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OVERSIGHT HEARING ON CONGRESSIONAL MAIL DELIVERY

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON HOUSE ADMINISTRATION HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

Hearing Held in Washington, DC, May 8, 2002

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CONGRESSIONAL MAIL DELIVERY IN THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

WEDNESDAY, MAY 8, 2002

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON HOUSE ADMINISTRATION,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to call, at 10:05 a.m., in room 1310, Longworth House Office Building, Hon. Robert W. Ney (chairman of the committee) presiding.

Present: Representatives Ney, Doolittle, Hoyer, Fattah, and Davis.

Staff present: Paul Vinovich, Counsel; Channing Nuss, Deputy Staff Director; Fred Hay, Counsel; Reynold Schweickhardt, Technical Director; Jeff Janas, Professional Staff Member; Bill Cable, Minority Staff Director; Sterling Spriggs, Minority Technical Director; Matt Pinkus, Minority Professional Staff Member; and Ellen McCarthy, Minority Professional Staff Member.

The CHAIRMAN. The committee will come to order.

Today, the Committee on House Administration is holding an Oversight Hearing on Congressional Mail Delivery in the U.S. House of Representatives. There will be members that will be coming in and out during this hearing. With us today is Congressman Doolittle of California, and ranking member Mr. Steny Hoyer of Maryland is on his way.

I will go ahead and begin just with a brief opening statement that I have.

Today, of course, is May 8, 2002. It has been almost 8 months since the devastating attacks of September 11 of 2001. It has almost been about 7 months since mail delivery to the House of Representatives ceased and our buildings were evacuated as a result of the anthrax that was introduced into our mail system.

We all recognize that, as a result of these attacks, things will never be quite the same. We are now all forced to look at what has become routine processes with new eyes. Assumptions about the way we conduct business in the House of Representatives has also changed forever. I am sure all of us here today recognize that reality——

Let me also be clear as we begin the hearing today that the efforts of so many of the individuals in this room and throughout our process, both in the House of Representatives and, more broadly, also for many people at the Postal Service as well as the private sector, that you all have worked tirelessly to respond to the new security realities to ensure that essential functions such as our mail delivery system continue to exist.

In particular, I want to thank our CAO, Jay Eagen, and his staff who had to take a mail delivery process that had evaporated—it had worked well and had to completely reinvent the system to accommodate the concerns we are now faced with. We recognize what you and your staff have done, and the House deeply appreciates that.

However, as we all convene here, there is a reason we are convening here today; and I have got to report that, regardless of all the efforts, the current mail delivery process is most certainly not meeting the critical needs of the Members of the House, our constituents, of the public at large due to the time frame from when it gets into the hands of the offices. I think we all know that that has to change. If we have been doing our best, we have got to get our heads together and do better. The current state of mail delivery in the House has simply got to be put on a faster path.

I applaud also the patience of the Members of the House of Representatives and our constituents across the country as we work to perfect the process. Our patience, of course, is starting to wear thin. If you talk to Members—I am sure Mr. Doolittle and other members will have some comments about that—we have had 7 months of goodwill, and we now have to get some more results.

The past 10 days the committee has received mail that was postmarked from the month of October. I actually brought a couple of pieces today. I am told these are being sold on eBay. But I got a couple of pieces of mail, and they are postmarked December, and our postmark in here is May the 3rd on those pieces.

The other problem, too, a lot of the Members receive invitations to events that are important to the constituents that invite us and information about urgent constituent matters which have occurred or bills or invoices that have become months delinquent. Those communications are critical.

There are also constituents who send us some very important information—they have a problem with Social Security or other nature of a problem, and they need a response. People talk about computers. Not everybody in the hinterland has access to a computer, frankly. Otherwise, we could e-mail each other. So the mail is important.

So I suggest that we need to think outside the box today for different solutions. Maybe we need to think in terms of reinvention, rather than simply modification. I will leave that to the experts, but, whatever it is, we have got to push ourselves to solve this problem, to do it quickly.

I know here at the Committee on House Administration, with the help of our Chief Administrative Officer, Mr. Eagen, we are in the process of exploring digitization of the mail as an alternative to our current process, which may prove to be a viable solution as we move into the future. We are determined to have a digitized mail pilot program in place soon, at least speaking on behalf of myself, before implementation of such an alternative means of mail delivery is still months away and we can't afford to continue to do business as we are at this time.

I am very anxious again to hear from our witnesses, so I will close at this time. Before I do, I want to remind our witnesses today that certain details related to the subject matter of this hear-

ing on mail process may have security implications. As a result, it is necessary that all participants exercise discretion as to the specific procedural details or facts that you may offer as both part of your testimony and in response to questions that may be asked of you during the hearing. This is a public hearing. As such, I ask you to keep this concern in mind.

With that, I want to turn to my colleagues and see if anybody else has an opening statement.

Mr. DOOLITTLE. I have no opening statement.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Mr. Chairman, I have no opening statement.

The CHAIRMAN. We will move on to the testimony.

Giving testimony will be Jay Eagen, our Chief Administrative Officer of the House of Representatives. Also attending and available to answer questions will be Carl Johnson, Senior Account Manager of Pitney Bowes. Also giving testimony, Sylvester Black, Manager of Capital Metro Operations, and that would be United States Postal Service. Also attending and available to answer questions will be Michael Cronin, Manager of Operations Support of Capital Metro.

STATEMENTS OF JAY EAGEN, CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER, U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, ACCOMPANIED BY KARL JOHNSON, SENIOR ACCOUNT MANAGER, PITNEY BOWES; AND SYLVESTER BLACK, MANAGER, CAPITAL METRO OPERATIONS, ACCOMPANIED BY MICHAEL CRONIN, MANAGER, OPERATIONS SUPPORT, CAPITAL METRO OPERATIONS

The CHAIRMAN. With that, I will start with Mr. Eagen.

STATEMENT OF JAY EAGEN

Mr. EAGEN. Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Doolittle, Mr. Reynolds. With me is Karl Johnson, as the chairman indicated, from Pitney Bowes Management Services. Mr. Johnson is the onsite manager for the House mail operations.

I am pleased to be able to provide you with information and answer your questions concerning the mail processing operation at the House. With my testimony, I intend to cover the following issues:

First, an overview of the House mail delivery process prior to the anthrax attack; secondly, what the House mail system encountered last fall and during recovery as well as what decisions were made and when; third, the current mail delivery process for the Postal Service and Pitney Bowes here at the House; fourth, actual results of this new mail delivery process both for the Postal Service and for Pitney Bowes at the House, including results of numerous field tests of those processes; and, finally, our plans for the future.

Prior to the anthrax discovery in the House and Senate buildings in October of last year, the U.S. Postal Service and the House mail operation were focused solely on speed and accuracy. Of course, mail was x-rayed for bombs and protected from theft, but these precautions did not significantly add to the processing time.

Since October, two additional factors have been added: sterilization of the mail and quarantined storage of the mail until it can be delivered. Concerns about biological contaminants in the mail—

including anthrax and other pathogens—resulted in significant changes in the mail delivery process at the House.

All the incoming, outgoing and internal mail processes for the House, with the exception of postal windows, have been handled by Pitney Bowes Management Services since February, 1996. Pitney Bowes processes U.S. Postal Service mail, including first-class letters and flats, third-class mail, packages and registered mail. Packages from shippers other than the U.S. Postal Service—and by that I mean Federal Express or United Parcel Service—were delivered by the shippers themselves to House offices. All mail and packages were x-rayed at the U.S. Capitol Police facility on V Street, S.E. A picture of this facility is on the charts before you.

Pitney Bowes sorted all mail for the House in a location in the basement of the Ford House Office Building, and a picture of that facility is before you as well.

Pitney Bowes tracked its delivery cycle times and generally delivered mail 24 hours after it was received from the U.S. Postal Service.

Before you now is a timeline for the anthrax recovery that the House experienced last fall.

The House stopped all mail deliveries on Friday, October 12, 2001, as part of a new mail security screening process that included a quarantine. A letter containing anthrax spores was opened in Senator Daschle's office on Monday, October 15. The House side of the Capitol and House Office Buildings were then closed the following Wednesday, October 17, to test for the presence of anthrax. Several machines used to x-ray mail at the P Street U.S. Capitol police facility were found to be contaminated with anthrax on October 18. By Friday, October 19, teams of government biohazard experts were performing environmental assessments of House Office Buildings and mail facilities. Anthrax contamination was found on a strapping machine in the Ford Building mail room on October 21. Several days later, contamination was found in several Member offices in this building, the Longworth Building.

The Capitol then reopened on October 23; and the Cannon and Rayburn buildings reopened on Thursday, October 25. The Longworth building reopened on Monday November 5, except for the four Member offices where contamination was found. The Ford building reopened on Friday, October 26, but the south wing of the first floor remained closed until January, 2002. And, finally, the four remaining Member offices in Longworth reopened in January, 2002.

In summary, four Member offices in this building and the first floor of the Ford building were displaced for 15 weeks. The P Street off-site facility is scheduled to reopen later this month. It will have been closed for 28 weeks.

Before you now is a chart that shows the mail delivery recovery process the House has gone through.

Delivery of first-class letters and flats—and this is a flat, larger sized envelope—resumed in early December of last year. Delivery of packages from local shippers resumed in mid-December; and delivery of packages from national shippers, Fed Ex and UPS, re-

sumed on a limited basis in early January, 2002. This was delivery of packages from known sources.

A decision was made that it was no longer appropriate to conduct mail operations in an office building that houses several hundred House employees as well as the House Child Care Center. This committee approved an occupancy agreement for an off-site mail processing facility on November 9, 2001. The facility is located in Capitol Heights, Maryland; and the posters before you show a picture of this facility.

Since October, 2001, the U.S. Postal Service has implemented additional procedures to ensure the safety of government officials and employees, including the House and Senate. Among the new safety procedures, mail is irradiated before it is delivered to Federal Government offices for ZIP Codes beginning 202 through 205. Here at the House, mail and packages have been accepted back on the campus in phases.

Before you is a chart that shows the mail process flow.

After a citizen posts a mail item to a mailbox, the Postal Service receives all government ZIP Code mail at its Brentwood facility in Washington, D.C., from 300 regional centers from around the Nation. It is packaged and shipped to Bridgeport, New Jersey, for irradiation and then returned to Brentwood. At Brentwood, it is unpackaged and a 24-hour off gassing aeration process occurs. It is then shipped to the Postal Service's D Street government mail facility where it is sorted by ZIP Code—meaning government ZIP Codes—and then delivered to each government agency. The Postal Service has estimated this process takes between 7 and 10 days.

Upon arrival at the House facility, the first-class mail is clipped, and it is sampled. The samples are sent to a military lab for testing that takes 72 hours. And to be clear, the testing itself takes 72 hours. The samples also have to be transported to that lab. The mail is quarantined until the results are received. Upon clearance, the mail is sorted and delivered to House offices. This process has been estimated to take between 4 and 5 business days.

Packages are handled through a different process at the House. Prior to October, 2001, again, packages were delivered directly to House offices by the shipper, Fed Ex or UPS. After October, at the request of the House, shippers held packages until the first of January. Following approval of a policy by this committee in December, packages from national shippers were accepted beginning in January this year.

Packages are no longer delivered by the shipper to House offices but are being delivered by Pitney Bowes employees. Packages are also being put through a process to make sure they are safe before being delivered to House offices. Packages from the U.S. Postal Service were accepted beginning March 24 of this year under a policy approved by this Committee on House Administration. Only packages approved by the recipient are being delivered.

Overall, the volume of mail coming to the House today is considerably smaller than prior to October, 2001. A 29 percent reduction has been seen in today's mail levels as compared to the months in 2001 prior to anthrax contamination. A 37 percent reduction is evident in 2002 levels, when compared to the same period for the year 2000.

Before you is a chart that shows the April mail receipt trend. Analysis of the first-class mail received by the House—and this is mail that the Postal Service has indicated to the House is current mail—shows that a portion of the mail is postmarked outside of the 10-day Postal Service estimate, although recent trends show improvement.

Before you now is a chart that shows the samples for April 30, last week. The sample of first-class mail delivered on April 30 shows only 12 pieces postmarked within 10 days, while more than half of the sample postmarked 60 days or longer. The average age of the postmark for April 30 was 121 days. Conversely, last Friday, May 3, a sample of first-class mail delivered by the Postal Service and described as current mail shows the average postmark was 9 days.

The House is also measuring its cycle times once the mail is delivered to the House. Turnaround is measured from the point that the envelopes arrive here at the House and delivered to the House customer. For the month of April, you will see a chart before you that shows you a week-by-week progress. The total turnaround was 4.7 business days for the month of April.

Looking to the future, our goal is to expedite the mail House delivery process without compromising the safety of Members and staff. Methodologies we are currently pursuing include improvements to testing and mail sorting so it can be delivered more quickly, and implementation of a digital mail pilot for the House, as the chairman referenced.

Focus areas for House improvement of mail processing time include pursuing an alternate lab and alternate technologies to identify contaminants without the lengthy lab process now required. Pitney Bowes is about to begin the next phase of the off-site facility that will further automate and improve the package delivery process.

In addition, the CAO is pursuing an initiative that has the potential to dramatically shrink the volume of hard mail coming into House offices. We call this initiative digital mail. Under this approach, mail would be received and opened at an off-site facility, and a digital copy would be made with a scanner. A digital copy would then be forwarded to House offices electronically within 24 hours of receipt.

We intend to complete specifications for a pilot program by next Friday, May 17, and immediately issue a request for bids from industry. Upon receipt of industry responses, a recommendation will be made to the committee for the pilot. The proposed digital mail solution will integrate with contamination testing and safety procedures as well as with correspondence management systems, or CMS systems, in Members' offices. The selected vendor will electronically deliver digital mail to Member offices participating in the program within 24 hours of receipt and will deliver necessary originals after the 3-day necessary quarantine period.

Especially when it comes to mail, I am frequently asked the question, when is it going to get back to normal? I consistently respond by saying, we are not getting back to normal. We are moving forward to normal.

Accelerating the mail delivery process while keeping the mail safe for Members and staff is an enormous challenge because threats can come in many forms and it is extremely difficult to trace the offender.

Before you is a chart of the record of one Ted Kaczynski. You may recall that it took almost 20 years to catch the Unabomber, from his first bombing in May of 1978 to his arrest in April of 1996. His terrorist track record included periods of up to 6 years between bombings and also up to four bombings in a single year.

In 1982, cyanide was placed in Tylenol that resulted in seven deaths and led to the national recall of the medication. This intrusion led to the addition of tamper prevention seals on nearly all over the counter medications and vitamins and even some food products. The perpetrator of the Tylenol poisoning has never been apprehended, and the $100,000 reward offered by Johnson and Johnson has never been claimed.

In sum, the world we face was made more complex by the events of September 11 and October, 2001. Just as we can't bring back those who were lost in New York, at the Pentagon or at the Brentwood mail facility, it is very unlikely we will return to old delivery mail methods. Instead, we need to aggressively improve and automate more secure solutions so constituent and other important and time sensitive communications are received as quickly and accurately as possible and seek new alternative means that in the long run may well be more effective. Speaking for myself and the employees of the CAO, we won't rest until we have accomplished that job.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. We thank you for your testimony.

[The statement of Mr. Eagen follows:]

Testimony of the Honorable James M. Eagen III
Chief Administrative Officer
U.S. House of Representatives

Hearing on Mail Delivery Process
Committee on House Administration
May 7, 2002

Good morning Chairman Ney, Mr. Hoyer and Members of the Committee. With me today is Mr. Karl Johnson from Pitney Bowes Management Services. Mr. Johnson is the on-site manager for the House mail operations. I am pleased to be able to provide you with information and answer your questions concerning the mail processing operation at the House. With my testimony, I intend to cover the following issues:

1. An overview of the House mail delivery process prior to the anthrax attack.

2. What the House mail system encountered last fall and during recovery, as well as what decisions were made and when.

3. The current mail delivery process for the U.S. Postal Service and Pitney Bowes Management Services at the House.

4. The actual results of this new mail delivery process for both the U.S. Postal Service and Pitney Bowes Management Services/House, including the results of numerous field tests of these processes.

5. And finally, our plans for the future.

Mail Process Prior to Anthrax

Prior to the anthrax discovery in House and Senate buildings in October 2001, the U.S. Postal Service and the House mail operation were focused on speed and accuracy. Of course, mail was x-rayed for bombs and protected from theft, but these precautions did not significantly add to the processing time.

Since October, two additional factors have been added: sterilization of the mail and quarantined storage of mail until it can be delivered. Concerns about biological contaminants in the mail (including anthrax and other pathogens) resulted in significant changes in the mail delivery process at the House.

All the incoming, outgoing and internal mail processes for the House, with the exception of the postal windows, have been handled by Pitney Bowes Management Services since February 1996. Pitney Bowes processes U.S. Postal Service mail including first class letters and flats, third class mail, packages, and registered mail. Packages from shippers other than the U.S. Postal Service were delivered by the shippers

themselves to House offices. All mail and packages were x-rayed at the U.S. Capitol Police facility on P Street, S.E. Pitney Bowes sorted all mail for the House in a location in the basement of the Ford House Office Building. Pitney Bowes tracked its delivery cycle times and generally delivered mail within 24 hours after it was received from the U.S. Postal Service.

What Happened to the House Because of Anthrax

The House stopped all mail deliveries on Friday, October 12, 2001 as part of a new mail security screening process that included a quarantine. A letter containing anthrax spores was opened in Senator Daschle's office in the Hart Senate Office Building on Monday, October 15, 2001. The House side of the Capitol and House office buildings were closed Wednesday, October 17, 2001 to test for the presence of anthrax. Several machines used to x-ray mail at the P Street U.S. Capitol Police facility were found to be contaminated with anthrax on October 18, 2001. By Friday, October 19, teams of government biohazard experts were performing environmental assessments of House office buildings and mail facilities. Anthrax contamination was found on a strapping machine in the Ford building mailroom on October 21, 2001. Several days later, contamination was found in several Member offices in the Longworth building.

The Capitol reopened on Tuesday, October 23, 2001. The Cannon and Rayburn buildings reopened on Thursday, October 25. The Longworth building reopened on Monday, November 5, except for four Member offices that remained closed. The Ford building reopened on Friday, October 26 but the south wing of the first floor remained closed until January 2002. The four remaining Member offices in the Longworth building reopened in January 2002.

In summary, the four House Member offices and the first floor of the Ford building were displaced for 15 weeks. The P Street off-site facility is scheduled to re-open later this month. It will have been closed for 28 weeks.

Delivery of first class letters and flats resumed in early December 2001. Delivery of packages from local shippers resumed in mid-December. Delivery of packages from national shippers resumed on a limited basis in early January 2002. This was limited to packages from known sources.

A decision was made that it was no longer appropriate to conduct mail operations in an office building that houses several hundred House employees, as well as the House Child Care Center. This committee approved an occupancy agreement for an off-site mail processing facility on November 9, 2001. The facility is located in Capitol Heights, Maryland.

Mail Process After Anthrax

Since October 15, 2001 the U.S. Postal Service has implemented additional procedures to ensure the safety of government officials and employees including the House and Senate. Among the new safety procedures, mail is irradiated before its delivery to federal government offices for zip codes beginning 202__ through 205__. Here at the House, mail and packages have been accepted back on the campus in phases.

After a citizen posts a mail item to a mailbox, the Postal Service receives all government zip code mail at its Brentwood facility in Washington, D.C., from 300 regional centers around the nation. It is packaged and shipped to Bridgeport, New Jersey for irradiation, and then returned to Brentwood. At Brentwood, it is unpackaged and a 24-hour off gassing occurs. It is then shipped to the Postal Service's V Street government mail facility where it is sorted by zip code and then delivered to each government agency. The Postal Service has estimated this process takes between seven and ten days.

Upon arrival at the House facility, the first class mail is clipped and sampled. The samples are sent to a military lab for testing that takes 72 hours. The mail is quarantined until the results are received. Upon clearance, the mail is sorted and delivered to House offices. The House process has been estimated to take between four and five business days.

Packages are handled through a different process at the House. Prior to October 2001, packages were delivered directly to House offices by the shipper. After October, at the request of the House, shippers held packages until the first of January. Following approval of a policy by this Committee in December, packages from national shippers were accepted beginning in January. Packages are no longer delivered by the shipper to House offices, but are being delivered by Pitney Bowes employees. Packages are also being put through a process to ensure that they are safe before being delivered to the House offices. Packages from the U.S. Postal Service were accepted beginning March 24, 2002 under a policy approved by this Committee. Only packages approved by the recipient are being delivered.

Actual Time for Receipt of Mail

Overall, the volume of mail coming to the House today is considerably smaller than prior to October 2001. A 29% reduction has been seen in today's mail levels as compared to months in 2001 prior to the anthrax contamination. A 37% reduction is evident in 2002 levels, when compared to the same period for 2000.

Analysis of the first class mail received by the House shows that a portion of the mail is postmarked outside of the 10-day Postal Service estimate although recent trends show improvement. For example, a sample of first class mail delivered on April 30, 2002 showed only 12 pieces postmarked within 10 days, while more than half of the

sample postmarked 60 days or longer. The average age of the postmark for April 30 was 121 days. A sample of first class mail delivered by the Postal Service last Friday, May 3, showed the average postmark age was nine days.

The House has been tracking its turnaround of mail once received from the providers. For the month of April the process has taken, from point of receipt to delivery to House offices, 4.7 business days.

Plans for the Future

Our goal is to expedite the House mail delivery process without compromising the safety of Members and staff. Methodologies we are currently pursuing include improvements to testing and mail sorting so it can be delivered more quickly, and implementation of a digital mail pilot program for the House.

Focus areas for House improvement of mail processing time include pursuing an alternate lab and alternate technologies to identify contaminants without the lengthy lab process now required. Pitney Bowes is also about to begin the next phase of the off-site facility that will further automate and improve the package delivery process.

In addition, the CAO is pursuing an initiative that has the potential to dramatically shrink the volume of hard mail coming into House offices. We call this initiative digital mail. Under this approach, mail would be received and opened at an off-site facility, and a digital copy would be made with a scanner. The digital copy would then be forwarded to House offices electronically within 24 hours of receipt.

We intend to complete specifications for a pilot program by Friday, May 17 and immediately issue a request for bids from industry. Upon receipt of industry responses, a recommendation will be made to the Committee for the pilot. The proposed digital mail solution will integrate with contamination testing and safety procedures, as well as with correspondence management systems (CMS systems) in Member offices. The selected vendor will electronically deliver digital mail to Member offices participating in the program within 24 hours of receipt and will deliver necessary originals after the three-day quarantine period.

Conclusion

Especially when it comes to the mail, I'm frequently asked the question, "When's it going to get back to normal?" I consistently respond by saying, "We are not getting *back* to normal, we're moving *forward* to normal."

Accelerating the mail delivery process while keeping the mail safe for Members and staff is an enormous challenge because threats can come in many forms and it is extremely difficult to trace the offender. You may recall that it took almost 20 years to

catch the Unabomber, Ted Kaczynski, from his first bombing in May 1978 to his arrest in April 1996. His terrorist track record included periods of up to six years between bombings, and also up to four bombings in a single year.

In 1982, cyanide was placed in Tylenol that resulted in seven deaths and led to the national recall of the medication. This intrusion led to the addition of tamper prevention seals on nearly all over the counter medications and vitamins, and even some food products. The perpetrator of the Tylenol poisoning has never been apprehended and the $100,000 reward offered by Johnson & Johnson has never been claimed.

In sum, the world we face was made more complex by the events of September 11 and October 2001. Just as we can't bring those back who were lost in New York, at the Pentagon and at the Brentwood mail facility, it's very unlikely we'll return completely to old mail delivery methods. Instead, we need to aggressively improve and automate more secure solutions so that constituent and other important and timely communications are received as quickly and accurately as possible, and seek new alternative means that in the long run may well be more effective. Speaking for myself and the employees of the CAO, we won't rest until we've accomplished the job.

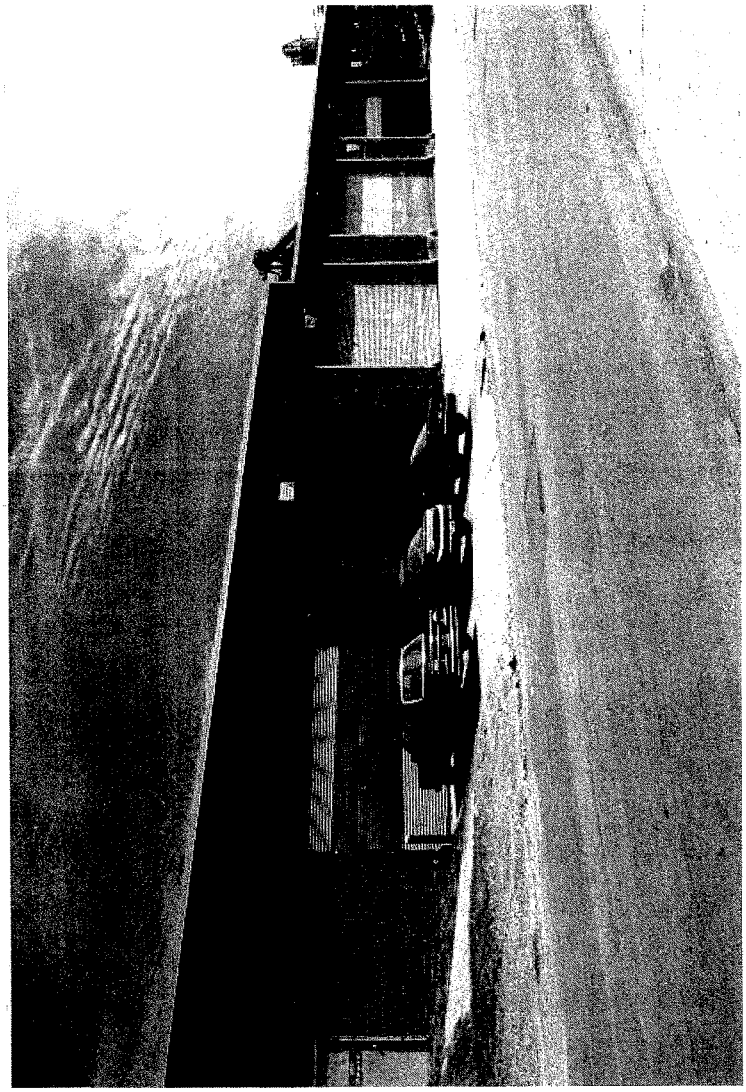
Thank you for providing me with this opportunity to address the Committee.

Testimony of the
Honorable James M. Eagen III
Chief Administrative Officer
U.S. House of Representatives

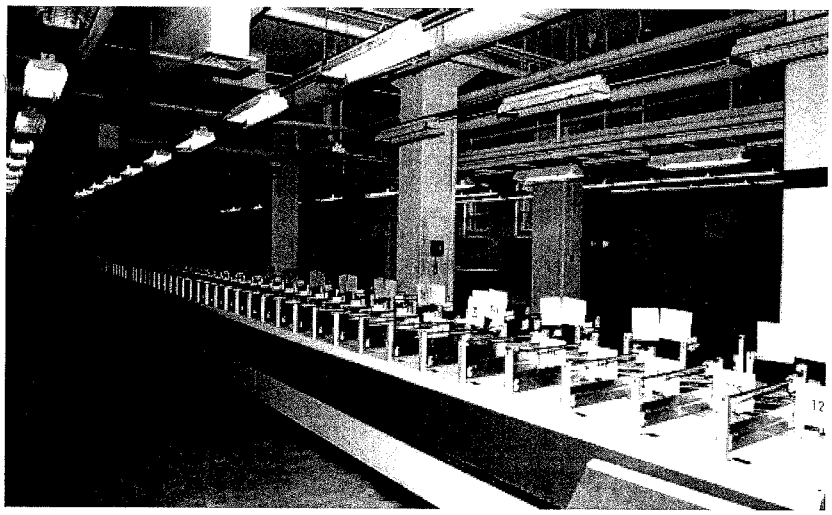
Hearing on the Mail Delivery Process to the Committee on House Administration

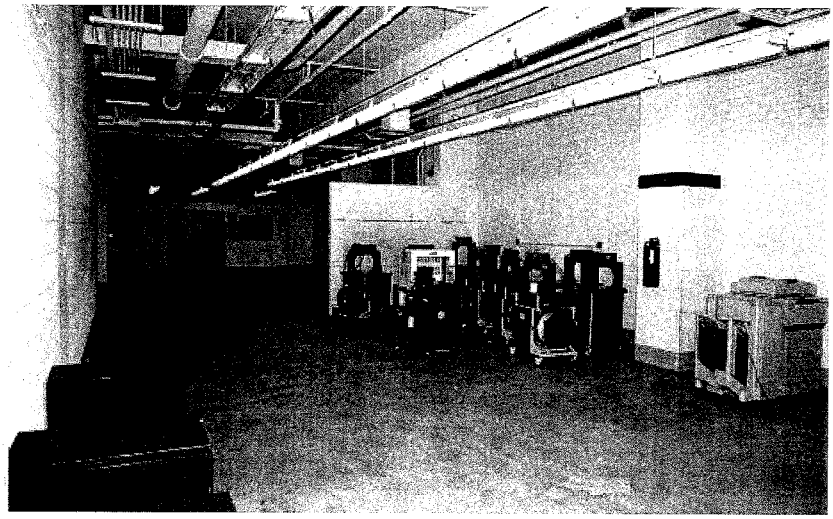
May 8, 2002

Chief Administrative Officer



P Street Mail X-Ray Facility





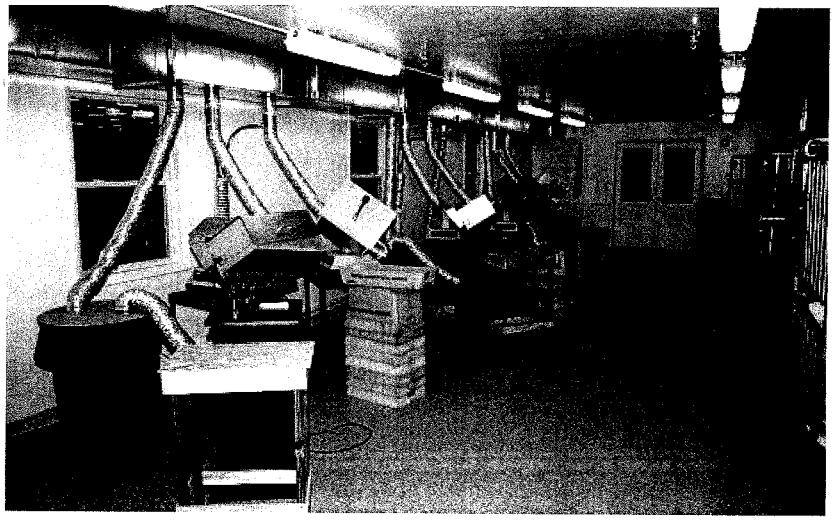
Former Ford House Office Building Mail Facility

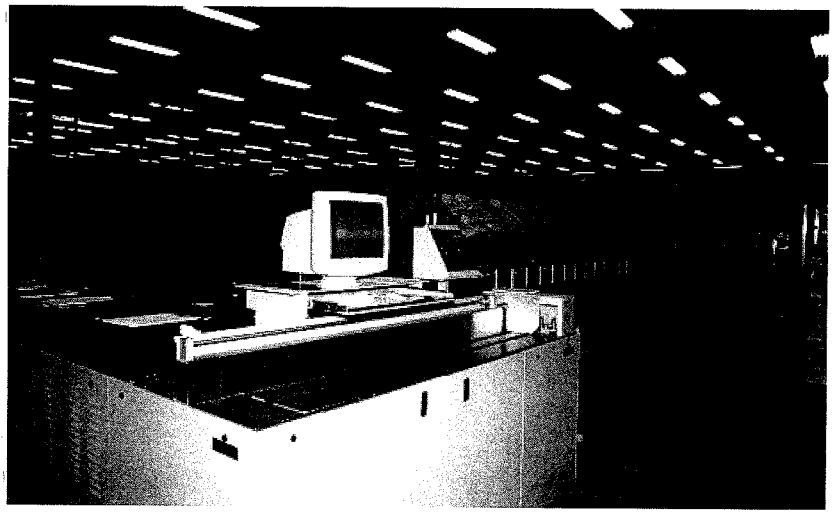
Timeline for Anthrax Recovery

October 15, 2001	Letter to Senator Daschle opened.
October 17, 2001	House side of Capitol and House office buildings close to test for anthrax.
October 18, 2001	P Street facility where mail is x-rayed tests positive for anthrax.
October 21, 2001	House mailroom in the Ford building tests positive for anthrax.
October 23, 2001	Capitol reopens.
January 2002	Four Member offices in Longworth building reopen.
May 2002	P Street facility scheduled to reopen.

Timeline for Mail Delivery Recovery

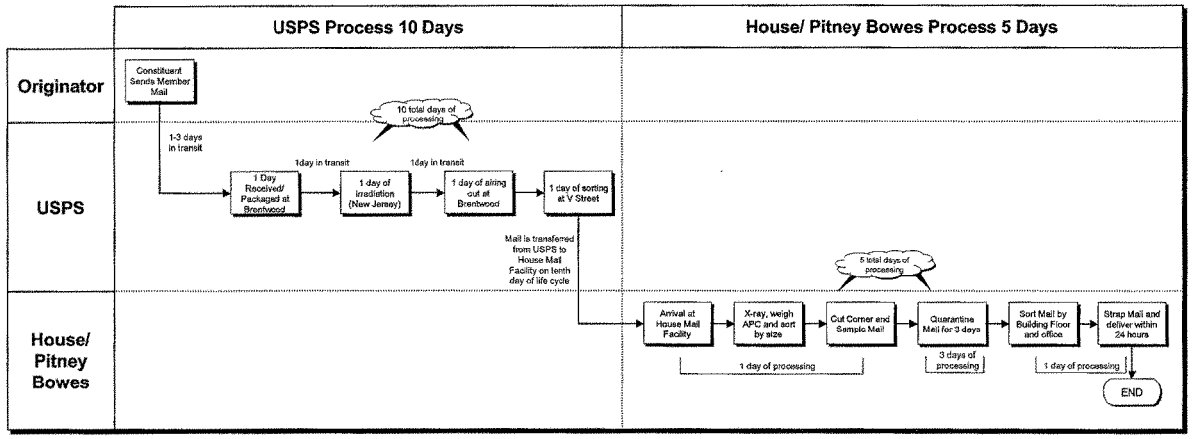
October 12, 2001	House mail quarantined.
October 15, 2001	Letter to Senator Daschle opened.
November 9, 2001	Agreed to accept irradiated mail from the U.S. Postal Service.
November 27-28, 2001	Conducted briefings for all House offices on mail situation.
December 2001	Commenced delivery of U.S. Postal Service irradiated mail.
December 17, 2001	Commenced delivery of packages from local shippers.
January 2002	Commenced delivery of packages from national shippers.
March 2002	Commenced delivery of U.S. Postal Services packages.





Capitol Heights Off-Site Mail Facility

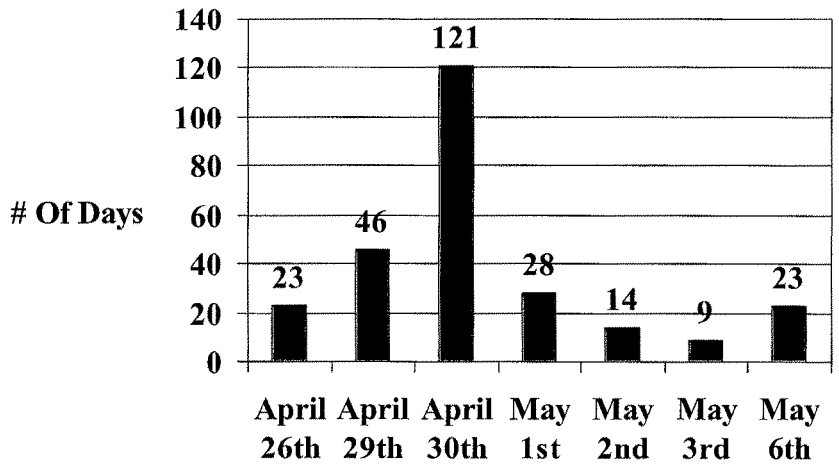
House Inbound Mail Process Flow



Chief Administrative Officer

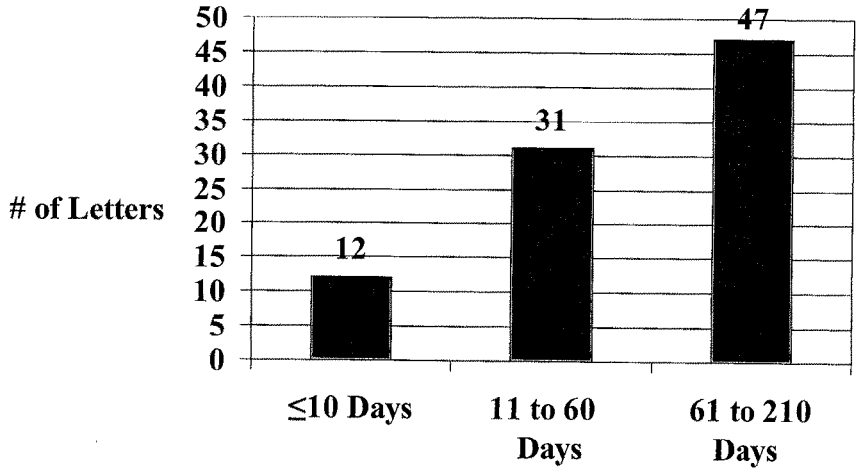
Average Elapsed Time Between Post Mark Date & Delivery Date to House

All House Sample Letters



Chief Administrative Officer

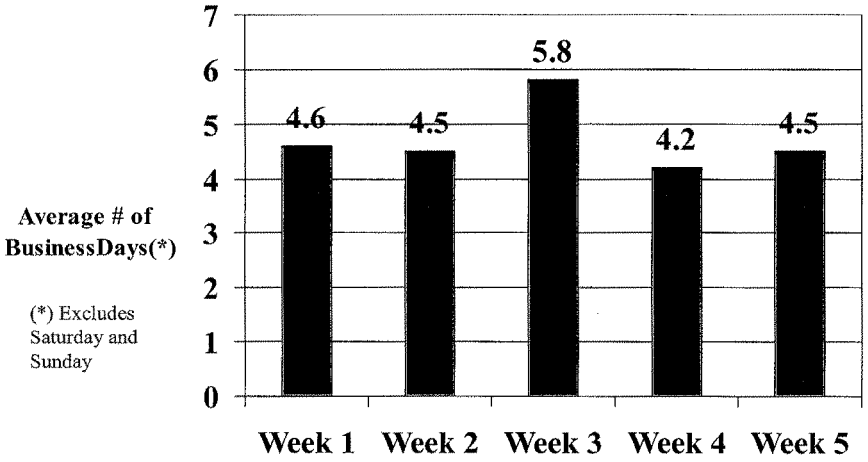
First Class Letters
Daily Post Mark Survey Results
April 30, 2002



Chief Administrative Officer

Average # of Days = 121.43

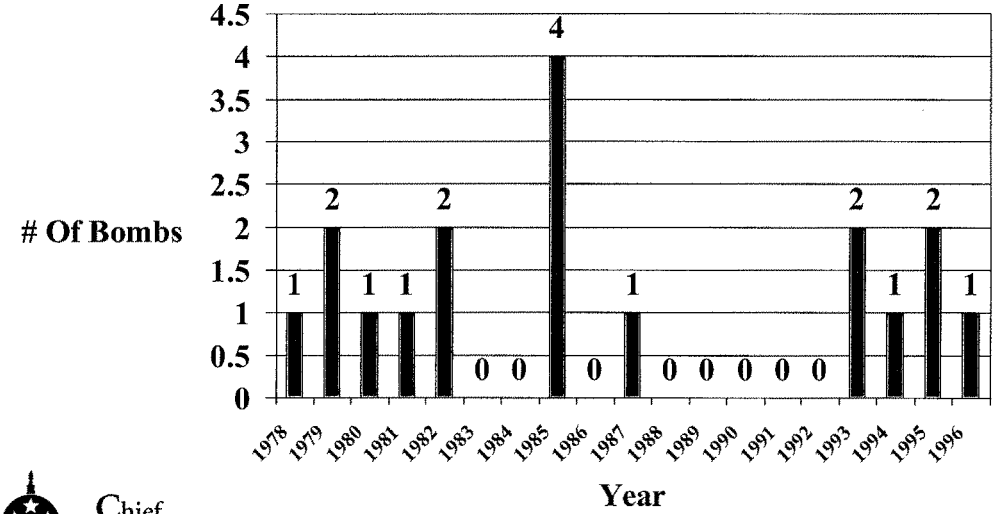
U.S. House of Representatives
All Letter Cycle Data
April 2002



Chief Administrative Officer

Average Age: 4.7 days

Unabomber Attacks



Chief
Administrative
Officer

The CHAIRMAN. I defer to ranking member, Mr. Steny Hoyer.

Mr. HOYER. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I apologize for being late. The Helsinki Commission is holding a hearing contemporaneously with this one, and the Foreign Minister of Portugal is now the chairman of the Office of the OSC, and the Counsel of Ministries was testifying. So I apologize to all of you for being late.

I would like to make an opening statement, however, and, Jay, congratulate you for your excellent statement.

Let me say to our witnesses, not one of us here today fails to appreciate the extraordinary circumstances that you have been forced to work under since all House mail deliveries were stopped on Friday, October 12, and a letter containing anthrax spores was opened on the Hill. Two postal workers, of course, lost their lives as a result of the cowardly attack. Many others were exposed to the hazard. Members of Congress and thousands of staff were displaced when the entire Capitol complex was temporarily shut down.

I understand that the Brentwood postal facility is still shut down because it has not been decontaminated. As a result, some Postal Service employees are working in tents. Others who are sorting mail are sent to government facilities and are working in converted warehouses on V Street.

I understand that the Postal Service as well as the House mail handlers have had to deal with a frightening and difficult set of circumstances and recognize that you are working hard and doing a good job, an outstanding job. Signs of progress which you referred to are encouraging. To paraphrase Mr. Eagen's statement, which he just gave, we may not be getting back to normal in processing congressional mail but we are trying to move forward to normal.

I also want to make this observation, and I think every member of the committee will agree. Constituent service and timely communications are the lifeblood of public office. Show me a public professional to who fails to respond or is slow in responding to constituents needs and concerns expressed in a letter and I will show you someone who is not going to be here long. Some may grouse about the necessity of such responsiveness, but I think it demonstrates democracy's strength.

As someone—Mr. Chairman, I know you have traveled extensively when the Iron Curtain existed and talked to literally thousands of citizens who had no thought that they could communicate with anybody in power and have anybody either listen and certainly, if they listened, they did not expect a response.

A few years ago, so-called experts liked to talk about the paperless office of the future. Someday we may actually visualize that vision. Even if the paper does not get to all offices, as you pointed out, it may be digitized and get to our office, but there is going to be paperwork.

Even with the ubiquity of e-mail, fax machines and other methods of communication, nothing gets our attention more than a heartfelt written letter from a constituent. That is true whether you are a freshman Member of Congress or you have been here for over 20 years. Thus, timely, responsive communications to constituents is not an option. It is an obligation and one that I know al-

most every Member embraces. In my office, I know that most of the mail we are receiving today was sent in mid-April.

You went through those charts very quickly, and we will ask questions when the question time comes. I am not sure that I fully understood as you went through it, because you went through it pretty quickly, specifically what they were saying.

But we are still receiving mail that was postmarked in—last year in December. Jim Moran at the legislative hearing, I think—Mr. Eagen, I know, was there—observed he was still getting Christmas cards, presumably mailed mid-December or later.

So while I support the efforts and hard work of our witnesses here and the people you represent, I particularly want to hear your views on how we can work together to address this and other challenges that confront us. Congressional mail stream must continue to flow however that stream manifests itself at the point of receipt.

Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for holding this hearing and thank you very much for being with us.

Mr. Chairman, I know Mr. Davis indicated he wanted to say something, but he defers.

The CHAIRMAN. I want to thank the ranking member and Mr. Davis and move on to Mr. Black.

Also, on behalf of the Congress, I want to again thank the United States postal authorities and the postal workers. I was in Columbus, Ohio, touring the tremendous facility there.

But, also, our sympathy goes out to the individuals that lost their lives and the people in the postal system that continue to process the mail and keep communications going in the United States.

With that, I defer to Mr. Black.

STATEMENT OF SYLVESTER BLACK

Mr. BLACK. Good morning, Mr. Chairman, and members of the committee.

With me today is Michael Cronin, the Manager of Operations Support.

We appreciate the opportunity to discuss the Postal Service's efforts to provide safe and timely mail service to Congress and Federal agencies in the wake of last fall's bioterrorism attacks.

Like many American businesses, the Postal Service was hard hit by the events of September 11; and, like Congress, the Postal Service also suffered the direct results of bioterrorism. Individually and collectively, our organization found itself tested as never before. Tragically, two of our own were taken from us when the mail was used as an instrument of terror.

Yet, through it all, the people of the Postal Service have maintained the world's finest postal system. Postal workers around the Nation stood united and continued on their daily rounds—in lower Manhattan, in New Jersey, in Connecticut and here in Washington, D.C., and in every location that became a potential target of this silent, insidious and deadly attack.

I am proud of each one of them, but, as manager of Capital Metro, I am particularly proud of the dedication and performance of every postal employee in Washington, D.C. None have been more affected than they have. Their determination and performance through the difficult months of the fall were nothing short of heroic

and represent the best of public service. I salute each and every one of them.

Let me share for a moment a sense of immensity of the network that supports daily mail service for our Nation.

Each day, almost 680 million pieces of mail enter our system through, literally, millions of entry points. This mail funnels through some 335 central processing locations that, in turn, feed 38,000 post offices, stations and branches that provide delivery to America's 138 million homes and businesses. It is a daunting and challenging proposition to protect a system so accessible and so ubiquitous against the threat of bioterrorism.

However, as we have learned, the very lives and health of postal employees, the American people, their government leaders and members of the media can be placed in jeopardy if we do not take the proper actions to limit the vulnerability—and the extent—of any future terror attacks using the mail.

When we learned that the mail stream had been used to carry anthrax, we acted quickly. Our first concern was the health of our employees and our customers. We worked closely with public health officials to address the medical needs of our employees, and we informed the public of the potential risks as they became known.

We closed contaminated facilities, including the Brentwood processing facility here in Washington. We tested others and, when necessary, we cleaned them. We provided our employees with masks and gloves. We changed maintenance procedures to limit the potential spread of anthrax in our buildings. We acquired, as quickly as possible, the means to sanitize mail that might be tainted with anthrax. And the Postal Inspection Service joined with the FBI and other law enforcement agencies in the ongoing investigation of the crime. It was our goal to do all we could to make sure that the mail we were bringing to America's homes, businesses and government officials presented no threat.

Let me go over in more detail how this process has evolved with regard to mail deliveries for Congress and the Federal agencies in Washington, D.C.

When our tests found that the Brentwood facility was contaminated, we closed it. Medication was made available to our employees, and they were reassigned to other locations. Both incoming and outgoing mail was rerouted to other processing facilities in both Virginia and Maryland.

Working with law enforcement officials, other Federal agencies and Congress, we identified certain mail as "target" mail. This was the mail that could not be delivered until we were confident that it did not present a risk to the recipients. This target mail included mail addressed to Congress and Federal agencies in Washington, D.C.

At the same time, more than one million pieces of potentially contaminated mail was trapped in the Brentwood facility. We could not move any of this mail until we had identified and implemented a safe and efficient method of sanitizing it. We worked quickly—and we worked carefully—to obtain access to the technology that would do this. With the input of the best experts available, we identified irradiation as the only technology both readily available

and effective at neutralizing anthrax spores from the mail. We contracted for irradiation services at a facility in Ohio and, later, at another one in New Jersey.

I would like to tell you about the irradiation process in a little more detail. Irradiation, as of today, represents the only process used by the Postal Service to sanitize mail. We will continue for the foreseeable future to irradiate letters, flats and packages addressed for government agencies in the 202 to 205 ZIP Codes.

For those of you who currently receive mail in the targeted ZIP Codes, we are preparing this mail for transportation to Bridgeport, New Jersey. There the mail undergoes irradiation.

After irradiation, the mail is returned to a temporary processing site where it is sprayed with an odor neutralizer called Odor Away. This is a nonhazardous, widely available commercial product that is commonly used in hospitals. After spraying, we ventilate the mail for up to 24 hours before it is sorted and processed for delivery. Processed mail is then transported to the appropriate Federal facility for delivery by the agency's mail unit.

When we first began the irradiation of mail, only small volumes of mail were able to move through our facilities each day. But, with experience, we were able to improve our processing and treat greater volumes of mail. By the first week of February, the backlog had been eliminated. As larger amounts of mail could be treated, larger amounts of mail were made available to Congress and to Federal agencies for delivery. We were able to eliminate the bottleneck of backlogged mail on the processing side.

Unfortunately, this meant that the mail volume received by some Federal agencies and by Congress exceeded the capacity of their internal distribution operations. We stored that processed, treated mail until the internal recipients were able to accept it. We are no longer storing any mail for any government agency.

Within the context of this "new normal"—with incoming mail for addresses in the ZIP Code ranges of 202 through 205 being diverted to Bridgeport, New Jersey—the additional transportation and processing time generally adds 4 to 7 days to the regular delivery times.

To this point, a number of staff members from this committee toured our temporary processing facility on Friday, May 3. They were able to see that the sanitized mail being processed for delivery was generally postmarked April 26 or 27, well within the 7 to 10 days the Postmaster General told members of our oversight committee.

Again, I should point out this is only for targeted mail. All other mail for homes and businesses in the District of Columbia is being delivered normally. In fact, despite losing their primary processing and distribution center, Capital District postal employees continue to provide mail service to the residents of Washington, D.C., near the pre-October 21 levels.

We are continuing to work with manufacturers of irradiation technology to identify the best processes and protocols for handling and processing the mail both safely and efficiently. The electronic beam systems we purchased will be deployed in a configuration optimized for mail. This limited deployment will allow us to accu-

rately evaluate the operational impacts, costs and effects on mail and its contents.

The Postal Service has the obligation—and the privilege—of providing every American in every community with safe, universal access to a system of affordable, dependable mail service. The people of our Nation rely on the mail. They welcome it. They trust it. We cannot let that change.

After all, the Postal Service, alone among carriers, is a vital public service provided to them by their government. It is crucial that we maintain our national infrastructure so we can continue to protect that trust for all users, urban and rural, rich and poor, business and consumer, private citizen and public servant. This is the promise of universal service, and it is the only reason that the Postal Service exists.

Mr. Chairman, let me again express my gratitude for the congressional assistance we have received to protect the Nation's postal system from bioterrorism. We look forward to your support and leadership and that of every member of this committee as the Postal Service continues its essential work of binding this great Nation together.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will be happy to answer any questions.

The CHAIRMAN. I want to thank the gentleman for his testimony.

[The statement of Mr. Black follows:]

STATEMENT OF
SYLVESTER BLACK
MANAGER, CAPITAL METRO OPERATIONS
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON HOUSE ADMINISTRATION
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
MAY 8, 2002

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee.

With me today is Michael Cronin, the Manager of Operations Support.

We appreciate the opportunity to discuss the Postal Service's efforts to provide safe and timely mail service to Congress and federal agencies in the wake of last fall's bioterrorism attacks.

Like many American businesses, the Postal Service was hard hit by the events of September 11th. And, like Congress, the Postal Service also suffered the direct results of bioterrorism.

Unfortunately, for the Postal Service, the delivery of four tainted letters – to Congress and to two media organizations – left a trail of contamination through multiple facilities and numerous pieces of equipment.

Individually and collectively, our organization found itself tested as never before. Tragically, two of our own were taken from us when the mail was used as an instrument of terror.

Yet through it all, the people of the Postal Service have maintained the world's finest postal system. Postal workers around the nation stood united and continued on their daily rounds – in lower Manhattan, in New Jersey, in Connecticut and here in Washington, D.C. – and in every location that became a potential target of this silent, insidious and deadly attack.

I am proud of each one of them but, as Capital Metro Manager, I am particularly proud of the dedication and performance of every postal employee in Washington, D.C. None have been more affected than they have. Their determination and performance through the difficult months of the fall were nothing short of heroic and represent the best of public service. I salute each of them.

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However, as we have learned, the very lives and health of postal employees, the American people, their government leaders and members of the media can be placed in jeopardy if we do not take the proper actions to limit the vulnerability – and the extent – of any future terror attacks using the mail.

When we learned that the mailstream had been used to carry anthrax, we acted quickly. Our first concern was for the health of our employees and our

customers. We worked closely with public health officials to address the medical needs of our employees and we informed the public of the potential risks as they became known.

We closed contaminated facilities – including the Brentwood processing facility here in Washington. We tested others and, when necessary, we cleaned them. We provided our employees with masks and gloves. We changed maintenance processes to limit the potential spread of anthrax in our buildings. We acquired, as quickly as possible, the means to sanitize mail that might be tainted with anthrax. And the Postal Inspection Service joined with the FBI and other law enforcement agencies in the ongoing investigation of this crime.

It was our goal to do all we could to make sure that the mail we were bringing to America's homes, businesses and government officials presented no hazard.

Let me go over in more detail, how this process has evolved with regard to mail deliveries for Congress and federal agencies in Washington, DC.

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I'd like to tell you about the irradiation process in a little more detail. Irradiation, as of today, remains the only process used by the Postal Service to sanitize the mail. We will continue – for the foreseeable future – to irradiate letters, flats, and packages addressed for government agencies in the 202-205 ZIP Codes.

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Within the context of this "new normal" – with incoming mail for addresses in the ZIP Code ranges of 202 through 205 being diverted to Bridgeport, New Jersey, for sanitization – the additional transportation and processing time generally adds four to seven days to regular delivery times.

To this point, a number of staff members from this Committee toured our temporary processing facility on Friday, May 3. They were able to see that the sanitized mail being processed for delivery was generally postmarked April 26 or April 27 – well within the seven to ten days the Postmaster General told Members of our oversight committees.

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will be happy to answer any questions.

# # # #

The CHAIRMAN. On Monday of this week, the House Inspector General documented that over 17 percent of the mail received at our Capitol Heights mail facility had postmarks dating from March of this year or earlier. Based on the mail volume for the day, this means over 3,000 pieces didn't meet that 7-to-10 day performance standards that the United States Postal Service has indicated is being met. Of this mail, nearly 10 percent, or approximately 1,600 pieces, had postmarks from last year. So I just wanted to see the consistency with the information that all the backlog, has been processed through the system.

So I am wondering, has it all been processed through the system, the backlogged mail, and where would the old mail be coming from?

Mr. BLACK. There are several avenues. One, our backlog, there is no backlog in our possession. But what has happened is that there is a hygiene—an address hygiene problem with the ZIP Codes of 202 to 205.

The CHAIRMAN. I am sorry.

Mr. BLACK. Address hygiene as far as machines reading it and addresses not being consistent with the rest of America, for instance, Congressman and that it is Washington, D.C. There are issues that we have always encountered. In fact, when Brentwood was up, we had what we called a Government Mails Unit within the Brentwood facility; and, in that unit, what we did was take a lot of human oversight to make sure that the mail was properly addressed or properly given to the right unit.

The other thing that is compounding everything today is that a lot of the agencies—what we call—this constitutes a loop mail situation where mail kind of goes to the wrong place and has to be reintroduced back into the system. Well, what happens if all the other agencies that received missent mail—if they are not diligent in reintroducing it back into the system, you do see tails. You see mail with long days of delivery.

The CHAIRMAN. So the 3,000 pieces that didn't meet the 7-to-10 day could be pieces then you are saying that were misdelivered or didn't have particular, correct addresses.

Mr. BLACK. Yes, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. And that would account for the 3,000.

Mr. BLACK. It would account for some of it.

And Mr. Eagen would probably tell you that we are not quite current here either with all the backlog of mail that we have turned over.

Mr. EAGEN. I believe the reference the chairman had was to the current USPS mail delivery truck which is what the IG was sampling yesterday and today is what the Postal Service has characterized to us as current mail. It is not sampling other categories of mail.

The CHAIRMAN. And you mentioned the loop, 20 percent of the mail is in the loop. Is that what——

Mr. BLACK. I am not sure of the exact percentage, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. EAGEN. Mr. Chairman, just to supplement in terms of the Members' offices in terms of the statistics you were referring to, I think that there are probably three explanations for what a Member sees.

For example, I have statistics for Mr. Hoyer's office for yesterday for what your mail was; and we have three mail deliveries in the morning. In the first delivery, you got six pieces of mail: Four were April postmarks; one was November; one was January. In the mid-morning delivery, you got 11 letters: Ten were April postmarks; one was January. Then, in the afternoon, the 2:30 delivery, you got a total of nine items: Five were April postmarks, three were December, and one was October.

What we are seeing on our side of things, I have three reasons for delays.

Mr. HOYER. The October guy is really ticked at me.

Mr. EAGEN. Probably.

One is, as I explained in my testimony, we consciously brought the mail back to campus in phases. We did so for security reasons, and we did so for capacity reasons.

Again, the Ford mail room was lost. P Street facility is still closed. We sent a proposal to the committee on November 9, 3 weeks after the anthrax, for leasing of a new facility in Capitol Heights, but that was an empty warehouse. We had to rebuild all the capacity inside that building. So we brought it back in phases.

The last phase of approval was for Postal Service packages on March 24, a little over a month ago. There is naturally a backlog built up behind that both for the Postal Service who was holding it for us and then when we received those trailers, and we have been working that backlog off.

Secondly, there are categories of items where we made a conscious decision, in consultation with personnel of the committee and talking to Member offices, items like old magazines and periodicals, people said we are not in a rush to get those. Make the priority the current stuff, the current first-class mail. So in some cases, especially with regard to old periodicals and magazines, we have been feeding those in over time. So that would sometimes identify when a Member gets older things. We have been feeding those in slowly, instead prioritizing the first-class mail.

Our statistics are showing, from what the Postal Service is saying, current mail there is a portion of that mail that has significantly old postmarks in some cases, and I can't offer an explanation for that.

The CHAIRMAN. I just wanted to—I got two perfectly addressed letters here, and they are to Jeff Janas, and they are here in the Longworth building. One is postmarked December 12, the other is February 5, and they came in May 3. So also I looked down in our office, our personal office and have been watching the postmarks, and it was pretty consistent. It might have changed this week.

But last week, if mail came in, it was the 18th of—I think it was March, and I received it last Friday. It was consistently—the next day was the 19th of March. It was consistently 1 month. So, somewhere along the line, we see the backlogs, but it can't be done if this is coming in. I mean, I got these two letters perfectly marked. So if it is a misdelivery, that would be a problem. And I think that is what Members are seeing. So when does the backlog get cleared up?

We also stopped using the Ohio—Lima facility, I was told, around the 11th of April. I was told we were stopping using the

Ohio facility and we are using the New Jersey facility because there was no backlog. Can anybody answer that?

Mr. HOYER. Before they answer, let me make an observation. I am just told in our office this morning we got two 2001 letters, whatever. They were perfectly addressed. I think there is a question pending. I just added to the example.

The CHAIRMAN. And the bar codes aren't blacked out. They do that for loop mail—and these aren't blackened out, which meant that they work. So any Members——

Mr. HOYER. Both letters were in the same position.

Mr. DAVIS. I think repetition is important here, because it demonstrates the magnitude and consistency. This is a letter that came in from December and appropriately addressed. This shows the level of confidence that people have in writing to us. I have seen your statistics as to how the mail has dwindled, and if I were writing out there—writing to my representative, I wouldn't have much confidence in how much impact the mail is going to have; and that is something that is difficult to cure over time. So my question, which they have asked as well, is, is there anything we are not doing that we could be doing to take care of this backlog of that type of mail, and are there any tools we need to give to you that you don't already have that would help you do more with respect to the backlog?

The CHAIRMAN. Anybody like to answer that? Any volunteers?

Mr. EAGEN. I guess I want to be clear with regards to the House. As far as the House is concerned, we don't have a backlog.

The CHAIRMAN. When you say we don't have a backlog, what does that mean?

Mr. EAGEN. We are processing the current first-class mail right into the 4.7 day cycle.

The CHAIRMAN. Once you receive it.

Mr. EAGEN. Once we receive it. That is the current State of the House mail operations for first-class mail and flats.

The CHAIRMAN. Just to make this clear, no matter what the date was that you received it—in other words, if you received this and the date was December 12 and you received it, this took 4 days to cycle to us is what you are saying?

Mr. EAGEN. Yes.

Mr. DOOLITTLE. Mr. Chairman, before you receive it, does it go through like a 10-day sanitation cycle or something? Is that in there?

Mr. EAGEN. Not at the House.

Mr. DOOLITTLE. Before—all the mail, before it gets into your 4.7 day cycle, goes through a very prolonged process as well, right? And that is how many days?

Mr. BLACK. It adds 4 to 7 days. So we could safely say it adds 10 days to the process.

Mr. DOOLITTLE. So 10 days plus 4.7.

Mr. BLACK. Right.

Mr. FATTAH. Mr. Chairman, as the ranking Democrat on postal affairs, this is a subject matter of which I am familiar.

I want to make one thing clear, because I heard a number of the comments, and I know what my colleagues are talking about, and I don't want it to be mischaracterized. None of us want you to do

anything that would not provide safe and safety to the Members and staff here, notwithstanding any impatience about the delivery of the mail; and I want to compliment all that has been done, both internally and through the U.S. Postal Service, of what has been a major concern in terms of the anthrax situation.

But the issues in relationship to mail delivery to these ZIP Codes here in D.C. are complicated issues. I think what you are saying to us is that, in terms of once the—once we get possession of the mail here, that you are delivering it within the timetable. The question is what the Post Office is doing in terms of your timetable; and if you are saying it adds 10 days, is that with the closing of the Ohio facility? Does that shorten the time, lengthen the time? And are there other things we can do to help expedite it?

But, again, none of this is a desire for you to cut any corners, because I would rather not get any of the mail if it was going to jeopardize my staff, colleagues and their health. I am sure I speak for all of my colleagues that that is not—we are not trying to push for corners to be cut. To the degree that people can send us a letter, hopefully, in a way in which, you know, it is safe and that you can get it to us in a reasonable amount of time.

I just wanted to put that on the record because I didn't want the press to misconstrue the comments that are taking place by the chairman and ranking member and others about your concerns.

The CHAIRMAN. I have got a couple of questions, and I will yield to the rest of the members. I also want to follow back with this, and we want obviously safety for your staff, our staff of the House. I think we are trying to, in my mind, trying to get down to a point.

The question I wanted to ask—to get, that is, in the most ideal situation—and I know we have one facility irradiating now. If I mail today from my home in St. Clairsville, Ohio, to myself in the Capitol, what is the maximum amount of time, going through the normal, safe process, that I will get that letter? And I would like to hear from both of you.

Mr. BLACK. From the Postal Service's viewpoint or standpoint, we are saying 7 to 10 days. Now that letter from Ohio would go in our logistics network and be delivered to the Washington, D.C., area. In the Washington, D.C., area, we are massing the mail for ZIP Codes 202 to 205 to be sent to Bridgeport, New Jersey, for sanitization. So those trucks are leaving Monday through Friday, taking mail to Bridgeport to be irradiated.

The process is adding—I believe Ohio would be in our 2-day standard. So it would be 2 days anyway. So we think that—what we are saying is that the addition is a day here, a day to get to Bridgeport, a day back process; and then we turn it over to the House mail unit.

The CHAIRMAN. And then that adds 4.7 days.

Mr. EAGEN. That has been our track record to date.

Factor in, of course, that there are no mail deliveries in the House on Saturdays and Sundays. So there is another potential 2 days that are going to be factored in, depending on when that cycle hits.

The CHAIRMAN. The mail is all delivered by truck. It is not flown, correct?

Mr. BLACK. Correct.

The CHAIRMAN. The costs of flying would be prohibitive, I would assume.

Then let me ask another question. If we brought an irradiation machine here off-site somewhere, how many days would that process take if I mailed a letter from Ohio to myself here?

Mr. BLACK. Theoretically, it would cut out our transportation or the bulk of our transportation time, so it would probably shave a day to 2 days off the process.

The CHAIRMAN. So we would still look then—a day to 2 days. We would still be looking at 8 days and your 4.7.

And, correct me if I am wrong, what I am hearing is that, no matter what we do, if we put that machine across the street, we are going to have 8 to 10 days—no, we are going to have 12 days to get our mail, is that a correct assumption, no matter what we do ?

Mr. EAGEN. I think there is opportunity, but it is months—if not a year—away. The scientists and research folks are telling us that they think there is good reason to believe that the sampling that presently—the test that takes 72 hours could be cut to 24 hours, but that is not immediately at hand.

The CHAIRMAN. Now with digitization, though, as I understand it in talking to several companies, at least five or six, that mail could be taken from Brentwood, delivered to the digitization company, and that mail could be up within a 2-day period, I guess, safe to say, on-line for members to access, as I understand it. That is one of the reasons, I think, at least from my perspective, we need to look at that as a 2-day service.

Mr. DOOLITTLE. Would you yield for a question?

So under the digitization proposal, they wouldn't go through all this sanitation process?

Mr. BLACK. It would. It would still—at least our plan is now that mail would go through the irradiation process of the Postal Service.

The CHAIRMAN. Let me ask this question: If the company says, give me the mail, give me the mail. You don't have to do anything with it. We will take care of it at our end. And they would have something safe and secure, because they obviously don't want to have their employees or their business go under. Now if that happened, then that is direct mail delivery, if that scenario is possible. Otherwise, you would have to still irradiate the mail and give it to a company to digitize. You would still be looking at about 11 days, I guess.

Are you done?

Mr. DOOLITTLE. Yes.

Mr. DAVIS. There is just one cost factor to that. Of course, the Postal Service is encumbering the cost of the irradiation, and if we were to pay for that the House would have to cover that part of the process.

The CHAIRMAN. If we gave it to a digital company.

Mr. EAGEN. Yes. Assuming that they would do the sterilization before they digitized it.

The CHAIRMAN. It would be in the cost of——

Mr. EAGEN. Exactly.

The CHAIRMAN. Right now, the Post Office is encumbering the irradiation. You don't want to bill us.

Mr. BLACK. We would like to.

Mr. DAVIS. I just want to go back to what I was describing as the backlog issue, to be more specific. It seems to me there is some mail, and it is still happening, that I would describe as 2001 mail. Christmas cards are probably the best illustration. And I just want to understand from you all where does that bottleneck exist? Is part of the process at the United States Postal Service? Is it here, Jay, inside the House Office Building? Are we doing everything we can possibly do to get this December, 2001, mail and the like into our hands as quickly as possible and do you have all the tools you need to do that?

Mr. EAGEN. Yes, I do think we do have the tools.

Again, as I explained earlier, there is a portion of mail that, because of the policies that we have adopted, came to us in large bulk quantities. At this point in time, that is almost exclusively packages and periodicals. First-class mail is now current at the House, and the portion—there is a portion that comes in that is described as current mail that has those kinds of postmarks on it.

Mr. DAVIS. Well, that is my question. With respect to this big quantity of mail that is sitting out there, which is not entirely—some of which is first-class mail, what is the process we are using for getting that into the offices as quickly as possible? Because, obviously, it is still coming in, and it is dribbling and drabbling in.

Mr. FATTAH. Would the gentleman yield?

The CHAIRMAN. This was just handed to us. This was from Congressman Charles Taylor, who is chairman, as you know, of the Appropriations Subcommittee; and these are just an entire batch he just received. These are from his district, and they are dated February and December, and they were in the mail today.

Mr. FATTAH. If I understand, you are just saying that when the mail gets here in the House, it is current in terms of the 4-day delivery time frame. Now when you get it, it could be 6 months old, but you are delivering it within 4.7 days, right?

Mr. EAGEN. I am saying that the trucks that come to us on a daily basis from the Postal Service are described to us as current mail.

Mr. FATTAH. And you are getting it to members under 5 days under your current scenario, but it has nothing to do when the mail was actually sent. This goes to the fact that it could be mail from a very long time ago, depending on how long it was in the system. But it is not a problem with the House. It may be a problem with the Postal Service. But in terms of the House and the Chief Administrative Office, you are delivering it at a current pace, except for these old periodicals.

Mr. EAGEN. Periodicals and packages.

Mr. DAVIS. So I guess the question then is directed to Mr. Black of the United States Postal Service. Do you have a huge quantity of mail? We know how challenging your job is and you are still playing catch-up, that you are going through to get to Mr. Eagen and the House of Representatives—again, I am referring to these first-class letters of December. What is the process you are using from a timing standpoint and what can we do to help speed up that process?

Mr. BLACK. Well, sir, the issue is—and being respectful to Mr. Eagen—is that 3 weeks ago we gave them 15 trailers of mail that dated back to January that we had sealed as early as January, which really put us in the heart of the dilemma that we are currently going through. I don't think that our protocol was good enough that that mail was segregated, that it was only periodicals or only bulk business. I think that what we are going to find is that when those trailers are completely worked out and we get the rest of the Christmas cards and the October mail that is commingled in there and I think once we work through that, I think we are going to find a lot of this old mail is going to disappear.

We currently have no backlog trailers at all in the Postal Service' possession, and it is not—again, if you take that statement on face value, what it is saying is that what we get in today goes out today. Now the problem being is that the Office of Social Security discovers that they have got a container of mail that has been sitting in their basement for 6 months, they can reintroduce that mail back into the system.

And they could have a container of mail that has been there for 6 months that doesn't belong to them because of some of the things you are seeing on the cards.

Every letter that you see where they block out the bar code is a mistake. It is a mistake. And what we have to do, the only way—because of the great strides we have made in automation with our equipment, there are fewer and fewer hands that touch the mail. So it is conceivable where our biggest mistake was in this entire process—early on we trusted everything to automation. So it is conceivable that in January, December, November, that a piece of mail could have been reradiated multiple times if a human being did not go through and catch that, and that is what we have concentrated on since March—the first of March, where we actually put people back in the process so we can go through. Every one you see crossed out is crossed out by a person who says this is loop mail that either misread on the automation, or it was directed to the wrong place. So we have concentrated on cutting down, but we can only do that if it is reintroduced back into the system.

The CHAIRMAN. If I could just for one—this mail that I have got, Mr. Taylor's and mine and yours, none of it is blackened out on the bar codes, and, I mean, I just wanted to stress that. If it was all blackened out, we would know it was——

Mr. BLACK. Right.

Mr. HOYER. Jay, I understand it takes 4.7 days, of which 3 days or 2 plus days, very close to 3, is the airing out and detection process.

Mr. EAGEN. Right.

Mr. HOYER. If we treated the mail that was delivered to us from the post office as okay, how long would it take under those circumstances to get to the Member's office?

Mr. EAGEN. I would estimate 24 to 36 hours if you eliminated the sampling and testing process.

Mr. HOYER. So we are looking at 1 to 1.5 days for in-house handling of mail, and the additional 3.2 days is attributable to airing out, testing at Fort Detrick and receiving, in effect, a clearance.

Mr. EAGEN. Not airing it out, sir. The testing solely. It is sampled, put in quarantine until the lab results come back.

Mr. HOYER. All right. Now, Mr. Black, I have talked to General Potter, and obviously one of the issues here is that we are receiving literally millions of pieces of mail. We have, of course, identified no anthrax, as I understand it, since October. Am I correct?

Mr. BLACK. Correct.

Mr. HOYER. So that we are incurring an extraordinarily high cost for, in effect, processing, sanitizing and testing clean mail?

Mr. BLACK. Yes, sir.

Mr. HOYER. Now, I agree with Mr. Fattah that it is very nice to say, you know, we have only got four letters, and they killed two people at the Postal Service, Mr. Curseen and Mr. Morris. And I want to say something. I was one of those—I don't know how many of you did—went down to D.C. General Hospital with a lot of folks that were in line from the Postal Service from Brentwood waiting to get either advice and counsel or medication, and they showed extraordinary courage and resolve. I didn't speak to one—and I must have spoken to over 100 people on 2 days that I visited down there and walked the line and talked to the doctors and talked to the medical personnel that were receiving them. I didn't talk to anybody who said that they weren't going to stay on the job with the Postal Service. They weren't interested in going back to Brentwood obviously, and we weren't letting them go back to Brentwood, but they were determined to do their jobs.

In talking to General Potter, clearly if we can get to the technology that will detect prior to going through this entire process, that is where we want to get, so that we have, in other words, some technology. And some—you have some 300-odd central points, so we have got millions, so we couldn't deploy the technology in the box or the slot. That would not be a practical way to do it. But it seems to me that the way ultimately we are going to have to get at this, assuming we continue to have mail, is to have a technology that detects at the input time as opposed to processing millions of pieces of mail that have not been found to have anything wrong with them.

Can you tell me, Mr. Black—maybe you are not the proper person to answer this—but where we are on the quest for that detection technology and input as opposed to processing through the—as I am sure most of the members of the committee, I don't know whether it was Mr. Curseen or Mr. Morris, he was standing at a door away from the machinery. What we presume happened—am I correct, Mr. Black, that at the point in time the mail was squeezed, the spores came out? The door was opened, and there was an outdraft, and he was in the outdraft and obviously took a breath at this point in time. That is how estranged he was from the particular letter that was infected with the spores.

So, I mean, obviously this is an extraordinarily virulent and dangerous material. So, Mr. Fattah is right. We all want to be careful for everybody who is working for us, and forget about the Members. You know, they take the risk, but I have got young people in my office who open mail, handle it and transmit it to me.

But where are we on the technology of detection?

Mr. BLACK. Well, unfortunately, Congressman, I am not the one to ask.

Mr. HOYER. I presumed that—my pipeline to the postal gurus, of course, is sitting behind you, Mr. King. Mitch tries to keep all of us informed. I don't know whether he has any information on that, but, Mr. Chairman, it seems to me that we really need to focus on the research dollars for detection capability, because if at the 38 or 40 central centers from these millions of entry points can detect at that point in time what we presume is going to be an extraordinarily tiny, tiny percentage of possibly infected mail, we can handle 99.999 percent of the mail in a fashion that will get to that 24- to 36-hour turnaround at our facility and do the 2- or 3-day delivery of which Mr. Black talks.

The postal department, Mr. Chairman, has gone from first class mail throughout the United States in the last 8 to 9 years from somewhere in the neighborhood of 65 to 80 percent on-time delivery to where now they are consistently throughout the country—in my district they are 95 percent on-time delivery of first class mail. They have done an extraordinary job in facilitating the flow of mail in a timely fashion. This anthrax thing kicked everybody in the head, and so to get back to that extraordinary performance, we need to find out at the input level, not at the processing and output level, which is what we are now doing—at the input level, where the danger exists.

I know you have got a note from Mitch King.

Mr. BLACK. Right. And we could have Tom Day, our vice president of engineering. There are some pilots going on, and he would be the one that is knowledgeable enough to tell us how that is working. They are doing some testing.

Mr. HOYER. Jay, and then I am going to let others have questions because I went on too long, but do you have any comment on that, and have we looked at that? I know it is postal department responsibility. And by the way, you talked about billing us. I frankly think it is the Federal Government's responsibility, ladies and gentlemen, to make the postal department whole for the extraordinary cost that they have incurred, just as we made the airlines whole. You know, we did billions of dollars for the airlines. We need to make sure the postal department, through no fault of its own has incurred a very substantial cost, be reimbursed for that cost as, in effect, an act of terrorism that we are going to try and compensate them for. But, Jay, do you have a thought on that?

Mr. EAGEN. The Senate and the House have both been participating in a task force that was established by the Office of Homeland Defense with the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, and the Postal Service is a member of that. That was the group that certified the radiation as the processing solution, and that same group is remaining in place to look at the alternative science solutions in the hope of finding them both on the front end, the middle end and the back end. The challenge, though—just one challenge is—remember, we are looking for more than anthrax, and so that testing has to be capable of looking for more threats than just what happened before.

The CHAIRMAN. The voting bells have been called, so I want Mr. Doolittle——

Mr. HOYER. I understand that, but detection has to be broader than anthrax.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Doolittle.

Mr. DOOLITTLE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

So you are currently testing for more pathogens than just anthrax?

Mr. EAGEN. That is correct.

Mr. DOOLITTLE. How many more?

Mr. EAGEN. As the chairman indicated, we are hesitant to say.

Mr. DOOLITTLE. Okay. I will note, too, we are getting Christmas cards every other day still in our office. The zip code you mentioned, 2——

Mr. BLACK. 202 through 205.

Mr. DOOLITTLE. That is the White House, executive branch, Congress and the judicial branch, right?

Mr. BLACK. Yes, sir.

Mr. DOOLITTLE. And, Mr. Eagen, the 4.7 days, you said some 1.3 or something is due for further sampling of mail. Did I understand you to say that right?

Mr. EAGEN. What I said was that it is 72 hours for the testing part of that, for the 5-day window.

Mr. DOOLITTLE. Well, but the post office is doing all the sterilization. Are we doing this on top of what they are doing?

Mr. EAGEN. That is correct.

Mr. DOOLITTLE. And that is felt to be necessary?

Mr. EAGEN. Yes, sir, it is, because, again, we are looking for multiple pathogens——

Mr. DOOLITTLE. Oh, all right. They are just doing it for anthrax, and you are——

Mr. EAGEN. Well, the radiation has been certified to sterilize against a number of biological threats, but in the case of anthrax and some others, it doesn't remove it from the envelope. The powder would still be there. The question is whether that powder is dead or not.

Mr. DOOLITTLE. Okay. You have a minute to talk about the charts?

Mr. EAGEN. Yes, sir.

Mr. DOOLITTLE. So looking at—I am looking at this one, average elapsed time between postmark date and delivery to House offices, and this is based on all of the mail. Or this is the sampling you have done?

Mr. EAGEN. Sample.

Mr. DOOLITTLE. And so you are saying that for mail received on May the 6th, that with the average day, the 23 days, right?

Mr. EAGEN. Right.

Mr. DOOLITTLE. Okay. May I just ask about the—and this has been a case for some time—don't we get—each of our offices gets five mail deliveries a day, is that right, or more?

Mr. EAGEN. Two deliveries and five pickups.

Mr. DOOLITTLE. Two deliveries and five pickups. And the two deliveries, is that because we get new shipments in so that you are doing a second delivery to respond to that, or is it just because you have to do that to deal with the volume of mail?

Mr. EAGEN. Well, we have different deliveries that are coming in, some from the Postal Service, some from UPS, some from Federal Express, so forth and so on. We also have stuff that is being processed through the sorting system all day long, so there is a volume to accommodate that.

Mr. DOOLITTLE. Okay. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Davis.

Mr. DAVIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Just one more time on the backlog. First class mail, December 2001, what I understood you to say, Mr. Black, is that recently you delivered a massive quantity of such mail to Mr. Eagen. So I guess my question to you, when you said earlier that you are current with the first class mail, which is a real tribute to your efforts, does that exclude this backlog that was recently delivered to you of a massive quantity?

Mr. EAGEN. We have three trailers sitting at the Southeast Federal Center. That is primarily packages and periodicals.

Mr. DAVIS. Is there anything we can do to help you more expeditiously segregate the first class mail in that and get it into the offices as quickly as possible?

Mr. EAGEN. Well, that is why we have been measuring the current deliveries. The current deliveries of first class mail go to our facility at Capitol Heights, and our understanding is that is the current mail stream, and we are giving that the first priority. So it already is segmented.

Mr. DAVIS. But I am asking about the mail that has been sitting there for several months now. That is not——

Mr. EAGEN. There is nothing sitting in our possession for several months.

Mr. DAVIS. Okay. Well, Mr. Chairman, there is a conflict here in the testimony that we need to pursue further about where this backlog is and what can be done on top of everything else that is being done.

Mr. EAGEN. Of the three trailers that are sitting in the Southeast Federal Center, one of them was delivered the day before yesterday.

The CHAIRMAN. But the other thing I would like to add here, and unfortunately we are running out of time, but I would—we did have it confirmed there were six trailers, and now we are told there are 15. So there are other conflicts we would like to——

Mr. HOYER. I just want to observe, on May 6th, as I understand the figures here, 29 of the approximately 290—a little less than 290—no. About 290, or 10 percent, were pre-2001 or 2002. Now, if we receive between 15- and 18,000—I understand from Mr. Cable May 6th was a relatively light day. If that is the case, that means there are between 1,500 and 1,800 letters per day that are 2001.

Now, this is obviously—every Member, therefore, has examples, and I think what Mr. Davis is trying to get at is where have they been, and where are they, and how do we get to them to get rid of at least those 2001? The fact that we have advised, I think, all our constituents that we are not receiving mail, if you sent us a communication and you didn't get a response, e-mail or send another letter, do whatever, and actually we are having a lot of mail

sent to alternative locations. I presume a lot of Members are doing that as well. But, Jay, I think that is the consternation you are hearing. Where are these 1,800 a day? You know, that is about 10,000 a week.

Mr. EAGEN. The statistics you are quoting, I understand, are the inspector general's sample from Monday——

Mr. HOYER. Yes.

Mr. EAGEN [continuing]. Of the Postal Service truck as the door was opened as it arrived at Capitol Heights, no storage on the part of the House. That was when the truck arrived at the House for delivery of first class and other mail items.

Mr. HOYER. Right. It came from somewhere, right? It came from the Postal Service.

The CHAIRMAN. And there were 3,000 pieces.

Mr. HOYER. Where are these pieces? How do we—you say they are in the loop. Social security, you said, for instance, found some and put it back in the loop. Why in heaven's name did Social Security hold onto it that long?

Mr. BLACK. Mike, do you want to take that?

Mr. CRONIN. Yes, Congressman Hoyer. What we found as we dug into this process is that a couple of things happened. There was a lot of confusion around the time that we closed the Brentwood facility, and I think that perhaps some of the mail rooms around the city were not aware of the fact there was a problem with the mail right away and continued to receive mail or to accumulate mail in their mail rooms.

What we have seen over the last 6 months is that from time to time almost at random various agencies come to us and say, Postal Service, we have mail in our mail room that has been there since October or November. We would like to reinduct it in the system, even though you have delivered it to us, and make sure—because we don't know if it has been irradiated or not, and we want to make sure it is safe. And that has been going on for a few months.

So those events when they happen, I can understand how the downflow of that event would be—there would be a sprinkling of old dates to various addresses within the city, but I am only aware of one case where there was a very significant amount of this mail, other than the mail that we were retrieving from P Street during the period February and March to reinduct in this process.

Mr. HOYER. Mr. Cronin, would you agree that 1,500 to 1,800 pre-2002 letters coming to this—the House itself is a pretty large number of pieces of mail, particularly ones coming on a daily basis? We are talking about, you know, 7,500 to 10,000 a week.

Mr. CRONIN. Yes, I would. And one of the things I noticed in the data, Congressman, is that, you know, we had such disparate results in the 2 days that—where we were comparing performance, we went from 121 days in one sample to something like 11 days on the next sample. It raised a question in my mind—and I am no statistician, but there is a question in my mind about how projectable those results are.

Mr. HOYER. So you are saying this may not be an average, it may be an anomaly?

Mr. CRONIN. I am suggesting it may be an anomaly, yeah.

Mr. HOYER. However—and I know we have to go, Mr. Chairman. The problem with it being an anomaly is that so many people talk to Mr. Ney and I and other people on this committee who happen to be getting the anomaly, so it becomes relatively frequent incidents of an anomaly, and we really need to have, I think, Jay, with the post office and, Mr. Chairman, perhaps with the Speaker and Mr. Daschle urging every government agency through the executive department to make a search for any mail that may fall into this category, extricating it from its storage spot, getting it into this system, and getting this backlog, which is old mail—forget about when anybody receives it—old mail through the system and get us operating on April/May mail.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. We have to go for the vote, but we are going to be forwarding a series of questions we need to put together and to get a proper response so we can get to the bottom of the issues that were raised today that weren't made clear. But we appreciate your testimony today.

I ask unanimous consent the Members and witnesses have 7 legislative days to submit material into the record and the statements and the materials be entered at the appropriate place in the record. Without objection, material will be entered.

I ask unanimous consent that the staff be authorized to make technical and conforming changes on all matters considered by the committee at today's hearing. Without objection, so ordered.

That will complete our business for today and the hearing on congressional mail delivery. The committee is adjourned. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 11:25 a.m., the committee was adjourned.]

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