

Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs

Hearing regarding the Postal Service's Actions During the 2016 Campaign Season.

Wednesday July 19, 2017

Good morning, my name is Timm Kopp. I am letter carrier of 10 years in Marshfield Wisconsin. I am also a member of the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) Branch 978. I am the person who reported the actions that I thought were illegal during the 2016 election period. I would like to be very clear on this. I am not in my opinion trying to hurt the Postal Service in any way. It has provided me with a very demanding and challenging place to work and a love for the job. I want it to be a profitable, sustainable place of employment. That is what all the employees deserve and the general public deserves. I am looking at this action through today's political divide across the country on basically any issue. I would have preferred that this matter didn't have to make it to the public scene rather it just be stopped and things done fairly and in a non-partisan way. I know it's true that historically the Democrat party has been the party to help the postal service, but these partisan acts will not help only hinder its efforts. The divide this could cause if continued would more than outweigh any efforts to help by getting certain people elected. The Postal Service always says it's rated one of the most trusted government agencies and it needs to uphold those claims. That is what will help it survive in the long term.

I will try to give as much background as possible into the actions that have prompted this hearing. At the time I made my complaint I had no idea it was going to result in any type of hearing or testimony that I would need specific dates and times so notes were not kept. I will try to be as accurate as possible and keep to the topic at hand.

When new employees are going through orientation one of the things they are told about is the Hatch Act. The Postal Service wants to be seen as a government agency that can be trusted, upholds values and is viewed by the public as non-partisan. Employees are also given brief follow up service talks about the Hatch Act especially during fall election periods. All of this is to not only uphold the law but to keep the Postal Service out of the mud of partisan politics. By doing this the Postal Service claims it is one of the highest rated government agencies when it comes to trust. The job itself is very demanding and employees are held to a higher level of work standards than I have seen in my previous jobs.

In early fall 2016 State NALC President Scott Van-Derven attended one of our local union meetings. He gave a brief talk about the status of bills in congress that the union is trying to gain support for. This is a practice commonly done to keep members updated on where things currently stand and where they are likely to go in the future. It was also mentioned that volunteers were needed to help campaign for the 2016 upcoming election. I don't recall if names were specifically mentioned at that meeting of who they were campaigning for but the union had previously let it be known who they were going to back to try to get more support for postal reform.

A few weeks after the meeting a carrier in my office let it be known he was going to volunteer to help with the campaigning. To my knowledge a letter was given to the supervisor from the State Union President stating that employee was to be released for union duties starting on Thursday, only two days later. The employee was going to be gone for up to 5 weeks and therefore management had to find a way to fill the vacancy. When I talked further to my supervisor John he also informed me that 2 people were being taken out of another office in a nearby town Wisconsin Rapids. That office was already short 2 people and possibly 3 some days, and taking 2 more would leave them 5 people short on a daily basis.

According to John both him and the other supervisor said they were going to deny the request because of staffing issues. When John later talked to me he said he was told by people higher up the chain that he must let the employee go. He also said he at very least tried to get that employee to stay until Saturday which would give him more time to cover the shortage but that was denied. He had to let him go on Thursday. I don't know how much notice the Wisconsin Rapids office was given but I do know by talking to John the managers there weren't happy and were really put in a bind.

I was an acting supervisor for approximately 6 months from the Fall of 2015 to the spring of 2016 in Stevens Point WI. During that time the neighboring office Wisconsin Rapids was constantly sending out emails for help. They were short staffed for a variety of reasons and any office that could lend help was greatly appreciated. Leading into the fall they were still very short on help and they were going to lose 2 more people due to the union releasing them. Vacancies in any office are usually covered with City Carrier Assistants, (part time help) when possible. When that is not possible those routes are split and divided among the employees and overtime is paid out. Exhausting all other options carriers are forced to work their days off to help cover, all on overtime. I personally had to work at least one if not two of my days off, and work longer days to help cover the absence. Other employees also had to do the same, some didn't mind the extra work while others complained that the reason they were having to work extra was for political reasons. This caused some minor disagreements among employees in our office. Just from a staffing issue along it should not have been allowed. Carriers and Supervisors are constantly scrutinized from people in higher positions to keep costs down and even a few extra minutes here and there are closely monitored. Many reports must be filled out daily on the performance of not only the office but the individual carrier. It is not uncommon for a supervisor to get multiple emails or phone calls daily asking about performance numbers and issues. For me seeing how this was being handled happen was nothing short of hypocritical.

I made phone calls to the State Union President and the District office of the NALC in Minneapolis. I had also gotten a call from a person with the NALC from out of state, his name I don't recall. My name was relayed to him by our State President to try to address my issues with what was going on. I stated my concerns about what was going on and the answer was pretty much the same no matter who I talked to. I was told that this was how it's always been done and we are trying to get people in office who will help the Postal Service get favorable legislation passed. When questioned about the legality of this I was also told that the union's political action fund was paying the wages of the employees taken out on leave. I further pressed that this was causing a lot of overtime that was not due to normal operations of the business. The response to that was that there's always overtime this is no big deal and it is for the betterment of the company.

After more correspondence with Scott wanting more clarification on this matter He stated in an email that all the names of the people that the union was out campaigning for were approved by the highest levels of management in the Postal Service. To me that statement if true showed this was illegal and morally this needed to be looked into.

I also thought back to previous election and started to look in to this a bit further. I do remember being told that our previous union steward did campaigning in 2008 for the Obama campaign. That person was one of the first ones to try to persuade me as a newer employee to vote certain ways, to help protect my job and future at the Postal Service. I stated to him at that time I would vote the way I wanted and not the way someone tells me to. I also said that when hired here there was no question relating to what party I was politically aligned with. I would later go along with things just to avoid any

constant confrontations at work. That lasted a couple of years and I finally made up my mind to not be intimidated.

I did do some work for the NALC as a Congressional District Liaison. I volunteered to make calls regarding postal issues to my Representative Sean Duffy as well as write letters. This was all done off the clock and I was paid minimally for my extra time. This is where I initially established a relationship with Scott Van-Derven. About a year later I resigned from this position. I kept myself up to date in the doings of the political side of the union and noticed during the 2012 campaign that Scott was doing more campaigning but this time out of state. I think in Kentucky. This to me was the realization of where my bi-weekly PAC contributions were going and I and a few others in the office stopped our contributions.

I decided to see if I could get a better answer how this could be legal and called both Senator Johnson's office and Senator Baldwin's office. I stated my concerns and said that at the very least I would like some sort of reply to this and would not like this thrown aside. A few days later after no response I also called my district representative Sean Duffy's office and stated my concerns. It took about a week and I finally got a reply from senator Johnson's office that they were going to look into this matter for me and would keep in touch. Sean Duffy's office called as a follow up to see if I was getting help. I got no reply at all from Senator Baldwin's office.

Weeks later I was contacted by an Investigator from the Office of Inspector General (OIG). He was going to look further into my complaint and wanted to interview me. Upon meeting with him I stated my complaint and said this all could be done in a fair way to not cause staffing shortages. When known ahead of time those weeks could be blocked off to not incur people above and beyond the normal vacation load to be absent. That way it could be covered easier. Those wishing to volunteer could also put in for annual leave as per the local office's policy when yearly vacation leave is picked. Both situations would not leave the office in any worse situation than it normally would be due to normal operations.

Over the course of the next 8 months I was occasionally called and checked up on to make sure I was not receiving any sort of retaliation and to let me know the status of the investigation. Short of a few comments from some co-workers no one in management has made any attempt to influence me or discipline me.