

LAW & JUSTICE

Postal Crisis Hits Workers and Customers

Hearing draws 100 people to local meeting

The challenges affecting the United States Postal Service boiled over at a hearing last week in Portland regarding working conditions and service.

More than 100 people crowded into Augustana Lutheran Church in Northeast Portland Feb. 21 for a public hearing chaired by State Sen. Chip Shields regarding overall postal service. Both customers and postal employees spoke.

With the continued development of electronic communications, the USPS has seen a dramatic decrease in revenue, while expenses have continued to rise. The combination has led to rising postal rates and reductions in staff. Home delivery on Saturday may soon be discontinued.

Jim Cook, president of the local National Association of Letter Carriers, spoke of how the inability to hire new employees has led to chronic mandatory overtime as being the key to an erosion in



A hearing draws State Senator Chip Shields, Multnomah Education Service District Board Director Geri Washington, Rethinking Schools' Bill Bigelow and others to discuss the postal service crisis.

customer service.

"Letter carriers want to provide the best service possible," Cook said. "We just need more staff."

USPS management has stated a hiring freeze is necessary to cut

labor costs. Beyond cutting service days, the Postmaster General is advocating the closure of 2,000 post offices.

Employee organizations say that the postal service is in debt mostly because of Bush-era man-

dates, which Congress or President Obama could fix.

"The issues facing the public postal service are of deep concern to all community members," Shields said. "I found particularly troubling certain management

practices, especially with regard to understaffing and "transitional" employees, but I also came away with a sense of hope because of some great ideas for the future."

After listening to testimony from over 20 speakers, the Portland Area Workers Rights Board, which sponsored the hearing, produced a report recommending Portland-area postal facilities improve their working conditions through the hiring of more local carriers.

The panel's members also pledged to communicate with Portland's Congressional delegation and forward to the President their desire to see a swift solution to the USPS accounting problems.

Other member of the workers' rights board joining Shields on the panel, included Rev. John Schwiebert of United Methodist Church, Multnomah Education Service District Director Geri Washington, Casa Bruno owner Don Oman, Jon Bartholomew of the Oregon Students Public Interest Research Group (OSPIRG), and Bill Bigelow of Rethinking Schools.



In this June 25, 1945 picture, army doctors expose patients to malaria-carrying mosquitoes in the malaria ward at Stateville Penitentiary in Crest Hill, Ill.

Past Medical Testing on Humans Revealed

(AP)-- Shocking as it may seem, U.S. government doctors once thought it was fine to experiment on disabled people and prison inmates.

Such experiments included giving hepatitis to mental patients in Connecticut, squirting a pandemic flu virus up the noses of prisoners in Maryland, and injecting cancer cells into chronically ill people at a New York hospital.

Much of this horrific history is 40 to 80 years old, but it is the backdrop

for a meeting in Washington this week by a presidential bioethics commission. The meeting was triggered by the government's apology last fall for federal doctors infecting prisoners and mental patients in Guatemala with syphilis 65 years ago.

U.S. officials also acknowledged there had been dozens of similar experiments in the United States — studies that often involved making healthy people sick.

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