

We Told You So

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Sandwiched between NAPS President Ivan D. Butts and Executive Vice President Chuck Mulidore at the mid-April Senate Postal Service oversight hearing, the refrain “we told you so” subconsciously kept repeating on a loop. Educated members of the postal community recognize that, among postal-allied groups, NAPS got it right—the logistics realignment and consolidation component of the USPS’ 10-year plan was not ready for prime time. In fact, a few weeks ago, a senior Republican member of the House Committee on Oversight and Accountability said just that to me.

This unsolicited congressional observation returns me to the Dirksen Senate Office Building hearing room. Senator after senator raised serious questions about the Postal Service realignment and consolidation plan’s ability to deliver for America. The concerns were bipartisan. Most tragically, much of the panel viewed the agency to be in a state of denial as the defects of the Postal Service’s ever-mutating logistics operation are being revealed.

The compelling and irrefutable evidence of the flaws were presented by the senators themselves, as well as by Postal Regulatory Commission (PRC) Chairman Michael Kubayanda and Postal Inspector General (IG) Tammy Hull. The PMG himself had to apologize for the deficient performance. Moreover, it was not just the failures in Richmond, Houston and Atlanta. It also was mounting skepticism about the 10-year plan around the entire country.

Postal infirmities suffered by constituents of U.S. senators should be of overriding importance to the Senate-confirmed members of the USPS Board of Governors. At their respective confirmation hearings, each one of the governors was asked by the committee about attentiveness to postal performance and their pledge to return to the committee to be questioned about their actions, or inactions, relating to performance.

It was clear from the panel’s questioning of Postmaster General Louis DeJoy and the other three witnesses that the impact of the 10-year plan regarding on-time First-Class Mail delivery and postal operations in rural America was

paramount. Compounding the almost universal congressional anxiety about the plan was the apparent refusal of the Postal Service to take an essential pause to reassess the wisdom, speed and magnitude of the realignment and consolidation juggernaut.

As you may recall, as early as NAPS' 2022 testimony before the House Oversight and Reform Committee, we cautioned that the Postal Service's facility realignment and consolidation was not ready for prime time. The then-emerging plan cried out for transparency and stakeholder engagement.

Absent thoughtful, comprehensive and meaningful evaluation, the plan would yield disaster—and it did. The PRC and IG statements presented at the hearing, including testimony submitted by NAPS (see page 8), laid out in detail what ensued and how the problems could have been prevented and mitigated. Furthermore, the dialogues conducted among the senators and witnesses strongly suggest the Postal Service should push the pause button.

Following the hearing, on the April 19 episode of NAPS Chat, I hosted Federal News Network Reporter Jory Heckman. He outlined the deep concerns expressed by Senate committee members and how those concerns potentially could impact future legislative action with respect to the Postal Service.

Jory also pointed out one particular “unforced error” by the PMG. In response to a question posed by Sen. Jon Ossoff (D-GA) about correspondence to the PMG, DeJoy responded that he did not read the letter. Ossoff proceeded to sternly lecture DeJoy about the importance of reading mail, particularly a letter authored by a U.S. senator who sits on the committee with jurisdiction over the Postal Service and whose largest city and rural environs were brutally victimized by the USPS' Atlanta realignment and consolidation actions.

Sens. Josh Hawley (R-MO) and Roger Marshall (R-KS) expressed deep concern about chronic delivery delays in Kansas City and St. Louis. Sen. Jacky Rosen (D-NV) parried with the PMG about moving mail processing from Reno to Sacramento, considering critical weather issues unique to the Donner Pass—the one avenue of transit between the two cities. Sen. Maggie Hassan (D-NH) questioned the wisdom of processing New Hampshire mail in Boston due to the traffic snags between the two points. Sen. James Lankford (R-OK) articulated worry about mail destined or originating in Tulsa and Oklahoma City.

In sum, the senators conveyed their collective angst about the changes and how these changes, thus far, have degraded service as illustrated on the Postal Service's own performance dashboard. Along with Senate committee activity, several bipartisan bills were introduced in the House and Senate to limit postal plant closures and consolidations. In addition, provisions are being considered as part of the annual appropriations process.

At the Senate hearing, Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) took some time to question DeJoy about protecting postal employees and mail through legislation pending before the committee, the Postal Police Reform Act (S. 3356). The senator decried the growing incidence of mail thefts and carrier assaults. In response to Blumenthal's request to support the bill, DeJoy stated he would “read the bill.”

On April 26, the PRC issued a precedent-setting order directing the Postal Service to “show cause” for why it has not requested a PRC advisory opinion of the “Delivering for America” plan by May 16 or to request such an opinion by June 5. Section 3661(b) of Title 39 of the U.S. Code requires the Postal Service to request a PRC advisory opinion prior to operational changes that could result in service changes over a broad area of the country.

This April order appears to reconsider part of a December 2021 PRC decision to accept the USPS's reasoning for not requesting an advisory opinion. At that time, the PRC dismissed a complaint filed by New York, Pennsylvania, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oregon, Virginia, Vermont, Rhode Island and the District of Columbia against the Postal Service for not requesting an opinion.

Interestingly, PRC regulations require the USPS to file the request for the advisory opinion 90 days prior to implementing the changes. It is unclear how the PRC advisory opinion process would align with ongoing realignments and consolidations. It will be interesting to behold.