



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF POSTMASTERS  
OF THE UNITED STATES

TESTIMONY OF  
JEANIE SCHNELL

POSTMASTER OF MONHEGAN, MAINE

BEFORE THE

POSTAL REGULATORY COMMISSION

PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE

JUNE 19, 2008

Mr. Chairman, distinguished Commission members, my name is Jeanie Schnell. I am Postmaster of Monhegan, Maine, and I am testifying on behalf of the 40,000-member National Association of Postmasters of the United States. Please understand that my statement and views do not necessarily reflect the policy of the U.S. Postal Service. Nonetheless, I strongly believe that I am very qualified to assist the Commission with its report on “universal postal service.”

Monhegan is a remote and literally isolated community. The Postal Service is our commercial and interpersonal lifeline. Located approximately ten miles off the coast, Monhegan Island is a mile and a half long and half a mile wide; three-quarters of the island is a forested natural preserve with 17 miles of trails through wooded areas and over rocky ledges up to some of the highest ocean cliffs on the Maine coastline. It is accessible only by boat, (an hours ride in good weather); and there are no cars or paved roads on the island. There is a church, a library, a museum, and a one-room school house (for K-8) but no high school, no bank, no drug store; certainly no doctor, not even a nurse. Monhegan has a year round population of around 60 residents; however, during the summer months the population grows more than tenfold.

Painters, photographers and bird watchers from round the world come each year to escape the hustling cities and rushing highways and rejuvenate on Monhegan. Indeed, many return year after year. Some buy summer homes and pass them down from one generation to the next.

And then there are those, like my husband and me, who come to stay – and work – and live with families that go back five and more generations. Please note the word “work” because, while quite quaint and picturesque, Monhegan is first and foremost a working community.

Monhegan’s economy is dependent on, of course lobstering and fishing, but also the tourist industry - the inns, the cottage trade, the summer shops and restaurants, even Winter Works – a co-op selling crafts made by the winter community. And central to all this work – and central to this whole remarkable isolated place - is its Post Office.

Of course visitors send letters and cards, but every single business on this island, and every family depends on our post office. Packages are sent and received, financial transactions are carried out, prescriptions and medications are sent, and reservations are made. The Post Office is Monhegan’s lifeline; it is our bank, our pharmacy, and our commercial center. If there were no Post Office on Monhegan, there would be no year round community on Monhegan.

On a personal note, I will add that the Post Office provides us with the priceless ability to communicate with our children who must, out of necessity, leave the island for boarding school at the tender age of twelve. Speaking as a parent who’s been through the ordeal, nothing quite compares with sending or receiving a care package from home.

While private-courier transported parcels do reach the island, the packages sit on the Port Clyde dock for days, since there is no “economic justification” to load the boat with the packages as they arrive, and convey them to Monhegan. They are considered delivered when they reach Port Clyde. And, of course, there is no private-courier service provided from the island to the mainland. Indeed, without the mail contract there would be no incentive for the boat-line to run during the winter months.

I am proud that the Postal Service provides universal service, and that universal service is not characterized solely by economics. Nonetheless, I caution the Commission that if you define universal service in economic terms, rather than based upon its societal impact, you will be arranging for the demise of communities like mine. I am proud that I play a small, but vital role in providing universal service. I strongly believe that a universal postal service is a sacred, government-guaranteed obligation, which must be preserved for the sake of small-town, back-roads America. Places like Monhegan Island.

Thank you.