to recruiting, engaging, and developing future leaders for UPMA, and the Postal Service, improving UPMA members' work situations and helping move all postal employees forward as we continue to deliver for the American people.

Passing Postal Reform

I want to express UPMA's strong appreciation of the work of this Subcommittee and Congress. I cannot overstate how important the passage of the Postal Service Reform Act (PSRA) was to the Postal Service's ability to pivot on its path to self-reliant stability, protecting what UPMA members rely on most: their postal careers and retirement. PSRA addressed many internal issues that hampered the Post Office in growing and planning for the future of mail delivery. The relief from retiree healthcare prefunding and Medicare integration, especially, has enabled a more straightforward financial path forward for the Service. The Postal Regulatory Commission's positive actions on pricing flexibility have allowed the USPS to continue to see growth in revenues while some mail volumes continue to fall. The ball is now firmly in the court of the US Postal Service leaders to further reduce costs, increase efficiencies, and modernize our processes, including the postal network.

Managing Peak Business Demands

I want to highlight the extraordinary measures put in place by postal management and the herculean efforts by UPMA members (and the rest of the 650,000 men and women of the US Postal Service) this past election cycle. I would point to those plans and that effort as a great insight into how my members will ensure that the 2022 "Peak Season" will be successful.

Of course, like every business, the USPS faces real pressure to perform at the standards its customers and stakeholders expect. Meeting service expectations is a significant responsibility of Postmasters. The USPS today would cite staffing and inflationary challenges across the board, but; this doesn't tell the entire story of what my members face in their local Post Offices. We take our mission seriously, but Postmasters are short-staffed in many areas of the country and are personally delivering mail on some routes in order to complete that mission. In some regions, advertised vacancies get no applicants for many posting cycles. Labor market challenges are not unique to the Postal Service, but the extra security measures involved in hiring federal employees does make the process more difficult. Sometimes when we are able to get an applicant, by the time we run background checks, etc., they have taken other jobs. When you compound that with retirements and the idea that there may be other separations from the Service – as has been reported recently, compared to peak seasons historically, it will not be easy to continue to achieve the stated service standards. However, the Postal Service has weathered situations like this many times, and UPMA members are proud of the efforts of the people they manage in executing on-time delivery in extraordinary circumstances.

Each peak season presents unique challenges. In 2020 we saw delays in plants and transportation. Pandemic-related absences crippled the postal network, and we could not adapt quickly enough to prevent bottlenecks that affected service nationwide.

Unprecedented election mail and exponential growth in package volume further exacerbated the problem. The Service recovered considerably in 2021, and better employee attendance and staffing in certain areas led to a much more successful season. Every postal employee is proud of the excellent execution of COVID test kit distribution which helped America recover and emerge from the pandemic.

Now, in 2022, we see record amounts of election mail again. Inflation is a distraction that is eating up many of our resources. Private sector pay and initial benefits are enticing applicants. Employees seeking Postmaster positions see long hours and difficult working conditions as added challenges that may deter upward mobility, making it even more difficult for the Postal Service to attract and retain qualified managers.

The Postal Service has historically managed to deliver for America despite many factors being against us. I have spoken personally about postal issues to most members of this crucial committee over the last decade. Although our philosophy of how to make necessary changes might have differed, we have always agreed that a strong, thriving, vibrant, and healthy Postal Service is essential for America, American democracy, the American economy, and the Postal Service's 650,000 dedicated public servants who rely on USPS jobs to support their families.

UPMA/USPS Pay and Benefit Consultations

As I mentioned, under title 39, UPMA consults with the Service, and they must give our opinions "full and fair" consideration. However, none of our consultations or fact-finding measures under title 39 are binding on the Service. Under my leadership, UPMA always stands ready to partner with the USPS to improve our performance, conditions for my members and the employees we supervise, and services to the American people as operations become more efficient. However, the law, written in 1972, is vague about what representation is, how it is recognized and how the Service should handle consultations; a revision is long overdue in this regard.

UPMA members eagerly await the results of the switch to where all Postal Workers' Health care plans are being organized under OPM separately within the Federal Employee Health Benefits Plan (FEHBP). The initial consultations that the USPS has had with UPMA suggest that although there are many moving parts under the surface, most of our members will see a seamless transition. The forecast is for lower premiums and a continued level of service with many options for all postal employees to choose coverage and plan for retirement with the Medicare Integration component. In addition to salaries, a stable retirement is also a significant benefit. The Thrift Savings Plan reorganization was not without setbacks. However, again, over time, UPMA believes that the TSP is still the best tool its members have to fund their retirement portfolio to supplement retirement annuity and Social Security.

WEP/GPO Reform

While outside the specific jurisdiction of this committee, we strongly encourage Congress to take up and pass a Windfall Elimination Provision and Government Pension Offset bill. This policy costs retired Postmasters, teachers, police officers, firefighters, and other public servants the benefits they have worked for and earned over their lifetimes. This is a benefit retirees paid their fair share to earn, and the penalty to these public servants is real. Several proposed legislative remedies have broad bipartisan support, including HR 82 (The Social Security Fairness Act), which has more than 300 cosponsors. While we know time is short in the 117th Congress, passing a fix for the WEP and GPO would help vulnerable retirees.

Delivery and Service - Vehicles

One of the significant challenges of the peak season is how the organization manages package volume. With packages as a substantial part of mail being delivered by the Postal Service, the next generation of vehicles must be developed and designed to meet the Service's needs. The next generation of vehicles can be safer for postal employees, reduce their environmental impact, and be more flexible for the future needs of the USPS.

Operation and Maintenance of Post Offices

When we look to reform the USPS, we must not forget the attributes that make us the most favorably viewed government agency, with value our customers believe in. We deliver to every household and business in America at least six days a week.

As the Postal Service evolves, it is essential to commit dedicated funding to the next generation of postal facilities. All too often, postal employees are crammed into outdated and outmoded facilities with a retail experience that frustrates the customer. UPMA believes the Postal Service should continue to invest in new state-of-the-art facilities to reflect the future mission of the Service cost-effectively.

Commitment to Community

The Postal Service makes America run. UPMA members touch every household every day in all fifty states and beyond. In no other country can someone send a letter from as far as Nome, Alaska, to Key West, Florida, at such a low cost. Small businesses, in particular, rely on postal services to reach customers and maintain cost competitiveness. The USPS is a significant supplier of cost-effective business solutions, making it possible for small businesses to deliver goods, products, and services to customers across the country and around the globe. UPMA supports the USPS's efforts to strengthen and increase its market share in this phase of the business model they have adopted.

Money alone will not solve the problems the USPS is facing. UPMA will continue working with Congress on reforms addressing falling first-class mail volume, increased parcel volume, outdated facilities, and vehicles that are well beyond their functional life-cycle and require replacement.

UPMA is proud to partner with the Service, consult with Postal leaders, and influence policy as we move the USPS forward. However, we do not always agree with every aspect of management's plans, and in those cases, we have to voice our concerns and have those concerns addressed. For the most part, when we work together, UPMA's input has improved Headquarters plans itself but certainly successfully influenced the plan's implementation, especially in the Retail and Delivery arena. After all, it is UPMA members who manage the Post Offices and other delivery units that ultimately complete the mission of "Putting the Mail in the Box"! So no matter what initiatives the Service plans and how they intend to implement them, UPMA members are an integral part of their success.

Thank you for the opportunity to share UPMA's views on the issues facing the United States Postal Service. I look forward to answering your questions.