

APWU **CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY**

**American
Postal
Workers
Union,
AFL-CIO**

WILLIAM BURRUS
PRESIDENT

Before The

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL
WORKFORCE,
POSTAL SERVICE AND THE DISTRICT OF
COLUMBIA**

**“Inquiring Minds Want to Know:
What Is the Postal Service Contracting Out?”**

**TESTIMONY OF WILLIAM BURRUS
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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for providing me this opportunity to testify on behalf of the 300,000 dedicated postal employees that the American Postal Workers Union is privileged to represent. I commend the Committee through your leadership, Mr. Chairman, for convening this hearing on the important subject of subcontracting in the United States Postal Service.

This hearing is convened at the appropriate time, given the events of the past several months. Recently, the United States Postal Service made significant changes to its subcontracting initiatives, including some which were vigorously opposed by the National Association of Letter Carriers, who sought Congressional intervention. This resulted in legislative proposals by members of Congress and the subsequent announcement that a tentative agreement had been reached within the collective bargaining arena on the subject in dispute. While that specific dispute has been addressed, the fundamental USPS policy that seeks to subcontract postal activities at every opportunity remains, and must be addressed.

I previously testified before this committee on April 17, 2007, and offered the following:

In this new world of postal reform, each institution must now find its rightful place. You legislate, unions represent, and managers manage. When these responsibilities overlap, and they do, the system can break, and more often than not, service and workers suffer. As inviting as it may be, when you are asked to intervene with legislative action in areas best left to other parties, I request that you resist the temptation to do so. To borrow a phrase from postal critics, we ask, with deep respect, that you "stick to your knitting."

I asked that Congress avoid substituting its judgment for the judgment of the parties who are directly involved. The Postal Service and its unions have a long history of addressing thorny issues affecting every aspect of mail services. We write the words of our agreements; we interpret their intent, and submit our disputes to mutually agreed-upon arbitrators.

In light of the recent agreement between the NALC and the United States Postal Service, my words seem prophetic. When given the opportunity and the appropriate forum, the collective bargaining process works. The letter carriers union is to be commended for finding a creative approach to a major problem.

The question must be asked, "Why did the dispute reach the point where bargaining seemed futile and legislative relief appeared necessary?" I submit that the reason is that no real bargaining began on this important subject until you, Congress, became involved.

That is because, under current procedures, the Postal Service will not bargain over subcontracting. We have been successful in negotiating a requirement that the Postal Service notify and consult with the unions when subcontracting is contemplated, but we have been unable to achieve real bargaining over whether or not specific activities will be subcontracted.

I am certain that the Congress of the United States does not desire to be called upon each time subcontracting is threatened. To prevent the continuous solicitation of your involvement, a clear provision must be enacted requiring the USPS and its labor unions to bargain when subcontracting is proposed. Congress has previously enacted provisions requiring bargaining, so this would not represent a significant departure from its current policy.

Within the Postal Service, labor and management have a 36-year track record of addressing issues of concern without work stoppages and without Congressional intervention. As we enter this new world where management continually seeks to reduce costs through the use of non-union, non-career, cheap labor, we will repeatedly seek your involvement – unless you adopt legislation requiring the parties to negotiate.

We will return again and again asking for your intervention as the Postal Service embarks on this journey toward privatization, one piece at a time.

I thank you Mr. Chairman, for your leadership and that of the members of this oversight committee. Thank you for your efforts. I would be pleased to respond to any questions that you may have.