

**THE HOLIDAY RUSH:  
IS THE POSTAL SERVICE READY?**

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**HEARING**

BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS  
OF THE  
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND  
REFORM

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS

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## THE HOLIDAY RUSH: IS THE POSTAL SERVICE READY?

Wednesday, November 16, 2022

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS  
*Washington, D.C.*

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:27 p.m., in room 2154, Rayburn House Office Building, and via Zoom, Hon. Gerald E. Connolly (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Representatives Connolly, Maloney, Norton, Davis, Lawrence, Raskin, Khanna, Porter, Brown, Hice, and Keller.

Also present: Representatives Mfume, Wasserman Schultz, Pascrell, and Gottheimer.

Mr. CONNOLLY. The committee will come to order.

Without objection, the chair is authorized to declare a recess.

Mr. KELLER. Mr. Chair, I would just have a question. I mean, we've all been here for almost a half an hour. In view of the things that we have going on here, could we have like a motion to adjourn, so we can actually start on time and be prepared to be able to spend the full time here?

Because we're now going to run a half an hour past where we were, and I've got other things going on, and I'd like to participate in the meeting. And we planned on it, and we were here on time as were all these people.

I mean, we're here to talk about the post office's service, and they're not the one that showed up 25 minutes late. So I would make a motion to adjourn.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I thank the gentleman for his courtesy and civility. He has moved to adjourn. The motion is not debatable.

All those favor, say aye.

All those opposed, no.

In the opinion of the chair, the noes have it.

Mr. KELLER. Could we have a recorded vote?

Mr. CONNOLLY. A recorded vote has been requested. I'd ask the clerk to join the meeting. Given the fact the gentleman is so concerned about the expenditure of time, I'm a little surprised that we're going to spend this time on this motion, but we are.

Mr. KELLER. If you can waste time, I can too.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Again, I thank the gentleman for his civility. A great way to start the lame duck session.

Is the clerk—the clerk's on the way. I apologize to our panel for this delay.

I will make a note, while we're waiting for the clerk, we have requests to waive members onto the subcommittee as participants for the purpose of the hearing. Those members are Debbie Wasserman Schultz, William Pascrell, Josh Gottheimer and Kweisi Mfume. I just noted it. I didn't ask for consent yet. I thought I'd fill up the time so we're not—

Of course, we're also joined by our distinguished chairwoman, Carolyn Maloney, for the purpose of this committee.

Our witnesses today—let me introduce them informally—are Tammy Whitcomb Hull, inspector general of the U.S. Postal Service; Paul Hogrogian, national president of the National Postal Mail Handlers Union; Edmund Carley, national president of the United Postmasters and Managers of America; Michael Plunkett, the president and chief executive officer of the Association for Postal Commerce; Gregory White, executive manager of Strategic Initiatives for the U.S. Postal Service.

We look forward to your testimony, and we'll swear you in as soon as this motion. We're still trying to get our clerk. I would hope that members are alerted to the fact that there's a recorded vote pending and make themselves available.

We have a clerk. The clerk will call the roll.

The motion is to adjourn.

All those in favor will say aye, and all those opposed will say nay.

The chair has already ruled that verbally the nays had it.

The clerk will call the roll.

The Clerk. Mr. Connolly?

Mr. CONNOLLY. Nay.

The Clerk. Ms. Norton?

Ms. NORTON. No.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Would you repeat, Ms. Norton? I don't think she heard it.

Ms. NORTON. No.

The Clerk. Ms. Norton votes no.

Mr. Davis?

[No response.]

The Clerk. Mr. Sarbanes?

[No response.]

The Clerk. Mrs. Lawrence?

Mrs. LAWRENCE. No.

The Clerk. Mrs. Lawrence votes no.

Mr. Lynch?

[No response.]

The Clerk. Mr. Raskin?

Mr. RASKIN. Raskin votes no on adjournment.

The Clerk. Mr. Raskin votes no.

Mr. Khanna?

[No response.]

The Clerk. Ms. Porter?

Ms. PORTER. Porter votes no.

The Clerk. Ms. Porter votes no.

Ms. Brown?

Ms. BROWN. Brown votes no.

The Clerk. Ms. Brown votes no.

Mr. Hice?

Mr. HICE. Yes.

The Clerk. Mr. Hice votes yes.

Mr. Keller?

Mr. KELLER. Yes.

The Clerk. Mr. Keller votes yes.

Mr. Clyde?

[No response.]

The Clerk. Mr. Biggs?

[No response.]

The Clerk. Ms. Mace?

[No response.]

The Clerk. Mr. LaTurner?

[No response.]

The Clerk. Ms. Herrell?

[No response.]

The Clerk. Mrs. Maloney?

Mrs. MALONEY. No.

The Clerk. Mrs. Maloney votes no.

Mr. CONNOLLY. The clerk will record the vote.

The Clerk. We have two ayes and seven nays.

Mr. CONNOLLY. The motion is not agreed to.

I recognize myself for my opening statement.

Last year, we held a hearing in Chicago to investigate its deteriorating mail delivery performance. This February we visited Baltimore, the city with the worst on-time delivery rating in the Nation.

Two months ago, we met in Philadelphia, a city beset with poor postal performance and unsafe conditions for postal workers.

Today we're back in D.C. We're here right before the Postal Service's pivotal holiday rush for our fourth hearing examining postal delivery in just 13 months.

During peak season, a rush of packages and letters places additional strain on the Postal Service's work force and logistics network, resulting in consistent drops in on-time delivery for nearly all mail.

Today's hearing will thoughtfully and thoroughly examine, I hope, the Postal Service's preparation for peak season. We'll hear from Postal Service officials, Postal Service workers, managers, mailers and the inspector general about what slows down mail delivery and what steps the Postal Service has taken and could take to mitigate those delays.

In fact, today the Postal Service Office of the Inspector General released a report entitled "Fiscal Year 2023 Peak Season Preparedness," which examines the Postal Service's peak season preparations. We look forward to hearing insights from Inspector General Hull.

Families, businesses, and communities rely on the mail year-round and, in particular, during peak season. Our subcommittee aims to ensure that the Postal Service is taking all steps possible to deliver this holiday season.

In 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Postal Service had its worst peak season in recent years, with its nationwide on-time delivery performance sinking to lows of 67.4 percent in December for First-Class Single-Piece Letters.

Fortunately, nationwide on-time delivery performance improved during the following year. While we certainly recognize this progress, some of the improvement is the result of the Postal Service's own changes to delivery standards, making it easier for them to meet lower standards.

Cost-effective, reliable service is vital to the Postal Service's long-term survival. Late or lost deliveries can humbug the holiday spirit in the short term and may drive mailers away in the long term.

The Postal Service is preparing for this year's peak season by hiring seasonal employees, leasing additional facilities, and taking other measures, and that's good. Unfortunately, early recent reports indicate that the Postal Service is struggling to hire those temporary workers because of tight labor market and insufficient wages and benefits, especially in communities with a high cost of living.

Failure to meet these targets puts additional strain on front-line employees, mail handlers, managers and those along the mail supply chain. Injuries can increase delivery and can slow it.

In April, Congress passed the Postal Service Reform Act, which I was proud to cosponsor with our chair and the ranking member. This once-in-a-generation legislation puts the Postal Service on the path to financial solvency. In fact, just last week, the Postal Service reported that the bill added \$57 billion to Fiscal Year 2022 revenue.

It's our job in Congress to make certain the Postal Service uses its new authorities and seizes opportunities to grow its product line and customer base. Congress remains poised to ensure that the Postal Service executes its new responsibilities appropriately.

Congress also needs to make certain that the Postal Service is accessible to everybody. We must ensure that rate increases for shipping and mailing packages do not make the Postal Service a service for the privileged. That's why we introduced the Ensuring Accurate Postal Rates Act. This bill would require the Postal Regulatory Commission to reconsider if the Postal Service needs increased ratemaking authority when accounting for the positive financial effects of the Postal Reform Act.

The Postal Service has a statutory obligation to deliver the mail to 163 million households across the country every day. Peak holiday season should be the time for the Postal Service to showcase its ability to deliver for this Nation. Today, we'll ensure that the Postal Service is ready to meet that moment.

The chair now recognizes the ranking member for his opening statement.

Mr. HICE. Thank you very much, Chairman Connolly. I think it's important not to lose sight of a very important fact. That is that, despite the passage of the Postal Service Reform Act, the Postal Service is still in very bad financial condition. We have likewise asked Louis DeJoy to perform something just shy of a miracle, quite frankly.

The Postal Service may be a beloved and vital American institution, but the PSRA did not change the fact that it is based on an outdated business model when it comes to delivering mail.

Mr. DeJoy has come up with a plan to try to save the Postal Service, but obviously implementing such a plan involves change,

and it has to. Doing the same old thing simply is not going to work. And, look, I appreciate the fact that change makes people nervous. I understand that. And I appreciate the message that stakeholders want more information about the Postal Service's plan, and I would encourage Postal Service leadership to be as forthcoming as they can be with respect to what they have in mind.

It also involves acknowledging mistakes. My colleagues on the other side of the aisle were quick to condemn Mr. DeJoy for his initial attempts to improve efficiency. These moves, which involve curtailment of unapproved overtime, making sure blue-collar—or blue collection boxes were located in the right places, and making sure trucks ran on time, all of these portrayed as attempts to steal the 2020 election. I think that's very unfortunate.

The Postal Service delivered in that election, both literally and figuratively. And, if this election that we're currently involved in, frankly, if it ever wraps up, I believe we will learn how well the Postal Service did this time around as well.

I'm given to understand Mr. DeJoy acknowledges his attempts to get the trucks running on time did not work and that he does not want to repeat that mistake. That's what leaders do. They try. They act. They acknowledge their mistakes, they learn from them, and they move on.

But, quite frankly, if Democrats are going to hold Mr. DeJoy to a zero-fault standard, then they should apply the same standard to the Biden administration. Let's just say there would be a lot of vacancies.

But the most important thing is that we've got to take action. The most conventional wisdom and all-too-frequent truth in any kind of Federal service is to go along to get along, and that simply is not going to work now.

The attitude of don't rock the boat is unacceptable. The fact is the boat in this case is sinking, and I applaud Mr. DeJoy for trying to keep it afloat. There are no other good options that I'm aware of. Throughout history, this country has struggled to make the Postal Service a viable institution.

If the current model fails, I suspect my Democrat friends won't be lining up to privatize the Postal Service. And returning the Postal Service to an appropriated agency has failed in spectacular fashion. That's why we have a Postal Service and not a Postal Department.

We have to let the Postal Service focus on its core mission of delivering mail and packages. But Democrats want to use the Postal Service as a guinea pig for a progressive agenda. Why would anyone think that postal banking would be a success? And the insistence that the Postal Service become a vehicle charger for the Nation is just absolutely misguided in every way.

With respect to peak season, it sounds from the inspector general that the Postal Service has a good plan in place. Obviously, that does not guarantee success, but it's a plan. And I look forward to hearing more of that in this hearing.

It seems the Postal Service has learned, to me at least, from past mistakes and is proactively working to correct them. And that's why we can fairly be in this hearing today and ask the questions that will be asked. Once the peak season is over, the committee can

then take a look at how this peak season went. And I certainly hope to be able to tune into that wherever I may be.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I thank you and I yield back.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I thank the gentleman. And I note this is his I think penultimate hearing on the subcommittee. And I thank him for his service and his cooperation and his partnership.

The chair listed people, other members seeking to be waived onto the subcommittee for the purpose of participating in this hearing. Is there any objection?

Seeing and hearing none, it is agreed.

If our witnesses whom I've introduced would rise and raise their right hand to be sworn in.

Do you swear or affirm that the testimony you are about to give is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Ms. HULL. I do.

Mr. CARLEY. I do.

Mr. HOGROGIAN. I do.

Mr. PLUNKETT. I do.

Mr. WHITE. I do.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Let the record show all of our witnesses have answered in the affirmative. I thank you.

And I now call on our distinguished chairwoman, who helped lead a successful effort for postal reform, the first comprehensive postal reform in 16 years, Carolyn Maloney, for any opening statement she may have.

Mrs. MALONEY. Thank you very much, Chairman Connolly and Ranking Member Hice, for holding this important and timely hearing. The Postal Service is one of our most cherished and valuable institutions.

It is one of the few—I think it's really the only government service that is mentioned in the Constitution of the United States of America, indicating how important the Postal Service is to unifying us as a country.

I have always been very proud of the fact that one stamp can go to Alaska or across the street in New York City, and it costs the same. Everyone is treated equally in it. It's a democracy, and everybody receives their mail.

Our dedicated postal employees deliver to more than 160 million locations six days a week. And it was one of the provisions of our bill that it went from five days to six days. It's now the law that they will be operating six days a week.

They operate at the center of a \$1.6 trillion mailing industry that employs more than 7 million people and delivers nearly half the world's mail. Postal workers truly bind our Nation together, ensuring that millions of Americans have access to essential items, like medicine and Social Security checks.

And I might add that, through the COVID crisis, all of our mail was delivered. Our employees were heroic. Many of them became sick because they were interacting with the public every day with their responsibilities. And we owe a debt of gratitude to the Postal Service and the role that they played during the COVID crisis.

We were reminded just last week of the critical role the Postal Service plays as millions of Americans once again opted to vote by

mail during the midterm elections. And in the coming weeks, activity at post offices and mail processing plants around the country will ramp up significantly with a wave of holiday mail and packages we'll be hearing about in this hearing.

Unfortunately, we all know too well that sometimes the Postal Service performance has been slower and less reliable. And we are concerned, I am concerned about operational changes in 2020 that happened without testing them first and without communicating fully with employees or customers.

So I am proud that this committee has delivered for postal customers in recent years. We have delivered with strong oversight and historic bipartisan legislative reform. Earlier this year, President Biden signed the bipartisan Postal Service Reform Act into law.

The law, which I was proud to co-author with Ranking Member Comer, put the Postal Service on sound financial footing after decades of decline. The new law lowered Postal Service retiree health cost benefits and removed the burdensome retiree healthcare prefunding obligation, all while preserving six-day delivery and freeing the Postal Service to experiment with new products and services to help their financial bottom line.

I do want to say and ask unanimous consent to put into the record "Postal News," the U.S. Postal Service report for Fiscal Year 2022. And it shows a revenue of \$78.5 billion, which is up \$1.5 billion over the previous fiscal year. It also showed a one-time noncash benefit of \$57 billion due to the Postal Service bipartisan reform legislation.

This committee has also led the way in providing—

Mr. CONNOLLY. Without objection, so ordered.

Mrs. MALONEY. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

This committee has also led the way in providing the Postal Service new resources to replace old, unreliable, gas-guzzling delivery out-of-date vehicles. At my urging, along with many members of this committee on both sides, the Postal Service will now be using billions of dollars made available in the Inflation Reduction Act to deploy a new electric vehicle fleet. And I am grateful that the Postal Service has agreed that at least half of the initial order of next-generation delivery vehicles will be electric.

Now the Postal Service needs to go fully electric and build a robust charging network to support these vehicles. Particularly in our rural areas, they can play an important role here. Over time, these investments will reduce costs, improve reliability, and help the Postal Service more efficiently deliver letters and packages while also contributing to urgent efforts to cut greenhouse gas emissions.

Thanks to the work of this committee, the Postal Service is in an excellent position to move past the challenges that have held it back in recent years. But I still have concerns about service quality at the Postal Service. On-time performance has rebounded from the steep decline we saw in 2020. First-class mail is once again delivered on schedule about 90 percent of the time.

But the Postal Service achieved these gains, at least in part, by weakening its own service standards. And, as Chairman Connolly has noted, other troubling recent trends, like a spike in mail thefts, threatens America's trust in the mail.

I want to give one—we need to look at the new 10-year plan, which proposes moving sorting and processing activities from local post offices to larger regional facilities, even though the inspector general found that a similar plan implemented in 2010 may not have cut costs or improved operations at all. So I look forward to the IG's comments on these proposed changes on whether it will achieve its goal.

It is the responsibility of the Postal Service to find ways to overcome difficulties they face and get mail delivered on time. To do this, it is critical that Postal Service leadership remember that it is not a private business but a public service essential to our country.

We all want the Postal Service to be financially viable. I understand the need for making tough choices, but offering worse service for higher prices will not increase the public's faith in the Postal Service. In fact, it might end up pushing people and businesses away from using the Postal Service. We must not allow the Postal Service to fail. We have to be there to help them in every way. It must continue providing the critical services that millions of Americans depend on.

This committee is doing its part, and this hearing is an important part of that work. I look forward to today's discussion. And, again, I thank Chairman Connolly and Ranking Member Hice for holding this important hearing and for their leadership on this critical service for America.

I yield back my balance of time, and I look forward very, very much to all of the panelists' testimony today. Thank you so much.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I thank the distinguished chairwoman.

We've introduced and sworn in the panel. Your full statements will be entered into the record. And I now call on Ms. Hull for your five minutes of testimony. Welcome.

**STATEMENT OF TAMMY WHITCOMB HULL, INSPECTOR  
GENERAL, U.S. POSTAL SERVICE**

Ms. HULL. Thank you. Good afternoon, Chairman Connolly, Ranking Member Hice, and members of the subcommittee. Thank you for inviting me here today to discuss our work related to the Postal Service's readiness for peak season.

Our mission is to ensure efficiency, accountability, and integrity in our Nation's Postal Service, and it's a mission that we take very seriously. We provide oversight of the Postal Service throughout the year, with additional focus on times when America relies on the Postal Service the most, such as during elections and the holiday peak season.

Our goal is to quickly identify and report problems, allowing the Postal Service to promptly address them and providing transparency to postal stakeholders. Each year, we review the Postal Service's readiness for the upcoming peak season and report on what we see.

After the holidays, we issue a report on performance during peak season. Last year, the Postal Service moved to a strategy of maintaining more employees and facility space year-round. This strategy, along with hiring temporary employees and leasing temporary

facility space, allowed successful delivery of more mail on time throughout the holiday season.

We just released this year's report on the Postal Service's readiness for the current peak season. It plans to hire fewer temporary employees and lease less temporary space than last year. Postal management said it will still be able to provide timely delivery because it has more experienced employees, higher employee availability, increased package processing capacity, and an overall more stable work force. They also do not expect an increase in volume compared to last year.

Because the Postal Service has a reasonable plan for peak, we did not issue any recommendations. We did, however, find the Postal Service is at risk of not being able to lease as much temporary facility space as planned. The Postal Service said acquiring temporary annexes can be difficult and space was not available in some locations. It will activate contingency plans, if needed, using tents and transferring mail to other postal facilities, if needed.

Election mail processing is another focus at the OIG. This past September we published a report on the Postal Service's readiness for the 2022 midterm election. We found the Postal Service was generally ready, but not all postal facilities were compliant with election mail policies. We are wrapping up our review of the 2022 midterm election mail performance and will report on that in early 2023.

For that work in October and early November, we conducted more than 800 observations at postal facilities, covering all 50 states, Washington, DC, and Puerto Rico. This extensive effort is used to identify delayed election mail, determine compliance with policies, and evaluate service performance. Leveraging an OIG-engineered mobile app, we provided timely feedback during our field visits to the Postal Service for immediate action.

In addition to our peak season and election mail efforts, we have other audit work that's focused on quickly recognizing and reporting issues for resolution throughout the year. Last fall, we created new audit teams that perform localized facility-specific reviews.

These teams perform a cluster of audit simultaneously. While one team visits a mail processing plant, other teams visit three to four delivery units that receive mail from that plant. This enables us to better focus on service issues in specific geographic areas that span across processing and delivery.

We have also begun recent work to address concerns about mail theft, specifically focused on checks, credit cards, and other sensitive documents. One reason for increased theft has been the Postal Service's poor management controls over arrow keys, the keys that are used by carriers to open collection boxes, parcel lockers, and cluster box units.

In response to this concern, we increased focus on arrow key management during our facility visits and have recently started an audit on how the Postal Service is responding to mail theft. We have also increased our investigative work on this critical topic.

Another focus of our work is the importance of mail to people who live in rural areas. One of our upcoming audit reports will evaluate how the Postal Service manages changes to rural routes and another will assess the Postal Service's oversight of its Con-

tract Postal Units and Village Post Offices, which are often used in rural areas.

We are dedicated to ensuring proper oversight of the Postal Service. We appreciate the opportunity to discuss our work, and I'm happy to answer your questions.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you very much.

Mr. Carley, you are recognized for your five minutes of testimony.

**STATEMENT OF EDMUND A CARLEY, NATIONAL PRESIDENT,  
UNITED POSTMASTERS AND MANAGERS OF AMERICA**

Mr. CARLEY. Thank you, Chairman Connolly, Ranking Member Hice, and members of the subcommittee. On behalf of the United Postmasters and Managers of America, my name is Edmund Carley, and I am the UPMA national president. UPMA is a management association representing more than 24,000 active and retired postmasters, managers, supervisors, and many associate members, clerks, carriers, mail handlers and others, who would like to be in postal management.

UPMA members oversee the delivery of over 500 million pieces of mail every day to 163 million households and businesses of all sizes in the United States. On November 1, 2021, I became the second elected national president of UPMA.

Our organization is recognized statutorily under title 39 of the U.S. Code. The statute directs that we consult with the USPS to participate directly in the planning and development of pay policies and schedules, fringe benefit programs, and other programs relating to supervisory and other managerial employees.

I am committed to recruiting, engaging, and developing future leaders for UPMA and the Postal Service, improving UPMA members' work situations and helping move all postal employees forward as we continue to deliver for the American people.

I want to express UPMA's strong appreciation of the work of this subcommittee and Congress. I cannot overstate how important the passage of the Postal Service Reform Act was to the Postal Service's ability to pivot on its path to self-reliant stability, protecting what UPMA members rely on most: their postal careers and retirement.

PSRA addressed many internal issues that hampered the post office in growing and planning for the future of mail delivery. The relief from retiree healthcare prefunding and Medicare integration especially has enabled a clearer financial path forward for the service.

The Postal Regulatory Commission's positive actions on pricing flexibility have allowed the USPS to continue to see growth in revenues while some mail volumes continue to fall. The ball is now firmly in the court of the U.S. Postal Service leaders to further reduce costs, increase efficiencies, and modernize our processes, including the postal network.

I want to highlight the extraordinary measures put in place by postal management and the Herculean effort by UPMA members and the rest of the 650,000 men and women of the Postal Service this past election cycle. I would point to those plans and that effort

as a great insight into how my members will ensure that the 2022 peak season will be successful.

Of course, like every business, the Postal Service faces real pressure to perform at the standards its customers and stakeholders expect. Meeting service expectations is a significant responsibility of postmasters.

The USPS today would cite staffing and inflationary challenges across the board, but this doesn't tell the whole story of what my members face in their local post offices. We take our mission seriously, but postmasters that are short-staffed in many areas of the country are personally delivering mail on some routes in order to fulfill that mission.

In some regions, advertised vacancies get no applicants for many posting cycles. Labor market challenges are not unique to the Postal Service, but the extra security measures involved in hiring Federal employees does make the process more difficult. Sometimes when we are able to get an applicant, by the time we run background checks, et cetera, they may have taken other jobs.

When you compound that with the retirements and the other separations from the service, it will not be as easy to achieve the stated service standards that we have. However, the Postal Service has weathered situations like this many times in the past. And UPMA members are proud of the efforts of the people they manage in executing on-time delivery in extraordinary circumstances.

Each peak season presents unique challenges. In 2020, we saw delays in plants and transportation. Pandemic-related absences crippled the postal network.

Now, in 2022, we see a record amount of election mail again. Inflation is a distraction that is eating up many of our resources. Private sector pay and initial benefits are enticing applicants away from the Postal Service. Employees seeking postmaster positions see long hours and difficult working conditions as challenges that may deter them from upward mobility, making it even more difficult for the Postal Service to attract and retain qualified managers.

The Postal Service has historically managed to deliver for America despite many factors being against us. I have spoken personally about postal issues to many of the members of this crucial committee over the last decade.

Although the philosophy of how we make those necessary changes might have differed, we have always agreed that a strong, thriving, vibrant and healthy Postal Service is essential for America, American democracy, the American economy and the Postal Service's 650,000 dedicated public servants who rely on USPS jobs to support their family.

Thank you for the opportunity to share UPMA's views on the issues facing the United States Postal Service. I look forward to answering your questions.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you. Exactly on time, Mr. Carley. Incredible. I wish I had been today.

Mr. HOGROGIAN, you are recognized for your five minutes of questioning.

Mr. HOGROGIAN. Chairman Connolly—

Mr. CONNOLLY. Excuse me, of testimony.

**STATEMENT OF PAUL V. HOGROGIAN, NATIONAL PRESIDENT,  
NATIONAL POSTAL MAIL HANDLERS UNION**

Mr. HOGROGIAN. Chairman Connolly, Ranking Member Hice, members of the subcommittee and honored guests, my name is Paul Hogrogian, and I am the national president of the National Postal Mail Handlers Union, a position that I have held since 2015. Previously, I served on the union's National Executive Board and as local president for the New York metropolitan area.

I started my career with the Postal Service in 1971 as a casual letter carrier in my hometown of Dumont, New Jersey. I later became a distribution clerk in Hackensack, New Jersey, before becoming a mail handler in 1976 at what now is called the New Jersey NDC in Jersey City, New Jersey.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the performance of the Postal Service during peak season. The NPMHU serves as the exclusive bargaining representative for over 50,000 mail handlers employed by the United States Postal Service.

Mail handlers are an essential part of the mail processing network as we move billions of pieces of mail each year. Our members work in all of the Nation's large postal plants and are responsible for loading and unloading trucks, transporting mail within the facility, and operating machinery and automated equipment in addition to many other functions. Mail handlers are generally the first and the last employees to handle the mail as it comes to, goes through, and leaves most postal plants.

The peak season is considered to take place from November to January each calendar year and is driven mostly by holidays and gift giving among family and friends. The Postal Service has seen a sharp increase in parcel mail caused mostly by the growth of e-commerce.

The increase in volume required an increase in hiring temporary noncareer employees as well as acquiring additional physical space for parcels and installing more sorting machines for processing that mail.

Recent increases in personnel and property can be attributed to the need to overcome staffing issues that arose during the 2020 calendar year peak season, mostly caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. By the end of the 2020 peak season, there were over 11,500 postal employees reported as infected with COVID-19, almost 3,000 of whom were mail handlers. Even with the best efforts taken by the Postal Service to meet the demands of peak season, it was difficult to overcome the personnel shortages caused by medical necessity.

The Postal Service remains one of the best and most trusted Federal agencies. The Postal Service is enshrined in the Constitution, and mail handlers and all postal workers take their mission to deliver mail to every address in America seriously and with great pride.

Additionally, since 2020, we have seen the peak season begin earlier each election year as more and more eligible voters turn to vote-by-mail initiatives to take part in the democratic process. At least 21 states allow for ballots to be mailed to eligible voters 45 days or more before each election. And the Postal Service now be-

gins to deliver millions of ballots to voters each election year by the end of September.

To answer the subcommittee's question, yes, the Postal Service is ready for the holiday rush expected during the 2022 peak season. The Postal Service has hired 28,000 seasonal employees, leased 52 peak season annexes, and installed 249 new package processing machines across the Nation. We have the people, we have the equipment, and we have the space available to get the job done.

I thank the chairman, the ranking member, and the members of the subcommittee for their time today to address these important issues. The Mail Handlers Union looks forward to our continued work together to promote a sustainable Postal Service for the American people. I am ready to answer questions that you may have. Thank you.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Hogrogian.

Mr. Plunkett, you are recognized for your five minutes of testimony.

**STATEMENT OF MICHAEL PLUNKETT, PRESIDENT AND CEO,  
ASSOCIATION FOR POSTAL COMMERCE**

Mr. PLUNKETT. Good afternoon, Chairman Connolly, Ranking Member Hice, and members of the subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the Postal Service's readiness for the upcoming peak season.

I'm here today on behalf of the Association for Postal Commerce, better known as PostCom. Our members are world-class organizations in financial services, healthcare, telecommunications, logistics, mail production technology and shipping. This diverse group is united in its reliance on the Postal Service and is committed to ensuring that reliable, affordable postal services remain available to all U.S. businesses and citizens.

Just over two years ago, I appeared before this subcommittee to discuss the state of the postal system and priorities for ensuring its continued viability. Shortly thereafter, unprecedented demand for shipping services overwhelmed delivery networks in the United States, including the Postal Service. That surge eventually hobbled the USPS network in December 2020.

Two years later, there has been a remarkable turnaround. Today, I'm happy to report that postal management has made tremendous strides in stabilizing its network and in expanding peak capacity. The 2021 peak season was a significant improvement over the previous year, and our members anticipate, with very limited exceptions that I address in my written testimony, that the Postal Service will successfully navigate the upcoming peak season.

The change in the Postal Service's financial status has been equally remarkable. Thanks to continued demand for shipping, the Inflation Reduction Act, the CARES Act, and, most importantly, the Postal Service Reform Act, the Postal Service's balance sheet has improved dramatically.

The future, though, is perhaps less clear. The Postal Service is preparing for an extensive reconfiguration of its network over the next five years as part of its Delivering for America plan. We agree that modernization of the postal system is overdue and necessary

for the Postal Service to remain an efficient and affordable provider of delivery services for the entire Nation.

PostCom's members are equally certain that the best way to ensure that a revamped postal network can meet the needs of its customers is by communicating and collaborating with the customers and business partners who rely on and pay for universal delivery service.

We have asked for and will continue to urge the Postal Service to be more forthcoming with its modernization and deployment plans to optimize the complementary capabilities of the Postal Service and its business partners.

Now, network modernization aside, the affordability of mail is increasingly concerning. In January, postage rates will increase for the fourth time in two years. When that increase takes effect, some products will be experiencing cumulative rate increases nearing 50 percent in just over 2 years. The most recent increase was approved by the Governors of the Postal Service just weeks after the previous rate increase took effect. In effect, the Governors have approved aggressive compounding of rate increases without any data on how unprecedented rate increases are impacting customers.

Further, at the most recent Board of Governors meeting, the Postal Service was clear that it will continue, quote, "taking price," unquote, even as market-dominant volumes are driven from the system. At that same meeting, the Postal Service revealed that it would not meet its projected break-even target for 2023, despite record revenues and a projected volume loss of 6.4 billion pieces in that year.

The Postal Service has called for the Biden administration to revisit the Postal Service's Civil Service Retirement System obligations to relieve some financial pressure.

PostCom agrees that the administration and Congress should consider all possible remedies to reduce these inequities to bolster the Postal Service and protect ratepayers. That will not be sufficient. PostCom has already petitioned the Postal Regulatory Commission, which enabled the unprecedented rate increases over the last two years, to revisit its regulations, given the Postal Service's recent good fortune. PostCom appreciates that Chairman Connolly has proposed legislation that would require the PRC to do the same. Without some check on these anomalous and excessive rate increases, our members are concerned that mail volume declines will accelerate to dangerous levels.

PostCom's members rely on the Postal Service to deliver magazines, medications, bills and statements, catalogs and essential communications. We are at the center of a mailing industry that employs millions of Americans, providing jobs in every state and accounting for more than a trillion dollars in annual revenues.

As this committee considers the Postal Service's readiness to meet peak season service commitments, we caution that, despite significant recent improvements, sustained punitive rate increases present an existential threat to the continued viability of the Postal Service.

Mailers are prepared to pay their fair share but should not be required to shoulder the entire burden of sustaining universal service during these challenging times. Thank you.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Plunkett.

Mr. White, you are recognized. I believe this is your first time before Congress, so we'll go easy.

**STATEMENT OF GREGORY T. WHITE, EXECUTIVE MANAGER OF  
STRATEGIC INITIATIVES, U.S. POSTAL SERVICE**

Mr. WHITE. Thank you.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Welcome.

Mr. WHITE. Thank you. Good afternoon, Chair Connolly, Ranking Member Hice, and members of the subcommittee. My name is Gregory White, and I am the Postal Service's executive manager of strategic initiatives. In this role, I'm responsible for assisting with the development and execution of the Delivering for America plan within the Office of the Postmaster General.

I appreciate the opportunity to discuss how the Postal Service has engaged in months of preparation and planning for the peak holiday season at all levels of the organization. Specifically, I will detail our ongoing and robust hiring campaign, improvements to our processing capacity, facility acquisitions, optimization of our vehicle fleet, and implementation of new technology to expedite processing and delivery.

Most importantly, service performance remains strong throughout the country. Service performance is better now than the same period for 2020 and 2021. The average time for delivery of a mail piece or package across the postal network is just 2.5 days.

Our service and operational improvements were demonstrated in the COVID-19 test kit fulfillment program, which required the expanding of inventory management systems, establishing 48 fulfillment centers to pack, label, and ship test kits, and ensuring timely delivery to homes across America. The program saw 680 million test kits packaged and shipped, with 96.4 percent of test kits being delivered on time with an average delivery time of just 1.2 days.

As service holds steady throughout the Nation, the Postal Service continues preparation for the holidays, including investments and improvements to operational precision.

As relates to staffing, we are actively hiring 20,000 seasonal employees. Beyond that, as part of the Delivering for America plan, we have deployed strategies to stabilize our work force. The Postal Service has converted more than 100,000 employees from part-time to full-time career positions over the last two years, 41,000 of those conversions since January of this year.

Employee availability has improved. Supervisor vacancies have been significantly reduced. The combination of experienced career staff and robust seasonal hiring is powerful.

In addition, as part of the \$40 billion in Delivering for America investments, we have added new package processing equipment. We have installed 249 new package processing machines across the Nation since the launch of the Delivering for America plan.

Paired with operational precision improvements, the Postal Service is expanding its processing capacity to nearly 60 million packages every day this holiday season. Expedited sortation will enable prompt and reliable mail delivery by ensuring an integrated and efficient flow of all products into and out of our processing facilities.

The Postal Service has also signed multiyear leases on peak season annexes and processing facilities, which added 8.5 million square feet to our footprint. These facilities are strategically located throughout the country to augment space shortages at existing postal sites.

We are not the organization we were two years ago during the challenging 2020 peak season amidst a global pandemic. While headwinds remain, we are now structured for precision. We are an organization better positioned to meet the country's evolving mailing and shipping needs, working to do so in a financially self-supporting manner.

The Postal Service is prepared to deliver a successful holiday for the American public. I want to thank the dedicated men and women of the organization. A successful peak is not possible without the hard work and commitment of our employees.

Thank you, Chair Connolly, Ranking Member Hice, and members of the subcommittee, for the opportunity to speak today. I welcome any questions that you and the subcommittee may have.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. White. See, that didn't go so bad. All right. All right.

The distinguished chairwoman of the committee, full committee, Mrs. Maloney, is recognized for her five minutes of questioning.

Mrs. MALONEY. Thank you, Chairman Connolly and Ranking Member Hice, for holding this important and very timely hearing. And I want to really talk about mail-in ballots, really. In New York and across the country, people really turned to mail-in ballots. It's more convenient, particularly during COVID.

And this past week showed once again the vital role that the Postal Service plays as millions of Americans cast their ballots through the mail. And what's more important than an honest and fair election?

To accommodate voters' growing interest in vote by mail, the Postal Service's IG has recommended the creation of a separate simplified mail product exclusively for election mail for Federal elections. This product would support uniform mail processing and have standards of reliability, honesty, and transparency.

I responded to the IG's recommendation by introducing the Vote by Mail Tracking Act. Right now, we can put a barcode on a package and track it all around the world. Why can't we put a bar code on a mail-in ballot and track it from the voter's hands to the election office. The bill would require that all mail-in ballots include a barcode and are easier to sort and track. Our committee will mark up this bill tomorrow, and I hope it can be enacted into law this year. This bill needs to be bipartisan because what is more bipartisan and really—and we all have a stake in honest and fair elections.

So I would like to ask Mr. White—Ms. White—no, Mr. White right over here, what progress has the Postal Service made on developing a simplified uniform product for election mail, as the IG has recommended?

Mr. WHITE. I am not an expert on election mail. That is outside of my area of responsibility.

Mrs. MALONEY. Can you get back to us in writing after you have looked at that?

Mr. WHITE. Absolutely, we will.

Mrs. MALONEY. OK. Ms. Hull, do you agree with my assessment, and how would products like those envisioned in my legislation improve tracking and delivery of election mail?

Ms. HULL. Yes. As you mentioned, we made that recommendation in 2020 because it was—we saw how important the Postal Service became in that critical election and continues to be in this midterm.

We just looked at the midterm readiness. And, as we looked at that, we looked at where the Postal Service was involved in the primary elections. We did visitations and found that the Postal Service rate of being able to track mail with barcodes had improved from about 53 percent in the 2020 election to 83 percent in this past primary season for a midterm.

So it really gives a great tool to track where those ballots are in the system if barcodes are included. The challenge because of, as you know, the number of election offices that are involved in preparing ballots, and the Postal Service is, obviously, not in control of all that. So I appreciate the efforts in your legislation to make those improvements.

Mrs. MALONEY. Well, I'd like to ask our other witnesses that have a stake in the whole system, Mr. Edmund Carley, the national president of United Postmasters and Managers of America, could you comment on the legislation in writing or now if you'd like?

Mr. CARLEY. Well, I'm interested in the product. The post office, where I'm postmaster since 2008, is a county seat. So I work very closely with the election officials, and there is no standardized product for mail-in ballots.

You know, we do extraordinary measures. I mentioned it in my comments. Postmasters going in on the Sunday before the election, when we don't normally do collections out of blue boxes we went in and collected blue boxes to get that and make sure that mail got in on Monday to get delivered for the election. And we go above and beyond. So I'm very interested in a specific product that we could then market to the county seats and the people that do the actual elections, because it's all different.

Mrs. MALONEY. Thank you.

Mr. Hogrogian, who happens to be a constituent, welcome to the subcommittee.

Mr. HOGROGIAN. Thank you. And thank you, Madam Chairwoman and the chairman, for all your help, and all the committee, for all your help during postal reform. And from all our members, thank all of you. And like New York, thank all of you.

To answer your question, I'm not an expert on ballot design, but if it makes it more efficient to process it, I'm all in favor of it. But that being said, no matter how you mail the ballot, you mail it, we'll move it. So—

Mrs. MALONEY. That's good to hear.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Hogrogian. The gentlelady's time has expired.

Mrs. MALONEY. May I ask Mr. Plunkett and anyone else on the panel to answer in writing, Mr. Chairman, because we don't have time?

Mr. CONNOLLY. Without objection. Absolutely.

Mr. PLUNKETT. I'd be happy to do so.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Absolutely. Thank you.

Mr. HICE, you are recognized for your five minutes of questioning.

Mr. HICE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. White, let me begin with you. Just in real simple explanation, what is the primary mission of the Postal Service?

Mr. WHITE. The primary mission of the Postal Service is to deliver mail and packages to 163 million addresses six days a week in a financially self-sustaining manner.

Mr. HICE. So what's a bit baffling to me, as you well know, Democrats actually introduced legislation to have the Postal Service offer financial services, including making loans and offering checking accounts.

Does the Postal Service have any expertise in offering financial services?

Mr. WHITE. I do not focus on policy or regulatory decisions. This—

Mr. HICE. That's not my question. Does the Postal Service have any expertise in offering financial services?

Mr. WHITE. I can speak that I personally do not and do not know of representatives close to me with that expertise, but, again, I am focused on peak season and our peak season success.

Mr. HICE. OK. The mission, as you said, is to deliver mail and packages. And my question is, is there any expertise in offering financial services? That's kind of a yes-or-no answer.

Mr. WHITE. I do not know the answer to that question.

Mr. HICE. OK. Well, I feel pretty confident that I know the answer to that question, and I believe the vast majority of Americans do as well.

Would offering financial services distract the Postal Service from its mission?

Mr. WHITE. I appreciate the question, but we will follow the mission. That mission currently states that we will deliver to 163 million applicants.

Mr. HICE. OK. I see your refusal to answer.

Let me ask you another question. The Democrats recently gave the Postal Service \$3 billion for electric vehicles through the Inflation Reduction Act, and also they said the Postal Service should provide charging stations to the general public.

Is it part of the mission or the duty or responsibility of the Postal Service to offer charging stations to the public?

Mr. WHITE. I will state again, our mission is to deliver to 163 million addresses—

Mr. HICE. So would you say your mission is not to offer charging stations?

Mr. WHITE. I think we will follow the policy guidance that—

Mr. HICE. That's not my question, Mr. White.

Is it the mission of the Postal Service to offer charging stations to the American public?

Mr. WHITE. The mission of the Postal Service is to deliver to 163 million addresses six days a week in a financially self-sustaining manner. That is the mission of the Postal Service.

Mr. HICE. All right. So that mission does not include charging stations or financial services. Is that correct?

Mr. WHITE. The mission is to deliver. We will deliver. That is the mission.

Mr. HICE. OK. So the mission, as you've stated several times, does not include financial services or charging stations. Is that correct?

Mr. WHITE. Again, the mission is to deliver to 163 million addresses six days per week in a financially self-sustaining manner.

Mr. HICE. OK. You're doing a good job of avoiding the question, but we all know the answer. You've stated the mission over and over, and it does not include financial services or some of these other things, which would absolutely distract and hinder the Postal Service from doing its job.

Ms. Hull brought up a while ago another concern that we all have and see and that is crime, postal theft. So let me just ask you this: Are you seeing, in relation to postal theft, the Department of Justice aggressively prosecuting postal crimes?

Mr. WHITE. The Inspection Service is the law enforcement arm of the Postal Service. They are the experts on matters related to mail security and employee security. I would have to refer questions to the Inspection Service. I will be happy to work with them to provide an answer for the record following this.

Mr. HICE. So you're not aware of the Justice Department being involved?

Mr. WHITE. The Inspection Service is the arm of the—

Mr. HICE. Will you find the answer to that, and would you commit to providing this committee with data regarding the number of crimes that have been referred to the Department of Justice?

Mr. WHITE. We will provide an answer back for the record.

Mr. HICE. OK. Thank you very much.

I see my team has expired. I yield back.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I thank the gentleman.

And I would note that at our hearing in Philadelphia, this issue came up. And there is growing concern about, A, the rules of engagement in terms of pursuing crime off postal property and, second, the shrinkage of the postal police force at a time when crime, as the gentleman suggests, is actually going up. So you might add that to your response back as well.

Mrs. Lawrence, you're recognized for your five minutes of questioning.

Mrs. LAWRENCE. Thank you so much.

I often remind the committee of my 30 years of service with the Postal Service, which few people recognize, and this panel and this committee are uniquely aware of the complexity, the multiple levels of responsibility and expectations that is placed on the organization.

On February 22, 1921, Frank Yager set out to prove that mail could be flown from coast to coast in record time. By flying night and day, he made it from San Francisco to New York in 33 hours and 20 minutes, a third of the time it would take by train.

Today, a century later, we have moved backward. It takes the Postal Service more than 120 hours to deliver mail the same distance, almost four times as long. That's because under the plan of

our current Postmaster DeJoy, he ordered the Postal Service to reduce the amount of mail transported by air. Today, people are more reliant than ever on the Postal Service to deliver medicine, ballots, holiday gifts, and other goods.

The Postal Service, however, has slowed down its delivery standard—service standard from 2 to 3 days to 2 to 5 and for up to 40 percent of the first-class mail packages.

Mr. Plunkett, how has this new decision to reduce delivery standards' decision change affected your members and your businesses and their businesses?

Mr. PLUNKETT. PostCom does have members that use commercial first class and periodicals class in their business, and in both cases, the reduction in service standards has reduced the quality of those products and reduced their value.

And in some cases, specifically with regard to bills and statements, some of our members operate in regulated industries where adding a day or two onto delivery times can create significant regulatory and compliance challenges.

So when the Postal Service sought their change in service standards, we filed comments with the Postal Regulatory Commission opposing those changes, and were dismayed that the Postal Service chose to go forward with them despite a negative report by the Postal Regulatory Commission.

Mrs. LAWRENCE. Thank you. And as it was stated earlier, we're not a business, we're a service.

The Postal Service is also rapidly increasing its rates. If you look at the—at the screen, you'll see the tables showing rate increases for mail and packages since August 2020. And we know that when we increase costs, everyone's talking about how much it costs to exist now as an American.

Mr. Plunkett, again, what will happen to your members' businesses if rates continue to increase at an uncomfortable rate?

Mr. PLUNKETT. It really depends on the product that they use. For users of first-class mail, they will undoubtedly end up redoubling their efforts to convince their customers to adopt electronic bill presentment and payment because mail becomes increasingly uneconomical as the rates rise.

In the case of senders of marketing mail, they will cut back on the volumes that they send. They will have to have smaller campaigns or reduce frequency because mail becomes less competitive relative to other advertising media as rates continue to rise.

So in both cases we expect to see reductions in mail volume in response to the rate increases.

Mrs. LAWRENCE. So this is a question for Ms. Hull. Has the OIG examined or do you have plans to examine the effects of the 10-year plan on the Postal Service financial condition and service delivery, hearing that there are options to all of our customers?

And as they continue to reduce the mail volume, which I worked there at a time where we literally, during the holidays, it was all hands-on deck. It was a force and just mounds of mail. As people start using electronic systems and other options, what is that impact on the Postal Service, and have we included that in the 10-year plan?

Ms. HULL. Yes. We're paying close attention to how the Postal Service implements the Delivering for America plan. And we are looking at how service and, if there are declines in service, how they might impact that. We also look at the financial impacts of the 10-year plan and likely will be looking at volume impacts as well as we move forward.

Mrs. LAWRENCE. Thank you.

My time has expired. I yield back.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I thank the gentlelady.

Mr. HICE. Mr. Chairman, may I ask you a question before we go to Mr. Keller?

Mr. CONNOLLY. Yes.

Mr. HICE. Just in light of the comments that you made between the questioning, I have a question as well. Obviously, the postal police perhaps may be an issue but to get them would requires more training, and they go beyond the postal facility and this, that, and the other. Prosecution seems like a good method.

But we asked Mr. White earlier, and I want to ask you if we can expand this, that we also get a strategic plan from the Postal Service as to antitheft strategies and also a timeline to get that.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Absolutely.

Mr. HICE. I think that would go to you.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Absolutely. And it would be very consistent with the hearing we had in Philadelphia where that—

Mr. HICE. OK.

Mr. CONNOLLY [continuing]. Issue was front and center.

Mr. HICE. Mr. White, if you will.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I would echo the ranking member's request.

Thank you, Mr. Hice.

Mr. Keller is recognized for his five minutes of questioning.

Mr. KELLER. Thank you. And I thank all the witnesses for being here today.

And I know it's been mentioned that the Postal Service is a service and not a business. Prior to coming to Congress and being elected office at the state level, I was—I was in private industry, and we provided a service. That's what businesses do. That's what enterprises do. So you can call it whatever you want. They've got to be effective and efficient to be able to do it, and they'll have to have the tools to do that.

So I just want to—you know, one of the things that I always looked at is, if you tell me how you're going to manage me, I'll tell you how I'm going to perform. And that's what the Postal Service needs is clear performance metrics. And I think under Postmaster General DeJoy, we've seen some of that.

You know, we're here to provide oversight. And I heard it said today, Congress is going to ensure the USPS will perform. Well, we witnessed today we can't even start a hearing on time with somebody here to take a roll call vote, OK, and we're here to try and beat up on the post office. I'm not here to do that. I'm simply here to say that there are things that I looked at.

And, Ms. Hull, I want to—appreciate you had—you had sent me the report on the preparedness. In looking at these things, you know, I just would say—and according to your assessment, do you believe the Postal Service is capable of executing its plan for the

upcoming peak season? I mean, do you think they can do that? I gathered from this they're ready, but—

Ms. HULL. Yes. I think one of the things that we saw that will really help them out, I think, is the deployment of additional package processing equipment. Packages kind of jam up. They're great, and the volume is important and the revenue is important, but they're challenging to move. So more automation in that area and more focus in that is going to be really helpful.

Mr. KELLER. Well, I guess I'd ask a question. I mean, we're talking about handling packages, and I know there's other places that handle packages that aren't the Postal Service. Have we looked at how they do it to look for like a benchmark or a best practice on how we do that?

Ms. HULL. Yes. We benchmark against private sector delivery companies all the time in our work, and the Postal Service does as well.

Mr. KELLER. Yes. And had we not bailed out some pensions, and they had to charge a true cost for what they had to cover their services, we might be a little more competitive too. I'm just going to say that.

The other thing I would like to talk about, Mr. Plunkett, you talked about rate increases.

Mr. PLUNKETT. Yes.

Mr. KELLER. I guess—I guess—and when we look at delivering any service, it takes energy to do that, right?

Mr. PLUNKETT. Absolutely.

Mr. KELLER. So—and actually you mentioned that.

I'm going to go back to Ms. Hull or Mr. White. How much of the increase or how much of increase have we seen in fuel for the Postal Service to be able to execute its mission and deliver the mail? Do we know that? Do we have an answer how much more we're spending for fuel than we did two years ago to accomplish the same mission?

Ms. HULL. I don't have that answer.

Mr. KELLER. Can somebody get that for us, please? Because, quite frankly, here we are. We're politicians, right? And in some cases, when we look at the Federal Government, some people in the government couldn't run a good one-dog dog show and they want to try and tell you how to run the Postal Service. OK.

I have experience at running things. I ran a \$50 million a year budget before I got elected to office. Right? And we had to be effective and efficient.

So I'd like to be able to see what that is, because we have politicians that are talking about all kinds of things that have increased fuel costs. And now they're griping at you because things that they have done, the Inflation Reduction Act placed on you and shutting down American energy, now they're griping at you because you have to raise prices. What did they think was going to happen when you have a 40-year-high inflation?

The Postal Service isn't going to—isn't affected by—I mean, you're affected by decisions that the White House makes or that Congress makes when it regards energy policy, aren't you?

I think we'd all agree the answer is yes.

So here we have a bunch of people that can't start a meeting on time, don't have the people here to take a roll call, make you wait, cause inflation, and then want to bang on you and tell you you can't run things properly and bang on the Postmaster General. I don't—I just don't think that's fair, quite frankly. You know, so I look at those things.

And it goes back to the banking, you know. You know, I don't—does the post office do any kind of assessment on the services its customers are looking for? I mean, do you have people coming to you, saying that I want the post office to do banking or I want the post office to provide electric charging stations? I mean, have you—is the post office aware of any of their customers? Because that's what they are. They're customers. In a business you have customers. That's—are you aware of any of that, Mr. White or Ms. Hull?

Ms. HULL. We've done some work in the past on ways to use the retail infrastructure, and we can provide some of that. I don't have the—

Mr. KELLER. So nobody's come to you and said, you know what, I really wish you had a bank here that I could write checks or you'd handle my investments or you had a place I could plug in my vehicle. That's not your job.

Ms. HULL. We did focus group kind of activities as a part of that, so—but I'm not aware of those two things coming up as part of the—

Mr. KELLER. Like I said, I think we should let the post office get back to its mission and stop trying—when we as the body have trouble running things here, telling you how to do things.

Thank you, and I yield back.

Mr. CONNOLLY. The gentleman's time has expired.

The gentleman from Maryland, Mr. Raskin, is recognized.

The gentlewoman from Ohio, Ms. Brown, is recognized for her five minutes.

Ms. BROWN. Thank you, Chairman Connolly.

Mr. CONNOLLY. You're welcome.

Ms. BROWN. Thank you for holding this timely hearing as the Postal Service prepares for the annual holiday rush.

Throughout this Congress, this committee has held several hearings, including some field hearings, focused on Postal Service performance and ways to support the agency.

Based on historical trends, the holiday season results in an increase in gifts, greeting cards, and other seasonal mail.

So if you'll look at the screen, you will see that the Postal Service's—sorry—preparation for the upcoming holiday season including converting 10,000 pre-career employees into career employees, hiring 20,000 temporary employees, installing 50 new package processing machines, and leasing 17 additional mail processing facilities.

Like many others, my constituents in Ohio depend on the Postal Service to deliver important items like medicine, unemployment benefits, and Social Security checks. So my question to all of the witnesses is: Does the Postal Service have the right staff, equipment, and facilities in place to get mail and packages delivered on time throughout the upcoming holiday season?

Mr. HOGROGIAN. I guess I'll give it a shot.

Yes, I believe we do. Earlier—we started preparations for peak season earlier this year than we ever have in the past. We started maybe in July. I can only speak for my union, the National Postal Mail Handlers Union, that we entered into a memorandum of understanding with the Postal Service where we agreed to convert 2,700 temporary employees to full-time career status.

And we also agreed—there's eight weeks during the year where the Postal Service contractually can exceed the 24.5 percent percentage of our temporary employees. And what has been happening, the Postal Service in the past has been using two to three of those weeks to just hire the people and get them onboard. So we reached an agreement to allow them to start an extra two weeks where they can hire people to put them onboard.

Now that being said, they have hired additional—they replaced the ones they converted and hired an additional, I was told, 28,000. But if it's 20,000, that is correct. I was told that they did hire, in fact, 20,000 people.

And that being said, our regular work force is ready, willing, and able to work any overtime that we're asked to do.

So in answer to your question, yes, I think they are properly staffed to address the peak season this year.

Mr. WHITE. I would also like to speak to this. The Postal Service is absolutely ready for this holiday season.

I appreciate some of the stats that you pulled up on the screen. I will speak more broadly. Over the last two years, we have converted over 100,000 part-time employees into full-time employees. We have leased 8.5 million square feet of multiyear annexes, so not just specific to one or two months but something we can upfit over the course of the year to ensure that we are ready for the December month.

And then our employee availability has improved. Supervisor vacancies have gone down. From a staffing standpoint we are ready. From a facilities standpoint we are ready. And from an equipment standpoint, we have installed 249 package sorters, again, since March 2021. So we did 112 last year, another 137 this year. We are moving packages at a much faster rate than we were at this time last year. We are very confident as we move forward into the holidays.

Mr. PLUNKETT. If I could add to that, the Postal Service's customers fully expect a successful peak season. They have added capacity necessary to meet the increased demand, and they seem to have a solid plan in place.

Because the Postal Service operates in virtually every community in the U.S., we fully expect there might be local instances of outages because of weather events or perhaps localized employee shortages, and hope that the Postal Service is able to communicate effectively when those inevitable things do happen. But in no way should anyone anticipate any kind of systemic problems like we had two years ago.

Ms. BROWN. Thank you.

Ms. HULL. Our audit work also indicated the Postal Service was ready and had a reasonable plan and contingency plans around any issues that they—came up during the peak season.

Mr. CARLEY. And speaking as a Postmaster, I actually delivered mail last New Year's Eve and during peak.

The question was: Do we have the right staff, equipment, and facilities? Equipment and facilities are things. They don't really move the mail. People move the mail, and we never have enough people. I've been here 25 years, but we manage.

We manage. We move people around. People work overtime. People do extraordinary things. It's a continuum. We've hired in the last couple of years over 400,000 people, and we continue to hire. So I don't think that I'm ever fully staffed. So we're always working, but we will deliver. It will be a successful season, I'm sure.

Ms. BROWN. Well, thank you for that.

I think I can say this: People across the country are counting on the Postal Service, especially during the holiday season. And my hope is that the Postal Service will be able to maintain on-time delivery performance. I look forward to working with you and my colleagues to ensure that the Postal Service continues to provide an excellent customer experience.

So thank you, Mr. Chairman. And, with that, I yield back.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Ms. Brown. And thank you for your faithfulness as a member of this subcommittee. We really appreciate it.

Mr. Pascrell, the gentleman from New York, is recognized.

Counsel. New Jersey.

Mr. CONNOLLY. What did I say?

Counsel. You said New York.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I meant New Jersey. Sorry.

Mr. Hogrogian, that accent. I'm sorry.

Mr. HOGROGIAN. I'm from New Jersey too. All right?

Mr. CONNOLLY. Originally?

Mr. HOGROGIAN. I was born in New York.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Yes, see. I knew it.

Mr. Pascrell from New Jersey is recognized.

Mr. PASCRELL. That's a big mistake, Mr. Connolly. We'll discuss that later.

Good afternoon. I'm honored to be here today.

And I want to thank all the panel. I thought you were excellent, on target. I'm thrilled to see my friend, the Garden State's own Paul Hogrogian, who's long been a tremendous leader for our mail handlers.

We've tried to get substantive postal reform done for over a decade, at least. We finally passed the Postal Service Reform Act into law this year. I thought it was a major victory for the Congress. Our reforms will free up, I think, a lot of money. We finally got rid of the prefunding anchor strangulation, which should have been done and could have been done 10 years ago.

But to help our Postal Service flourish, I think we have to think bigger and bolder. There must be affordable, fast, and reliable mail first and foremost. I know that's what all of you want. The current Postmaster General, I don't think has done—put together a good plan for the post office's future.

Our post office is a public utility. We cannot sacrifice the timely delivery of mail. We must also ensure our postal workers have the benefits, the compensation, and the support to thrive. I stand by

that statement. Postal employees don't receive locality pay. Postal workers in Manhattan, Kansas, and Manhattan, New York, are paid the same wage.

The Postal Service has struggled to hire workers for the peak season. Without locality pay, the post office can't compete in areas with higher cost of living, like where I live in North Jersey.

Mr. Hogrogian, why doesn't postal leadership raise wages for workers in high cost of living areas? How important is this change to a state like New Jersey?

Mr. HOGROGIAN. Well, that's a—that's an interesting question, Congressman. And it seems very simplistic. Yes, I believe people in the New York metropolitan area and other high-cost areas should get more money and make more because they live in a higher cost of living area.

But that's very simplistic. I represent the entire country. I represent people in New York and Mississippi and other where the places aren't as cost—the cost of living isn't as high.

Now, I'm fine if you want to pay them more money. How are you going to pay for it? I mean, I know what the post office is going to do. OK. They'll give you more in San Francisco, but they'll cut it somewhere else. But if somehow we can get the money to pay them more, fine with me.

Mr. PASCRELL. Do you—Tammy Hull, Hull, over the past four years, the Postal Service has struggled mightily during the holiday season. Haphazard leadership, pandemic staffing shortages led to unprecedented slowdowns.

This is our first holiday season with Mr.—with the postmaster. His plan to slow down first-class mail and some packages implemented. This is when it's going to be implemented. The Postal Regulatory Commission blasted the United States Postal Service for failing to adequately research this misguided overhaul.

Ms. Hull, is your office committed to providing rigorous oversight and timely and transparent reporting on the impact of these operational and staffing changes during the upcoming peak season?

Ms. HULL. Yes, sir, we are.

Mr. PASCRELL. Thank you.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I thank the gentleman from New Jersey for his insightful questioning. Thank you.

Before I call on Mr. Davis, the gentleman from Illinois, I would ask unanimous consent. Mr. Hice and others have raised the question of what is the role, if any, of the Postal Service with respect to financial services and providing financial services to customers. The fact is, actually, there is a history of providing certain financial services.

And I would simply ask that the report of the inspector general went back to 2015, simply laying out what are those options, if any, with respect to the future of financial services of the postal office be entered into the record at this point.

Without objection, so ordered.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Mr. Davis, the gentleman from Illinois, is recognized for his five minutes of questioning.

Mr. DAVIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And let me thank you for not only calling this hearing, but let me thank all of the witnesses for being here and sharing their testimonies with us.

I've always had a great deal of interest in the Postal Service since I started work. It was my first real job, and I enjoyed it. As a matter of fact, we enjoyed it. The pay was good, not as good as it should have been, could have been. But there were tremendous opportunities. I was young and healthy and had a lot of energy, so I worked as much overtime as I could get.

Then after working for about a year and a half, I took another job, but I also continued to work part time. They had what they called short hours at the time. So that interest and that affinity for the Postal Service has lasted. As a matter of fact, we had a motto we used to use where I worked. "Clean hands, gentle touch. Surely we owe a letter that much." And we'd joke and do our work.

But during every peak season, the Postal Service hires a large number of temporary employees. This year, of course, that's no exception. As someone who has always been a staunch defender of workers' rights, I am concerned about the conditions that temporary and noncareer workers at the Postal Service face.

Unfortunately, many of these employees receive lower wages and benefits and, of course, lack union protections.

Further, according to the Government Accountability Office, temporary and noncareer employees have between a 16 and 22 percent higher injury rate than career employees.

Ms. Hull, could you describe the results of the 2022 audit titled, "Changes in Mail Mix: Implications for Carriers' Physical Health"?

Ms. HULL. Sure. Yes, we looked at how the increases in package volume have an impact on the carriers. And one of the things that we found is that particularly temporary, pre-career employees had a higher injury rate from carrying large loads of packages and—than career employees did. We looked at how the injuries were associated with their time in service and their career status.

And so we did find exactly what you were referring to, that pre-career employees had a higher injury rate and all carriers carrying more packages have—it has had an impact on their injury rates.

Mr. DAVIS. Did you get any indication that there were serious efforts underway to change these outcomes?

Ms. HULL. That might be a better question for Mr. White, but we—we did—we did get comments from the Postal Service in this space. And I believe they're working on solutions to address this, particularly policies around the weight of packages and how that might impact carriers themselves.

Mr. DAVIS. Then, Mr. White, would you—

Mr. WHITE. Yes, absolutely. We have made significant progress in converting employees to full-time career employees, as you just stated, understanding the difference between that part-time or seasonal hire and a full-time employee. Those employees are more experienced.

And then the other thing I would add is some of the package sorters that we have deployed do handle larger boxes, boxes up to 22 inches, that can improve the ergonomics for the employees on some of the large packages that Ms. Hull is referencing.

Mr. DAVIS. Let me think thank you for that.

I want to try and find out what's happening with temporary employees.

Mr. Hogrogian, do noncareer employees have a clear path to becoming career employees?

Mr. HOGROGIAN. Yes, they do. Let me preface that by saying that I'm speaking on behalf of just the National Postal Mail Handlers Union right now. Our contract expired September 20, but we made sufficient progress where we extended bargaining. We continue to bargain. In fact, two days ago, we had our last meeting, and we're very close to an agreement.

And one of the issues is addressing pre-career employees and establishing a clear and definitive path to career status. And I don't want to bargain over here on C-SPAN or whatever, but we're going to get the job done, Congressman. I think you'll be happy. We'll send you a copy of the agreement when we get it.

Mr. DAVIS. Well, thank you. Thank you for that.

Let me ask you, Mr. White, if I can. As we approach, of course, the holiday season and their efforts, I know in my city it seems like there is some difficulty getting individuals to apply.

Mrs. MALONEY.[Presiding.] The gentleman's time has expired. The gentleman may answer his question.

Mr. WHITE. Yes. That is a great question. Since June, we've actually held 3,000 hiring fairs for just that reason, to onboard additional employees.

I do want to publicly thank those Members of Congress who have promoted those hiring fairs. That is very beneficial to us and very beneficial to get people from your local communities to apply to the Postal Service. Thank you.

Mr. DAVIS. Thank you very much.

Madam Chair.

Mrs. MALONEY. OK. The chair now recognizes the representative from Florida, Representative Debbie Wasserman Schultz. You're now recognized.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you so much, Madam Chair. And I thank you for allowing me to waive on to this important committee hearing.

Because this Nation's sacred elections will always land during the peak postal season, so it's absolutely critical that the Postmaster General provide confidence and transparency to the American people. They need to know that not only will gifts, medicine, and bills all arrive on time but that the Postal Service can also meet the weighty demands of our democracy.

Yet despite the herculean efforts of our postal workers to deliver for this Nation every day, Postmaster General DeJoy still cloaks their fine work in secrecy and faulty legal reasoning. Last month, the postmaster denied my entry to tour a south Florida postal facility yet again where timely ballot delivery problems were specifically documented.

My office coordinated a tour with the local facility, and I had Postal Service employees available to escort me unobtrusively around the facility. I've taken tours of this site for years without incident. But according to DeJoy's staff, my visit would violate their rules and run the risk of causing their employees supposedly

to violate the Hatch Act around a Member of Congress who is on the ballot.

Now, after my tour request was blocked, I reached out to USPS Inspector General Whitcomb Hull for a Hail Mary, and she agreed to inspect this facility prior to election day.

And I want to extend my deep appreciation to her team, to your team, Ms. Hull, who thankfully were able to conduct two speedy, thorough inspections of the facility. And, fortunately, they found no issues.

Ms. Hull, though, do your inspections, can you tell me, disrupt USPS operations?

Ms. HULL. We do our best to be as unobtrusive as possible when we come in and do our work, but I'm sure there is some impact of us coming in the facility and looking at how processes is being conducted.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. But you're not turning things upside down.

Do these inspections provide your office and, ideally, the public with greater confidence that ballots are being delivered in a timely manner?

Ms. HULL. I believe they do.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Now, you were able to get a team to that south Florida facility the very next day and even followed up. But with all of the postal facilities across the country, is it realistic for you to be able to send teams everywhere that quickly or even at all?

Ms. HULL. No. There are over 30,000 delivery units across the country and post offices. And so we visit many, many during election season but not—nowhere close to a majority or even a measurable percentage. We have about 90 field offices and we go to many places, but we can't scratch the surface on the number of postal facilities.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you. And just as important, because of the discreet nature of your work and in this case the need to followup, your team is handcuffed in what you can say publicly about the results. And to your credit, we don't see a lot of IG press conferences for the USPS.

How is Congress supposed to be able to conduct our oversight role on something as important as whether vote-by-mail ballots are delivered efficiently and on time to count if we cannot enter postal facilities for 45 days before an election? And that's Mr. DeJoy's position.

The IG has nowhere near the personnel to ensure this accountability. And the Office of Special Counsel, who has jurisdiction over the Hatch Act, has clearly said that the Hatch Act does not prohibit Members of Congress from conducting their official duties in overseeing the USPS even near an election. Yet the USPS prohibits this oversight.

So that begs the question, Mr. White, what are you trying to hide? I'd like to really understand why Members of Congress and how this committee is—would be able to stop their oversight for 45 days when that's a critical time to make sure that you are absolutely able to do your job efficiently.

Mr. WHITE. I do understand that there are longstanding postal policies on congressional visits. I would have to point you to our legal and government relations team for more detail on those. I would also add that we do work closely with the Office of the Inspector General and her staff.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. OK. But it begs the question, what are you trying to hide?

A key reason that I needed to visit this south Florida facility was because of past problems with election mail processing there. And the other key reason my restricted access is detrimental to the public is because the IG office cannot share the positive work being done for this election and, therefore, carry the unfounded fear that their—people will carry the unfounded fear that their ballot is unsafe in the mail, and that has to change.

And, finally, Mr. White, what will Postmaster General DeJoy pledge to Members today? Because Mr. Connolly has been denied access to postal facilities, as have other Members across the country. What will Postmaster General DeJoy pledge to Members today to bolster access, transparency, and the confidence that Americans can carry in how USPS manages vital ballot deliveries? What will you commit to today? Because it needs improvement.

Mr. WHITE. Again, I will state that I do understand that there are longstanding policies on congressional visits—

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. That's not my question.

Mr. WHITE [continuing]. And I will point—

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. That is not my question. I want to know—reclaiming my time. I want to know what the Postmaster General will pledge to Members today to bolster our access, our ability to conduct, this committee's ability to conduct our responsibility for overseeing the post office and how it's OK in your mind for us to be unable to do that in the 45 days before an election.

Mr. WHITE. Our government relations team will reach out to you in the next day—

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. I don't want to talk to your government relations team. I want an answer to this question from Mr. DeJoy.

Mr. WHITE. I am not Mr. DeJoy. The Postal Service, I understand—

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. I know.

Mr. WHITE [continuing]. Has longstanding policies, and we would have to get back to you with more information.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Madam Chair—

Mrs. MALONEY. The time has expired on the question.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ.—I know you've been frustrated.

Mrs. MALONEY. The gentleman may answer the question.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. I've been frustrated.

Mrs. MALONEY. OK.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. We need—we absolutely as a committee, Madam Chair, and for whoever is our next chair, to have the ability and not forfeit the ability as a committee to oversee the post office all 365 days of the year.

Mrs. MALONEY. Well, we all—

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. I yield back.

Mrs. MALONEY [continuing]. Support that goal and look forward to the response from the post office.

I would now like to call upon Representative Josh Gottheimer from New Jersey for his five minutes.

Mr. GOTTHEIMER. Thank you so much, Madam Chairwoman.

Thank you, Mr. Hogrogian and the other witnesses, for testifying today. We appreciate your expertise on postal related matters. Very grateful.

More than three years ago, stolen checks and incidents of mail fraud were reported in Teaneck, New Jersey, where I represent. Many victims who are constituents of mine have had checks altered after dropping them off at the post office and from

[inaudible] the recipient's name to inflating checks and so many different types of issues that they faced.

Initially, these reports were referred to the local police and then to the postal inspector. The lead agency for investigating mail theft in response and the Postal Inspection Service made recommendations to the local postmaster to improve mail security in and around Teaneck.

Three years later, unfortunately, my constituents and I are still dealing with these issues. I've had calls with local postal officials and the Office of the Inspector General. Your agency told me that you would have a resolution on these cases in Teaneck's post office back in July of this year. It was then delayed to August, then to October, now to the end of November. And I'm trying to get a sense of all this money that's been stolen from families, seniors, and veterans, which is illegal, trying to understand why we can't get answers.

Can you help me better understand why it takes so long to complete these investigations, what the Postal Service is doing about it to get a resolution to matters like these, please?

Ms. HULL. I'm sorry. Was the question for me as the inspector general's—inspector general?

Mr. GOTTHEIMER. Yes. I'm sorry. That was to you. Sorry.

Ms. HULL. Yes.

Mr. GOTTHEIMER. For Hull, sorry. Yes.

Ms. HULL. Sure. Yes. We are currently working that aggressively, and sometimes these investigations take more time than we would like. But we are definitely working that investigation and doing our best to keep your staff updated about the progress.

I also want to emphasize that we're starting a more broad look at mail theft and the Postal Service's response to mail theft, because as has been mentioned several times in this hearing, it's a bigger—it's becoming a bigger and bigger problem. And so we're looking at it more broadly.

But in the cases that you're referring to, we're working those as aggressively as we can.

Mr. GOTTHEIMER. It just seems that, right, it keeps taking months to get any answers and, obviously, our constituents are very, very frustrated, families, seniors, veterans who are coming to us who literally they keep facing issues.

And is it because you don't have enough staff to be able to do these investigations, Inspector General? What's the issue that keeps dragging on?

Ms. HULL. We would always like more staff, but I'm not sure that's the problem in this case. I think it's just the time it takes to investigate some of these matters. It's—some of these things are complicated. What we've seen—and I don't know if this is in this case, but we've seen situations where groups of organized criminals are working together to recruit postal employees to steal from the mail and other things.

So it's a big—it's become a bigger and bigger deal, and these cases have become much more complex than they used to be. So mail theft cases have—have always been a big part of our inventory of casework. The cases that we're working now, though, are much more complicated than they used to be and involve a lot of external activity, not just postal employees.

So we're working with the Inspection Service on this case, and we will continue to do so. And we'll do our best to keep your staff updated when we get to a solu—resolution.

Mr. GOTTHEIMER. Can you help—yes. Can you help me get information on this case? Because literally we can't. We haven't heard from anybody. The regional postal inspector refuses to return our calls. We can't get answers. I just need you to help me—

Ms. HULL. We will definitely—yes.

Mr. GOTTHEIMER [continuing]. Followup.

Ms. HULL. Sure. Sure. We'll definitely get back with you.

Mr. GOTTHEIMER. I really appreciate that, because I'd like to get back to my constituents.

Now, nationwide we know that the Postal Service interference and delay issues impact the delivery of lifesaving medication to seniors, to veterans, Social Security benefit paychecks, tax returns, absentee ballots that's been talked about today.

In northern New Jersey, I've had many constituents tell me that post offices continually lose their mail. And amid the holidays, you might imagine this is particularly stressing for our families.

Inspector General, if I can also followup with you on this one. What's being done to protect our senior citizens and veterans to make sure they receive their mail, whether it's medication or their hard-earned benefits? And do you have a sense of like what percentage of mail actually goes missing by state, by area? Is that something you track?

Ms. HULL. I'm not sure we would be able to do that. We do have a lot of data analytics efforts that bring together the complaints that are raised by—by customers of the Postal Service, as well as complaints that come into our hotline. So we look for trends and things like that in those complaints and identify routes and post offices that are most problematic, and we send out teams of auditors to go look at that.

But the Postal Service, as you can imagine, being the size that it is, receives thousands of complaints every day from customers. And so it's a big challenge.

Mrs. MALONEY. The gentleman's time has expired.

The gentleman's time—

Mr. GOTTHEIMER. Is that—

Mrs. MALONEY [continuing]. Has expired.

Mr. GOTTHEIMER [continuing]. As the problem or is that just—

Mrs. MALONEY. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. GOTTHEIMER. Thank you. I yield. Thank you so much.

Mrs. MALONEY. Thank you so much.

And, Ms. Norton—

Mr. GOTTHEIMER. Thank you.

Mrs. MALONEY. Representative Norton from the District of Columbia is now recognized.

Ms. Norton, you are muted. We cannot hear you.

Ms. NORTON. Can you hear me now?

Mrs. MALONEY. We can hear you now.

Ms. NORTON. All right. I—this is a question for Mr. White. I am deeply concerned about the increase in mail theft that we have seen in my district, the District of Columbia, and other areas across the country as well. I've been contacted by constituents who have had their mail checks stolen and altered and thousands of dollars taken from their accounts. The increase in thefts put the safety of our hardworking postal workers at risk.

Mr. White, what measures is the Postal Service taking to reduce mail theft?

Mr. WHITE. Thank you for the question. The Inspection Service is the law enforcement arm of the Postal Service. It is my understanding that you have recently met with Chief Barksdale regarding that matter. I will not be able to give a better answer than Chief Barksdale can.

Ms. NORTON. OK. Does anyone else have a response to that question?

OK. Let me move on.

The Postal Service hires additional employees during this peak season to account for increased mail volume. An inspector general report released today indicates a tight labor market has hindered the Postal Service's ability to hire sufficient workers this year. Last Thursday, Postmaster General DeJoy announced that Postal Service—that the Postal Service had reduced its hiring goal for peak season by almost a third, from 28,000 to 20,000 temporary employees.

Mr. White, does the Postal Service have the right staff in place to get mail and packages delivered throughout the coming holiday season?

Mr. WHITE. Yes, we do. The reality is that this year we are less dependent on peak season heroics than we have been in the past. We have converted 100,000 employees to full-time career status, which will help us with experienced employees with high retention rates. Supervisor vacancies are down, so we have more experienced, knowledgeable management within those facilities. And employee availability is up throughout the country. So, yes, we are staffed.

Ms. NORTON. OK. Ms. Hull, Mr. Carley, Mr. Hogrogian, Mr. Plunkett, would all of you agree?

Mr. CARLEY. For the most part, yes.

Mr. PLUNKETT. We expect the Postal Service to have adequate resources to successfully navigate the peak season.

Mr. HOGROGIAN. I believe that we do have enough staffing. And whenever the additional staffing falls short, our regular work force is ready, willing, and able to work whatever overtime is necessary to get the job done.

Ms. HULL. Yes. And we would agree that the Postal Service has a really good plan looking forward to the peak season. And we believe if it executes on that plan, they'll be in good shape.

Ms. NORTON. Thank you very much.

My time has expired.

Mrs. MALONEY. The gentlelady's time has expired.

We have no further members asking questions. I now yield to Mr. Hice for a closing statement.

Mr. HICE. I thank you, Madam Chair.

And before Chairman Connolly had to leave, we were discussing between the two of us.

Mr. White, if you could add to the information that you're already going to provide the number of crimes that had been referred to the Department of Justice, we would also appreciate that information, if you could add to it. And, with that, it goes right along with what Ms. Norton was saying.

I would also like to say, in regard to the information that was provided to the committee earlier, to Mr. Connolly, regarding the financial services, what we are now talking about goes far beyond what he was mentioning. We are now talking about a service, a Postal Service that is like a sinking ship financially, that is in trouble financially. And we all know it.

And for that organization to now be offering loans is absolutely insane if we're going with the recommendation and the legislation for it to become a financial service, offering loans and the like. And so I just wanted clarification on that issue. It just makes no sense, and it far goes beyond the mission of the Postal Service to deliver mail and packages.

With all of that, I do want to extend a sincere thank you to each of you as our witnesses today. You have an enormous weight on your shoulders and an enormous constitutional responsibility. And I know that each of you and the hundreds of thousands who work within the Postal Service are giving a lot of effort, and we deeply appreciate that.

And I'm grateful for you coming and testifying before this committee today and wish you the best. I'm sure we won't see you again for a while but wish you a great Thanksgiving and Christmas in spite of a very, very busy time that you're about to embark on. So thank you for joining us.

Mrs. MALONEY. The gentleman's time has expired.

I now recognize Representative Brenda Lawrence for a closing statement.

Mrs. LAWRENCE. Thank you so much.

We've heard testimony today that indicates the Postal Service has taken many steps to ensure that you're ready for the Nation's peak holiday season, but we know there's still more to do. We're looking forward to the reports from our—to look at our operations of how we're continuing to move forward and meet the needs of the people.

We also learned, as we've known all along, that as we talk about these measures, that it is the people, the work force, and the stakeholders community that make this thing—the Postal Service work.

I've dedicated 30 years of my life as part of this essential thing we call the post office, and I know firsthand the dedication and the focus on the mission. As Mr. Hogrogian said often, we'll get it done.

At the end of the day, it's always like ringing the bell. We got all the mail out of the building and sometimes exhausted, sometimes with overtime and other issues. And I appreciate the postmaster who said he delivered mail on New Year's Eve. I know that feeling. We'll get the job done.

I have served on this committee for the Postal Service because I wanted to make sure that the company that gave me so many opportunities, the organization, the service industry, that we continue to provide service.

As you know, this committee is committed to the Postal Service, who is the Nation's favorite Federal agency. You continue to be the highest-ranked agency in our Federal Government.

In closing, I just want to say to our witnesses thank you for being here. Thank you for your remarks. I, too, want to wish you an amazing holiday season, safe holiday season. We said that a lot in the Postal Service because we know, like in Michigan, holiday seasons is rough once you walk out the door. And I want to also wish you a joyful, you and your family, holiday season.

And thank my colleagues for all of their efforts to hear and to make sure we're moving forward. Thank you.

Mrs. MALONEY. Thank you. The gentlelady yields back.

I now recognize myself for a closing statement.

I want to thank all of our extraordinary witnesses today for your public service, first of all, and then for your testimony today and your insights.

And I want to commend all of my colleagues that participated in this important conversation today.

And I would like to insert into the record the Postal Service Office of Inspector General's report entitled, "Fiscal Year 2023 Peak Season Preparedness," and statements for the record from Keep US Posted, the American Catalogue Mailers Association, the National Association of Supervisors.

Mrs. MALONEY. And I just want to say that the Postal Service, like all of Americans, I rate it as a service that I really treasure. And, in fact, on a personal note, when I first ran for Congress 30 years ago, I challenged a 30—a 15-year Republican whose top priority, believe it or not, was to privatize the post office. So that was a clear item between us. We needed postal services. People were constantly asking for more post offices, more services, yet he wanted to privatize the postal office.

So when I came to Congress, I too wanted to serve on this committee to protect postal services in our country and to make sure that this vital service was available to everybody who wanted it, everybody who needed it.

And it's been said before. It's in the Constitution. And it's the one institution, the one agency that unites and knits this country together. One postal stamp can go to any address in America for the same price, and you would not have that if that was privatized.

So it's been a very strong purpose of myself to keep it vital. And that is why I worked so hard this year to make sure we passed postal reform, got rid of unnecessary requirements that hinder

them. And it has shown in the report that we've gotten that it's helped move the Postal Service to a stronger, more sound financial footing.

And we've already recently seen that the bipartisan postal reform law is having a positive impact, and we need to continue to build on that impact and that legislation.

Mrs. MALONEY. I'm looking forward to the Postal Service continuing to move rapidly toward electric vehicle fleet using the funds, the over \$3 billion that Congress approved for this purpose, and, again, thanks to leadership from this committee.

Two years ago, our committee raised serious concerns about declining service performance. And I am pleased that the Postal Service has made efforts to improve its service since then, but concerns about service and quality remain. To be clear, lowering service standards to increase on-time percentages is not the solution.

It is also critical that the Postal Service closely examine planned service changes that could negatively impact service quality, especially as we move into peak season. The American public deserves a high-quality Postal Service that is reliable, affordable, and accessible to all.

I look forward to this committee continuing to work with the Postal Service to ensure that the American public is getting the service that it expects and deserves. And this committee will always be a partner in improving services and supporting the postal office.

With that and without objection, all members have five legislative days within which to submit additional written questions for the witnesses to the chair, which will be forwarded to the witnesses for their response. I ask our witnesses to please respond as promptly as you are able. I also join my colleagues in wishing all of you a very happy holiday season for Thanksgiving and for the holiday Hanukkah and Christmas season. Thank you all for being here today.

This hearing is adjourned. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 4:24 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

