

- Les AuCoin

EXTENSION OF REMARKS
CONGRESSMAN LES AUCOIN

In the U.S. House of Representatives
October 14, 1981

MR. SPEAKER, in a few days, the cost of mailing a first-class letter will rise to 20 cents. It is the second jump in postal rates this year. Many of my constituents are angry about it and are asking -- quite appropriately -- what if anything the Postal Service has done to eliminate inefficiency before imposing yet another increase.

They are skeptical, to use the kindest word, of the explanation from the Postal Service that the increase is necessary to keep postal operations in the black. I share that skepticism, and I believe it is wholly justified in view of the rejection of this inflationary rate change by the independent Postal Rate Commission -- not once, not twice, but three times.

The Rate Commission, which is the only agency charged with regulating another, reached its conclusion after 10 months of public evidentiary hearings in which more than 53 parties participated, including representatives of the commission charged with presenting the public's case. More than 20,000 pages of testimony were amassed in the course of the commission's exhaustive inquiry.

After all of that Mr. Speaker, the Rate Commission recommended, in February, an increase to 18 cents. It found that an increase to 20 cents was unnecessary. The commission had never previously disapproved a requested rate change. In June and again in September, the Rate Commission reviewed and upheld its February findings.

The response from the Board of Governors of the Postal Service was to ignore the rate commission's conclusion and to invoke, for the first time since the Postal Service was reorganized more than a decade ago, this rate increase on its own.

Mr. Speaker, this unilateral action, by itself, speaks to the need for Congressional oversight hearings. A very disturbing precedent has been set here, and it should not go unchallenged. The Postal Service cannot be exempt from the same budget discipline that is being demanded, at very real sacrifices, from all other agencies of government.

The Postal Service cannot be allowed to exploit its semi-autonomous standing by unilaterally raising rates every time it anticipates a revenue shortfall.

When our constituents complain to us of erratic service, curtailed services, inept management, rudeness, and unjustified rate increases, they do so because they understand we in Congress have the authority to do something about it.

For those reasons, Mr. Speaker, I believe this is an appropriate time for Congress to exercise its oversight authority and to review aggressively the way the Postal Service is being run.