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Testimony of
Donnie Pitts, President
National Rural Letter Carriers' Association

before the

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

July 19, 2007

Mr. Chairman, and members of the Committee, my name is Donnie Pitts and I am President of the 111,000-member National Rural Letter Carriers' Association. I want to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing on contracting out.

As of February 2007, rural carriers are serving on more than 75,000 rural routes. We deliver to 37.4 million delivery points, and drive more than 3.3 million miles per day. We sell stamps & money orders; accept customer parcels, Express and Priority Mail, Signature and/or Delivery Confirmation, Registered and Certified Mail, and serve rural and suburban America to the "last mile."

There is a saying that if you refuse to recognize the past you shall be forced to relive it. I was reading over a back issue of our national magazine, *The National Rural Letter Carrier*, from May 11, 1991, when the President at the time, Vernon Meier, testified before Congress, saying the "NRLCA is concerned that we are beginning to see a pattern of deliberate...conversion of many areas to Highway Contract Routes." To which a congressman replied, "We need to pass some kind of law where you cannot contract out those kinds of services." So now here we are, 16 years later, and I come before you to urge you to pass legislation to stop the growth of Contract Delivery Service (CDS).

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to report that as of July 9, there are 222 bipartisan co-sponsors of House Resolution 282, a resolution introduced by the Honorable Albio Sires "expressing the sense of the House of Representatives that the United States Postal Service should discontinue the practice of contracting out mail delivery services." What I have a hard time understanding is why *all* 435 Representatives are not co-sponsors of this important resolution.

Is it because the Postal Service has suggested that Contract Delivery is a matter for collective bargaining and not a policy question? I hope not because contracting out most certainly raises significant policy questions – particularly when the safety and security of the mails is at stake. Mr. Chairman, I am sure by now that everyone knows that the NRLCA and the Postal Service could not reach an agreement during our recent contract negotiations, and we are headed toward interest arbitration. What is less well known is that, unlike our friends in the city carrier craft, contract delivery services were never brought forward during our union's talks with the Postal Service. We don't see what the Postal Service is doing now as a collective bargaining issue; we see it as a policy issue.

There are a number of different policies already in place with the Postal Service to limit what can and cannot be contracted out. Our National Agreement with the Postal Service contains an article which addresses subcontracting, Article 32. Article 32 sets the standards and policies under which routes can be subcontracted. The Postal Service's P-5 Handbook which "establishes the national policy and procedures for the operation and administration of highway contract routes." That handbook language states that a route

that serves less than one family per mile may be converted to CDS. Additionally, we have grievances at the national level that challenge the improper contracting out of mail delivery. Mr. Chairman, we, as a Union, have done everything within our power, utilizing policies, and agreements with the Postal Service, to stop the Postal Service from contracting out the delivery of mail. Despite this, the Postal Service continues to ignore all these policies and agreements and continues to contract out routes. I'm asking that the House introduce legislation to stop CDS.

Mr. Chairman, in May you held a site hearing in Chicago regarding the slow delivery of mail. It's been rumored another site hearing will be held in Los Angeles at a future date. Congressmen in New Mexico are scheduling meetings with officials from the Postal Service to discuss staffing concerns and persistent service problems throughout New Mexico. When the Postal Service announces the consolidation or closing of a facility within a congressional district, that Congressman gets involved. During the passage of Postal Reform, even an issue like work-sharing—the discounts the Postal Service gives to mailers who provide presorted mail—was made into a policy issue. Every time the Postal Service enters into a work-sharing agreement with a mailer, the end result is a postal employee not performing the work.

Even outside of the Postal Service, Congress has gotten involved in issues that Congress does not directly oversee. In March 2005, this very committee became involved with Major League Baseball (MLB) when it was made public that some players were abusing MLB's steroid policy. Congress got involved because it was the right thing to do, and it needed to be done. Questions were raised about the sufficiency of the policies then in place as well as the enforcement of those policies.

What I'm trying to point out using these examples is that when there is a problem with the mail service, closing of facilities, security, or any other problem, Congress gets involved to correct that problem. My question is why isn't Congress getting involved in stopping contracting out? Do they not see this as an issue just as important as service problems or the consolidation of facilities? I have no problem telling you this is an issue that is just as important as the others.

Letter carriers are the face of the Postal Service. We are the ones the American public sees out in the streets every day delivering their mail. They get to know us; they become our friends; and they trust us. This honor, for the third year in a row, has earned the Postal Service the distinction of being named the most trusted government agency by the Ponemon Institute, LLC.

The Postal Service scored 83 percent, according to the survey. It was one of the few federal agencies to increase its customer satisfaction and trust scores from the previous year. The average trust score among the 60 agencies surveyed was 47 percent.

I reference this survey because the public perception of the Postal Service is **DELIVERY**. If the Postal Service fails to deliver because of here-today-gone tomorrow contractors, the mailers will find another way to get their message to the public. I care