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**Hearing before the  
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
United States Senate**



**Oral Statement**

**The Postal Service's Actions During the 2016  
Campaign Season: Implications for the Hatch Act**

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Good morning, Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member McCaskill, and members of the Committee. Thank you for inviting me to discuss our work on postal employees' use of leave without pay for election campaigning.

During last year's election season, a Postal Service employee expressed concerns that certain mail carriers in Wisconsin were taking leave without pay to work for union political campaigns. The employee was concerned that the Postal Service was behaving in a partisan manner. The employee also complained the absences were causing operational problems, including additional overtime and an unfair distribution of work among employees who remained.

As a result of that complaint, we investigated and provided our findings to the Office of Special Counsel to evaluate for potential Hatch Act violations. We also conducted an audit on the nationwide use of leave without pay for union campaign activities.

We determined that, from September through November 2016, 97 carriers took leave without pay to participate in partisan political campaigns for periods ranging from four to 50 days. In total, the employees took more than 2,700 days off. Eighty-two percent of this time was taken in six states: Florida, Nevada, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. The carriers were associated with a single postal union, the National Association of Letter Carriers.

Our work found that local managers felt compelled to release the carriers for extended periods of time. Several managers initially attempted to deny the requests because of the impact on local operations, but higher-level Labor Relations or Operations managers in the field directed them to release the carriers. All 97 carriers were ultimately released.

The releases occurred because a Headquarters Labor Relations executive used his position and authority to send emails to local Labor Relations managers in the field announcing the release and requesting explanations for any carriers that were not released. Because of these and other communications, and the long-standing practice of allowing employees to participate in union political campaigns, field Labor Relations and Operations managers believed releasing the employees to be mandatory. This circumvented Postal Service policy and the ability of Operations supervisors to manage work at their local offices. Postal Service policy gives local installation heads the administrative discretion to approve leave without pay requests of less than a year. Employees make requests using a leave form, which supervisors approve or deny. Decisions are to be made based on the needs of the employee, the needs of the Postal Service, and the cost to the Postal Service.

Local managers said the leave without pay caused operational problems such as increased overtime and delayed delivery of mail. In at least one office, the remaining carriers were required to work six days per week, including their

normal scheduled days off. Some managers and employees also believed the releases were politically motivated.

For our audit, we analyzed the absences of 22 of the 97 carriers who took leave without pay across the country. In each instance, we examined the assignments that could have been covered if the carrier was working. According to our analysis, the use of leave without pay resulted in combined net overtime costs of more than \$90,000 at the 22 facilities we reviewed.

Throughout our work, we found that Postal Service management generally viewed allowing employees to take leave without pay for union campaign activities as a customary practice. They saw it as a necessary part of cultivating a good relationship with the union, even though releasing employees for union campaign activities is not required by the collective bargaining agreement.

In our audit report issued on July 5, 2017, we recommended that the Postal Service follow its policy of assessing operational needs prior to granting leave without pay requests. We also recommended that Labor Relations and Operations improve communications to bring up any operational problems caused by employees taking time off for union activities. Postal Service management disagreed with the premise of our first recommendation and do not intend to implement it. They believe they followed their policy. We consider management's comments on this recommendation nonresponsive and will work

to coordinate a resolution. The Postal Service plans to address the second recommendation by improving communications and undertaking an educational campaign about the collective bargaining agreement.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss our work. I am happy to answer any questions.