

Congressman Sires

Testimony on H.Res. 282 for the House Subcommittee on Federal Workforce, Postal Service, and the District of Columbia

July 19, 2007

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Marchant, and Members of the Subcommittee, I would like to thank you for allowing me to testify before you today regarding a resolution I introduced, H.Res. 282, conveying the sense of Congress that the United States Postal Service should discontinue its practice of contracting out mail delivery services. This resolution has been cosponsored by 225 members of the House of Representatives and has been endorsed by the National Association of Letter Carriers.

Today, the U.S. Postal Service provides mail delivery services to over 144,000,000 homes and businesses across the nation and adds about 1.8 million new delivery addresses each year. With this unfettered access, the U.S. Postal Service has been shifting away from allowing letter carriers to deliver and collect the mail to contracting with private individuals or firms. Traditionally, the U.S. Postal Service has used contractors along Highway Contract Routes to transport mail in bulk and to deliver along sparsely populated rural areas. These are well accepted and legitimate uses of contractors. This past year, however, the Postal Service has expanded its use of contractors to establish contract routes in areas where there is new development in both urban and suburban communities.

This practice is endangering the quality and security of our nation's mail. By contracting out mail delivery services, the U.S. Postal Service is bypassing the hiring processes that

ensure only qualified individuals handle the mail. The checks performed by the Postal Service for career employees include criminal history and outstanding warrant checks, fingerprinting, application reviews, driving record reviews, and drug screenings. Most of these checks are performed for contractors, but according to the U.S. Postal Service the drug screening were not conducted on all of its contractors. According to the Postal Service, they will begin to perform drug screenings on all of its contractors beginning July 31, 2007.

Performing background checks on contractors is one thing, but we encounter a real problem when contractors subcontract. Postal Service contractors often subcontract the delivery work to individuals who go through minimal or no background screening procedures. Independent contractors do not use the same extensive recruiting and screening processes that the U.S. Postal Service uses when it hires and trains its mail carriers. This practice can open the door for felons, identity thieves, and terrorists to gain access to the mail and mail boxes of millions of Americans. Our nation's mail workers handle bills, credit card statements, medical records, personal correspondences, and other secure and vital information. Our letter carriers also have access to almost every home and business six days a week. Granting this type of access to low paid contract workers who receive no benefits, no potential for career advancement, and who have no incentive to provide first class service compromises the security of our mail system.

I was pleased to have learned this past weekend that the Postal Service and letter carrier unions had reached an agreement during their contract negotiations not to assign new

urban routes to contractors for at least the next six months. This agreement will ensure that new residential and business developments in my district and districts across the country will not be assigned to contractors, but will remain in the hands of our trusted letter carriers. This is an issue, however, that must be addressed by the Congress. We must permanently stop this practice.

The contracting out by the Postal Service of its functions is a broad issue that has been gaining momentum. It was recently brought to my attention that the Postal Service has contracted out the processing of military mail at the New Jersey International and Bulk Mail Center located in Jersey City, New Jersey which is in my district. It is my understanding that the Postal Service has moved all the processing of military mail from a site that already had adequate personnel and infrastructure to conduct these services to a completely different location. These actions not only pose national security questions, but it is also a concern of why the Postal Service would remove the processing of military mail from its career employees, many of whom are veterans that have a personal interest in seeing that this mail is properly and efficiently processed. I understand that others on this panel will be going into greater detail concerning this particular issue, and I thank the subcommittee for looking into what I consider to be a major problem.

The protection of our mail delivery services is a vital component to our national security. At a time when our country has waged a war against terror and security precautions are at an all time high, we must not allow the U.S. Postal Service to jeopardize the safety and

security of mail delivery to our homes and businesses. The issue of contracting out of mail delivery services is a legitimate public policy and national security issue that we as members of Congress should decide.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman for your time.