

Testimony of Jimmie Canada

President, NALC Branch 11

**Before the House Sub-Committee on the Federal Workforce, Postal Service and
the District of Columbia**

Field Hearing on Mail Delivery Problems in the City of Chicago

Chicago, Illinois

May 31, 2007

Good afternoon, Chairman Davis (and other members of the Sub-committee). Thank you for this opportunity to testify before this field hearing on mail delivery in the city of Chicago. My name is Jimmie Canada; I am the President of Branch 11 of the National Association of Letter Carriers. NALC is the collective bargaining representative of 220,000 active letter carriers in the United States and Branch 11 represents 3,900 letter carriers in the city of Chicago, with nearly 97% of them choosing to be union members.

I have been a letter carrier since 1968 and have served my union at both the national and the local level. Before being elected as President of Branch 11, I served as a Regional Administrative Assistant in the union's Illinois regional office.

I want to thank you for holding this hearing. This city is fortunate to have one of its own in a powerful position to oversee the operations of the Postal Service. The problems we have had with the quality of service in Chicago in recent months have caused my members a lot of grief. They are the public face of the Post Office. When the quality of service suffers, they hear about it from their customers. My members don't like it. They want to provide the best possible service and they are dedicated to finding solutions to Chicago's service woes.

As you will hear today, the deterioration in service in recent months has had many causes. The lack of proper equipment maintenance, the poor management of DPS databases and the instability of top management in the Chicago District have all played a role. Each of these problems, it now appears, is being addressed. But I want to focus on another key cause: the shortage of city letter carriers. In 2002, Chicago had 4,332 letter carriers. Earlier this year, that number had fallen to 3,710 – a decline of 14 percent. This happened even though the number of delivery points and overall mail volume kept

rising. While the USPS should strive for efficiency gains, the Chicago District clearly went too far in slashing its carrier workforce -- it did not have enough carriers to cover all the routes in Chicago. It tried to fill the gap by relying on low-wage, temporary workers who don't know the routes well and who lack the commitment to quality service that career employees have. It also forced a lot my members to work long hours of forced overtime, which often backfires with higher rates of injuries and occupational illness.

Although NALC is heartened that some 200 new carriers have been or will be hired, we believe that another 100 will be needed to get the job done. I am convinced that proper staffing and a willingness on the part of Chicago District management to work with Branch 11 on quality issues are essential to giving the people of this city what they deserve: prompt, reliable, and high-quality service.

The pressures facing the Postal Service in Chicago are present all over the country. But I think our experience here should be a warning to the folks who run this great institution in Washington. Providing poor service is no way to save money or to succeed over the long run. Whether relying on casual employees to perform a core functions like mail delivery -- as we did here -- or turning to low-wage contractors as the USPS seems to be doing elsewhere in the country, the same poor results will occur. That's why Branch 11 joins our national union in calling on Congress to adopt House Resolution 282 that calls on the USPS to discontinue outsourcing mail delivery. And that's why we urge this sub-committee to use its power to severely limit contracting out in the Postal Service.

Thanks again for the chance to testify. I look forward to answering your questions.