

BEFORE THE  
POSTAL REGULATORY COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON, DC 20268-0001

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COMMENTS OF THE NATION COMPANY L.P. AND OF THE MAGAZINES OF  
POLITICS, POLICY, AND CURRENT EVENTS COALITION (MPPACE)  
PURSUANT TO THE PRC REQUEST FOR COMMENTS ON THE UNIVERSAL  
SERVICE OBLIGATION.

I am writing on behalf of *The Nation* magazine and of an informal coalition of bipartisan political and cultural magazines (MPPACE – Magazines of Politics, Policy, and Current Events) in support of the universal service obligation of the United States Postal System.

When the Post Office was established by the founding fathers over 200 years ago, journals such as ours were an important consideration in the setting of postal policies and rates. As Victor Navasky, *The Nation's* Publisher Emeritus, said in his testimony before the Federal Workforce, Postal Service and District of Columbia House Subcommittee hearing on October 30, 2007, the founders “saw the mails as the circulatory system of our democracy...[the distribution of] these journals, whose core franchise is public discourse about public affairs, are, like water, national defense, public highways and public education, a public good.... [The founders believed the postal system] would bind the country together. As one contemporary put it, the postal system helped transform the country from a confederation of states into ‘one great neighborhood.’”

We believe that any degradation of the universal service obligation, postal monopolies, and related service changes would uniquely undermine the reason we have a government-run postal system in the first place. Charging more for remote delivery will penalize those who are in greatest need of connection to the civic arena. Limiting the days of delivery, or other such contractions of current USPS services, will by definition limit the circulation of information, opinion and what the founders called “intelligence,” which they believed were a precondition of self-governance. And while the Internet provides a valuable supplementary means of connection and distribution, the fact remains that 20% or more of our citizens do not have access to the Web and will not for the foreseeable future, nor can the paid Internet, at least in its current incarnation, fully replace all of the community and democracy-building functions provided by universal postal service.

Small periodicals such as ours are particularly vulnerable to changes at the USPS. The radical restructuring of postal rates that occurred in 2007 has had dire consequences for small magazines, many of whom, including members of

our coalition, have been forced to lower their volume and cut their frequency. Further planned limits on the services of the USPS, discounts for the largest mailers at the expense of the smallest, and the possibility of outsourcing portions of the postal service could in fact be catastrophic to our titles, titles that have been at the core of postal policy for the last 200 years.

We are in a time when market forces and market-based arguments rule the day. But are we truly prepared to jettison the wisdom of Jefferson, Franklin, Madison and Washington (the primary thinkers behind and proponents of our historic postal service) and turn to an entirely pay-to-play system, where inevitably important parts of the population would be unable to afford to participate? Does it make sense to dismantle the public good that the USPS provides, the 215 years of postal policy that has been instrumental in the creation of the extraordinary free press we have in the United States today? We fear that the economic pressures on the postal system and the lobbying for preferred treatment by the country's largest mailers are leading us quickly down this road.

We believe that the universal service obligation of the USPS, and all that it entails, is invaluable to the democratic functioning of this country. It is perhaps time to re-evaluate the 1970 Postal Reorganization Act and its requirement that the USPS, and each class of mail, pay its own way, and to instead look toward other sources of revenue to maintain our current system. A market-based service is not what the architects of our laudable postal system envisioned 200 years ago. We urge that current levels of service be maintained and enhanced. We also urge that, in light of the invidious effect on smaller periodicals such as ours, magazines the founders thought critical to a flourishing democracy, the 2007 radical rate restructuring be revisited.

Respectfully Submitted,

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*Commentary*, Sarah M. Stern, Business Director  
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