



# AUSPL

## news & views

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### President's Commission on USPS Says Trips to Post Office are "Inconvenient"

*Common postal services available at Wal-Marts, banks, grocers, ATMs and kiosks*

It's been several months since the President's Commission on the United States Postal Service presented its recommendations to President Bush, and some of the proposals have knocked rural citizens and owners of small post offices for a loop, including 95% of AUSPL members who own such post offices in small town USA.

Clearly, the Commission has pricked a nerve. The post office is the lifeblood of a community, without it, the most basic connection for rural America is lost. In many towns, the post office is the only representative of federal government. At the post office, customers can register for the draft, apply for Social Security cards and post federal notices. In addition to delivering the mail, the postmaster assists people with reading mail and paying bills. Seniors rely on the post office to interact with fellow citizens as well as receive medication, which may be adversely affected by weather or stolen if left in a mailbox to be collected by a letter carrier.

While the Commission endorses the basic features of universal service, it seeks to take everyday postal services out of the post office and plunk them inside grocery stores, drug stores, banks, at ATMs and other locations.

Today, people can buy postage and mail packages at 5,000 grocery stores, Wal-Marts and banks. Stamps are sold at 17,000 ATMs, approximately 20,000 consignment locations (like supermarkets), through the mail and online. Full-service kiosks, known as Automated Postal Centers, provide about 80% of postal products and services, including First-Class Mail, Priority Mail, Express Mail, Parcel Post, Delivery Confirmation, Certified return receipts and international postage.

The Postal Service plans to set up 2,500 such kiosks nationwide in 2004. According to the Commission, these alternatives offer service equal to a post office

at less cost and eliminate the "greatest inconvenience of a post office – having to make a special trip there."

#### AUSPL and League of National Postmasters Unite to Stop Postal Closings

AUSPL President Gary Poelstra recently met with Ann Fisher, deputy staff director for Senator Collins (R-ME), chair of the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee, which has jurisdiction over the Postal Service.

Senator Collins is a strong advocate for rural post offices and is conducting hearings on postal service reform. Gary explained that the majority of post offices are small and the Commission's suggestion to "sell off such real estate" was unrealistic because more than 27,000 post offices are leased, not owned, by the Postal Service. In fact, the AUSPL Insurance Program insures 24.5 million square feet leased by USPS.

Thus, the Commission's proposal to dispose of "low activity" post offices by "transfer to a state or local government or not-for-profit organization, with or without reimbursement, best serves the public interest" is not feasible.

Driving from Capitol Hill to Alexandria, Virginia, Gary met with Steve LeNoir, president of the National

League of Postmasters (NLPM), Mario Principe, the LEAGUE's post office continuance consultant and Bob Brinkmann, LEAGUE legislative



*Pictured from left: Steve LeNoir, Gary Poelstra and Mario Principe at NLPM headquarters. (Not pictured is Bob Brinkmann.)*



counsel to plan strategy. The group agreed to ask AUSPL members to continue writing their legislators, urging them to oppose reforms that would weaken the postal service. AUSPL and the LEAGUE have

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formed a strong bond, and Steve LeNoir will be a featured speaker at AUSPL Conference 2004 in Las Vegas, April 2004. He has also testified before Congress on the issue of rural post offices.

#### **Senator Collins Invites AUSPL to Provide Written Testimony for Next Hearing**

Back on Capitol Hill, James Johnson, co-chair of the President's postal commission testified about the findings and recommendations during a recent hearing chaired by Senator Collins.

Senator Collins acknowledged the Commission's strong endorsement of the basic features of universal service. “It is important to me that my constituents living in the north woods, or out on the islands, or in our many rural small towns have the same access to postal services as the people of our cities. If the Postal Service were no longer to provide universal service and deliver mail to every customer, the affordable communication link upon which many Americans rely would be jeopardized...The preservation of universal service, and many more issues, must be examined in depth if we are to save and strengthen this vital service upon which so many Americans rely for communication and their livelihoods.”

The Senator's office invited AUSPL to provide written testimony for upcoming hearings.

#### **AUSPL Letter Campaign Reaches Senator Daschle, Senator Leahy, other Notable Legislators**

This fall, AUSPL members began a letter writing campaign to legislators in Congress and the Senate using sample letters supplied by AUSPL. Many members have shared their responses with the Association. In his letter to AUSPL member Art Jones, who owns the Newell, SD post office, Senator

Tom Daschle (D-SD) said, “I share your concerns that the Commission's recommendations, if implemented, could adversely affect mail service in South Dakota. Universal, affordable, reliable mail service is absolutely critical to South Dakota.”

“We cannot afford to sacrifice universal service, six-day-a-week delivery, or other postal services on which American families and businesses depend. And, as you know, the maintenance of small, rural post offices is also essential. Please be assured that I will be monitoring the Commission's work closely.”

In response to another AUSPL member, Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) said, “I am supportive of finding viable solutions to the challenges that face the USPS...However, upon initial review, one of their recommendations seems problematic. The commission has expressed the USPS's need for the flexibility to dispose of 'low activity' post offices that are no longer necessary to the fulfillment of the goal of universal delivery service.”

“The USPS is in need of significant reform, which I fully support. At the same time, it is crucial that any changes made to the current system are responsive to the needs of both consumers and employees of USPS. Many of these post offices are an essential part of everyday life for many Vermonters and represent more than simple mail delivery.”

Senators Daschle's and Leahy's sentiments are similar to those of other members of Congress – the legislators agree the Commission's recommendations will weaken the Postal Service and pledge their support to do “everything we can to prevent this from happening.”

There are 11,000 small rural post offices measuring less than 1,000 square feet nationwide. Potentially, they could all be in danger of closure if the Commission

succeeds in transferring the most common postal services from post offices to Wal-Marts, kiosks and small businesses. To help stop the closures and consolidation of rural post office, AUSPL urges all postal lessors to write their legislators.

