



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF POSTMASTERS  
OF THE UNITED STATES

TESTIMONY OF

DENNIS O'NEILL

POSTMASTER OF CHOKIO, MN

BEFORE THE

POSTAL REGULATORY COMMISSION

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

JUNE 5, 2008

Mr. Chairman, distinguished Commission members, my name is Dennis O'Neill. I am the Postmaster of Chokio, Minnesota, and I am testifying on behalf of the 40,000-member National Association of Postmasters of the United States. Please understand that my views may not reflect the policy of the U.S. Postal Service. Nonetheless, I strongly believe that I am uniquely qualified to offer my constructive input to the Commission's report on "universal postal service," as I am the Postmaster of an isolated postal-reliant community.

Mr. Chairman, with your permission, I would like to tell you about my town. Chokio is a small city located in west central Minnesota, approximately 40 miles east of the South Dakota, Minnesota border and on Minnesota Highway 28. Currently, there are 418 residents. The Chokio Post Office is housed in a 150-year-old, 1,200 square foot building, with a small lobby. We have 225 post office boxes, where residents and business pick up their daily mail. My windows are open from 9-12 and 1:15- 4. Chokio has one rural route, with 165 delivery points. I have proudly served the community as their Postmaster for the past 15 years. I love the job. It is an honor to bring the nation, and indeed, the world, to rural Minnesota. This special relationship brings me into contact with the 25 small businesses that depend on access to a full-service retail postal facility. These businesses need the Post Office. It also enables me to spread community news because Chokio's newspaper, with about 1,000 subscribers, distributed via the mail. We have five religious institutions that rely on the Chokio Post Office to inform their congregants of good news and bad. My little Post Office is a town fixture, where residents can assemble to communicate with each other, and of course, to transact postal

business. Indeed, about 250 Chokio residents pass through my Post Office lobby every day. Obviously, Chokio postal customers recognize the priceless value of universal postal service.

At the same time, I am deeply saddened that there are special interests and economists who devalue the tremendous importance that small and rural Post Offices bring to America's heartland. The ubiquitous postal presence throughout our country – and especially in small towns like Chokio – continues to bind our nation together. So many of our citizens are not computer savvy, are not wired to the internet, distrust email, are suspicious of electronic fund transfers, or are just plain loyal to Ben Franklin's legacy. In addition, computer geeks have yet to figure out a way to transmit a package via the internet. Let me assure, you that in small towns like Chokio, that landscape of America, there is no option, but the Post Office. If we did not exist, residents of small and rural America would be forced to rely on undependable, inconsistent, and expensive mail services.

There are those who argue that, small rural Post Offices are an anachronism, are unnecessary and drain USPS coffers. Let me share with you a not-too-carefully-kept secret. In rural areas, private for-profit carriers rely on the Chokio Post Office and other small Post Offices to deliver the last mile. In addition, if small town and rural residents want to send a package, they are forced to pay a steep premium for sending that parcel. In rural areas, postal customers tend not to be in the vicinity of their rural mail box, if they have one, at the time their rural letter carrier delivers their mail. So, to provide an

enhanced sense of security, the postal customers lease post office boxes at their local Post Office. Our customers rely on the Post Office to pick up and send “accountable mail”, and purchase postal money orders because there is no accessible financial institution. Small town and rural postal customers should not be forced to travel miles and miles from their residence or their trade, to transact their postal business. It’s not only inconvenient – it’s unfair and will have a devastating economic and social impact on the community. Moreover, ever-escalating fuel prices would place a heavy burden on postal customers victimized by consolidation of small and rural Post Offices.

Simply stated, Chokio and small town rural residents should receive the same level of mail service that postal customers here, in the Twin Cities, receive. To Postmasters, universal service means nondiscriminatory accessibility, price and standards.

Thank you for providing me the opportunity to share with you my views.