

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS

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October 20, 2009
Start: 10:12 am
Recess: 11:06 am

HELD AT: Council Chambers
City Hall

B E F O R E:
HELEN SEARS
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Council Member Inez E. Dickens
Council Member Simcha Felder
Council Member Larry B. Seabrook
Council Member Peter F. Vallone Jr.

A P P E A R A N C E S [CONTINUED]

Helen Sears
Opening Statement
Chairperson
Committee on Governmental Operations

Matt Gewolb
Counsel
Committee on Governmental Operations

Josh Gerber
Policy Analyst
Committee on Governmental Operations

Written Testimony Submitted:
United States Postal Service

Information received from:
Postal Regulatory Commission

Thanks:
Congressman Jerry Nadler

Clarice Torrance
New York Metro Area Postal Union

Clarence A. Wall, Jr.
New York Metro Area Postal Union

Evidence:
Postal Regulatory Commission Decision
Dated October 18, 2009
Document Number A2009-1
Filing Number 65247

Ellen Peterson Lewis
Senior Resident
Far West Village

Annette Zaner
Village Independent Democrats

A P P E A R A N C E S [CONTINUED]

Socrates Solano:
Reading Statement of Congressman Charles B. Rangel
Community Representative
Office of Congressman Charles B. Rangel

Thank you:
District Leader Maria Luna
City Councilman Robert Jackson
Assemblyman Danny Farrell
Assemblyman Adriano Spiat
Council Member-elect Ydanis Rodriguez
Community Board 12
Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation

Jim Musamichi
President
Brooklyn American Postal Workers Union

Thank you:
Congressman Nadler
Congresswoman Yvette Clark
State Assemblyman Colton
The Media

Reverend Alonzo Jordan
Queens Branch
National Association for the Advancement of Colored
People

2 [START 1001.MP3]

3 MR. EDDIE RENTO CORIASO: This
4 Committee is going to be on Governmental
5 Operations. Today's date is October 20, 2009 and
6 it's being recorded by Eddie Rento Coriaso.

7 [END 1001.MP3]

8 [START 1002.MP3]

9 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: Good morning.
10 My name is Helen Sears and I'm chair of the
11 Governmental Operations Committee and I want to
12 thank you all for being here. I happen to think
13 that this Resolution, this issue, is a very
14 critical issue of what's happening in the City of
15 New York and maybe elsewhere around the country
16 but certainly it affects each and every one of us.

17 And before I read a statement that
18 well prepared, I want to acknowledge to my left,
19 your right probably, my colleague Simcha Felder
20 from Brooklyn; and we have Matt Gewolb, he's
21 Counsel to the Committee; and Josh Gerber who is
22 the Policy Analyst who has done a great deal of
23 work on researching this issue. And I'm glad that
24 we're having it today, really.

25 We're going to consider Resolution

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2 2166A, a Resolution calling upon Congress to pass
3 both HR 22, the United States Postal Service
4 Financial Relief Act; and HR 658, the Access to
5 Postal Services Act, which would stop the
6 unnecessary closure of neighborhood post offices
7 and would increase community input as the Post
8 Office reorganizes branches throughout the City of
9 New York.

10 We should note at the outset that
11 some provisions similar to those proposed in HR 22
12 have been signed into law through other means.
13 This move might help provide the USPS with greater
14 flexibility in making operation decisions. The
15 Committee is committed to monitoring the
16 implementation of these measures.

17 This Resolution concerns the
18 contemplated Post Office closures in New York
19 City. Currently the USPS is considering the
20 closing or consolidation of at least 14 Post
21 Offices in the City. Perhaps most importantly
22 this Resolution urges passage of HR 658, the
23 Access to Postal Services Act. This bill
24 currently pending in Congress would modify the
25 procedures that USPS must follow in connection

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2 with the closing or consolidation of any postal
3 facility.

4 The legislation according to an
5 official Congressional summary would require an
6 assessment of the need for the closure or
7 consolidation; eliminate a requirement to consider
8 the resulting postal service economic savings;
9 require a posting in each affected postal facility
10 at least 90 days before the final decision is
11 made; and require under current law, allowing
12 suspension of the determination pending an appeal
13 to the Postal Regulatory Commission.

14 The USPS has weighed in against
15 this piece of legislation and the Committee is
16 eager to hear the positions of advocates and
17 community members. Additionally the Committee is
18 looking forward to hearing about the impact that
19 potential Post Office closings might have on
20 residents and those who work in these facilities.

21 I would also like to note that the
22 USPS declined to appear personally but did send
23 written testimony in advance of today's hearing.
24 And that testimony will be entered into the
25 record.

2 [Pause]

3 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: I think what
4 we'll do is to summarize their testimony 'cause
5 it's rather lengthy so that we don't have to take
6 your time in reading it in full but I do feel that
7 you should hear what they have had to say. So
8 we'll summarize that rather than going through
9 numerous pages.

10 I would also like to note that we
11 have reached out to the Postal Regulatory
12 Commission who also play an important role in this
13 process. They are unable to offer testimony
14 because this is a pending matter but were helpful
15 in offering information to the Committee.

16 I would now ask my colleague,
17 Simcha Felder, if he has anything to add and then
18 we will call our first panel to testify.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER FELDER: Oh, no, no.

20 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: Thank you.

21 [Pause]

22 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: Okay. Also I'm
23 to note that Congressman Jerry Adler was very
24 helpful in providing information for those of you
25 who know him or he represents you. So I thank the

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2 Congressman for that.

3 [Pause]

4 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: We're also
5 joined by Councilwoman Inez Dickens from
6 Manhattan, thank you for being here.

7 [Pause]

8 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: Our first
9 panel, we have two that are from the Metro Postal
10 Union and if there are no objections, I would like
11 to call Clarence (sic) Torrance and Clarence A.
12 Wall, Jr. to come up. So that's Clarice and
13 Clarence. Sorry about that. And if the two can
14 come up and have a panel, we'll hear from the both
15 of you.

16 [Pause]

17 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: Okay.

18 [Pause]

19 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: All right. I
20 think we will ask Clarice to start because I'm
21 just looking at your shirt and it certainly speaks
22 out as to who you are, what the group is and it's
23 nice to see you and the shirt here.

24 MS. CLARICE TORRANCE: Thank you so
25 much.

2 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: Thank you.

3 [Pause]

4 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: Turn it so it's
5 red and it's on--

6 MS. TORRANCE: [Interposing] Yes.
7 Thank you so much. Chairperson Sears and members
8 of the Committee, thank you for convening this
9 hearing and inviting me to testify on behalf of
10 the hardworking postal workers that the New York
11 Metro Area Postal Union represents.

12 This union represents the clerk,
13 motor vehicle and maintenance crafts in Manhattan
14 and the Bronx, along with two large facilities in
15 New Jersey. That means that on a list of New York
16 stations and branches under review for possible
17 closure, our Local represents postal workers at 14
18 of them.

19 We have already seen what hardships
20 the existing cutbacks in service have meant to our
21 members. There are clerks from our union that now
22 have to commute 125 miles each way to work because
23 they have been excessed from New York City to the
24 far reaches of Suffolk County. Yes, they spend
25 between six and seven hours a day commuting to and

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2 from work.

3 With the proposed station closings
4 before us, we will most assuredly see more of this
5 or worse. It's very tempting to use this
6 opportunity to describe only how devastating these
7 proposed station and branch closings will be to
8 our members but we understand that we have our
9 jobs because we are employed to serve the public.

10 We have to look at how those
11 proposed station and branch closings will impact
12 upon the people we serve. The people who are most
13 dependent upon the Postal Service are the elderly,
14 the poor, the disabled and small business owners.
15 They do not have readily available alternatives.
16 For these people a trip to the Post Office that is
17 located a block or two or three from there they
18 are can be a difficulty. Closing their
19 neighborhood Post Office because there's another
20 one located just a mile away is not only
21 shortsighted it is cruel. For some, getting to
22 the Post Office will now be an impossibility.

23 I can't tell you how many times I
24 have mentioned this situation to Postal Managers
25 and I get the same canned response. Oh they can

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2 go online or there will be an automated postal
3 center where their old station used to be. I know
4 it is incomprehensible for Postal Managers to
5 understand but there are people who do not have
6 computer access. There are people who find it
7 very confusing to use an automatic postal center
8 without assistance. And even if they could figure
9 it out, they don't have a credit or debit card to
10 access this. Are these people not entitled to
11 postal service?

12 In certain areas of this City,
13 there are not bank branches on every corner and
14 many areas where poor people live, they rely on
15 the neighborhood Post Office as their bank. They
16 go there to buy money orders to pay their bills.
17 Rather than closing the station or branch, why
18 doesn't the Postal Service come up with some kind
19 of a plan to expand this service to these
20 communities?

21 If banks won't open branches in
22 poor communities how about the Postal Service
23 developing something along the line of a credit
24 union model for these customers? This would be
25 better than shutting down stations and branches.

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2 They could find more ways to do business there.

3 The members of the public who are
4 most dependent upon the Postal Service have
5 already had to put up with fewer collection boxes,
6 shorter hours of operation, the elimination of
7 vending machines and mobile units. And now they
8 are faced with the closing of their neighborhood
9 Post Office and possible cutbacks in delivery from
10 six days to five. To these people the USPS is the
11 branch of the government that they know and rely
12 on. They don't need cutbacks and closings. They
13 need better service.

14 It is time to decide whether Postal
15 Service is here to serve all members of the public
16 or here to be a money-making business that views
17 retail operations as a costly expense that it
18 would rather do away with as quickly as possible.

19 If the answer is that the Postal
20 Service is here to serve the public, then better
21 answers have to be found rather than closing
22 needed stations and branches.

23 Postmaster General Potter has
24 stated that the closing of stations and branches
25 nationally will bring about minimal savings. Here

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2 in New York City each and every one of the 14
3 finance stations in Manhattan and the Bronx still
4 being considered for closure by the Post Office
5 are bringing in more revenue than they cost to
6 operate. In other words, all 14 are making money
7 for the Postal Service. Why are they still on a
8 list?

9 A short time ago the union got a
10 call from a local television station because of
11 ongoing complaints that they were getting from
12 people who were using the Fordham Station in the
13 Bronx. Shorter hours, longer lines, the service
14 at the station had fallen drastically.

15 The union's Director of Industrial
16 Relations, Frankie Sanchez, went to the station.
17 He was interviewed in front of Fordham Station by
18 the reporter and explained that the Post Office
19 had reduced the number of employees assigned to
20 the station resulting in longer lines and poor
21 service. He was factual.

22 Bronx Postal management was upset
23 with the report and angry with Mr. Sanchez for
24 making them look bad. The reason I relate this
25 story at this time is that with the proposed

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2 closings in the Bronx, Fordham Station will have
3 people going there, longer lines, they will have
4 more people going there with longer lines and
5 continued poor service. And the same is true
6 throughout all of Manhattan.

7 The intent is not to make the
8 Postal management look bad; it is to provide what
9 is necessary for the public we are mandated to
10 serve. There is a process that Postal management
11 uses that is called a Function Four. These
12 actions pull window clerks out of virtually every
13 station in the City, cutting back on service to
14 the public drastically. There isn't one station
15 in New York City where you can walk in and not
16 find a line wrapped around a lobby.

17 At the same time the Postal Service
18 spent \$50 million nationally, putting employees in
19 what we called the Blue Rooms where they are paid
20 for eight hours doing no physical work, instead of
21 putting them to work to serve the public. This
22 was done to justify eliminating positions, cutting
23 back on service while the public suffered.

24 Now if any of these 14 stations are
25 closed, the pressure put on neighboring stations

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2 to absorb the increase in volume in mail and
3 service will be overwhelming. The Postal Service
4 has faced a severe drop in mail volume because of
5 the drastic economic drop, downturn in business.
6 But its financial crisis is more a result of
7 mandates and restraints imposed upon it by
8 Congress with the passage of the Postal
9 Accountability and Enhancement Act of 2006 which
10 this union opposed.

11 It is time to correct shortcomings
12 of the legislation without placing the entire
13 burden on the people who most depend upon the
14 Postal Service. This is the time for everyone to
15 come together to find solutions to the problems
16 that the Postal Service is facing but without
17 losing sight of the mission that it has been
18 entrusted with, to serve the needs of the American
19 people.

20 Postal closings are not the
21 solution. They are part of the problem. I
22 applaud the City Council for considering this
23 Resolution. I also add that it is incumbent upon
24 all of us to do what we can to convince the Postal
25 Service that nothing less than an immediate

2 moratorium on Postal closings is what is needed to
3 protect the needs of the citizens who rely most
4 upon the Postal Service in New York City. I am
5 happy to answer any questions that you may have
6 and thank you very much for allowing me to
7 testify.

8 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: Thank you very
9 much. We'll ask questions after we hear Mr. Wall.
10 Thank you. Before you start, I wish to introduce
11 our colleague, Erik Dilan from Brooklyn, thank you
12 for being here.

13 MR. CLARENCE A. WALL, JR: Good
14 morning. First I want to thank you for your time
15 and your attention and your help. I have a
16 document before me where a community in West
17 Virginia went to the Postal Regulatory Commission
18 with their complaints, their concerns, about a
19 closing of a Post Office in West Virginia, Hacker
20 Valley, West Virginia.

21 This document was issued and signed
22 off yesterday, October 19th, 2009 where the Postal
23 Commission found the Postal Service in error.
24 They were in favor of the community of the postal
25 closings. The document number is A 2009-1. The

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2 filing number for the Postal Regulatory Commission
3 is Filing Number 65247. And I would like to have
4 this document entered into evidence. And I'm not
5 going to--it's a lengthy document, it's 11 pages.
6 I'm not going to read the whole document but I
7 would like to have it introduced into evidence.

8 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: We will
9 introduce it into the record. It's introduced and
10 so be it.

11 MR. WALL: Thank you.

12 [Pause]

13 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: What we'll do
14 is we'll have the Committee Counsel review the
15 document so that we can have that. Now a question
16 for Clarice, can you explain in a little more
17 detail the Blue Room--

18 MS. TORRANCE: [Interposing] Yes
19 it's a room that the Postal management refers to
20 as a Work Life Planning Center. They take
21 employees who don't have bid assignments and put
22 them in this room and they don't let them work
23 anywhere on the work floor.

24 So you have stations where you have
25 windows that are not covered by window clerks

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2 because those window clerks are being paid for
3 eight hours a day for weeks and months at a time
4 to do absolutely no work.

5 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: Is the Blue
6 Room centrally located somewhere?

7 MS. TORRANCE: Yes. They're--it's
8 located in the Morgan Facility at 30th Street and
9 9th Avenue.

10 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: Um-hum.

11 MS. TORRANCE: Yes.

12 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: Okay. And is
13 there any length of time that you're familiar with
14 that the workers stay there--

15 MS. TORRANCE: [Interposing] Well
16 we've had employees who've--clerks who've been in
17 there for at least four, five, six months or more.
18 And it--there's --they've been using it for over a
19 year. So even if you have one group that's in
20 there for four months or so, then they bring
21 another group in. So it's always full. Actually
22 they were running out of room to place these
23 people and they sit in the room, play chess,
24 checkers and do absolutely no work.

25 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: Has any

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2 explanation been given to the union?

3 MS. TORRANCE: Well we know that
4 their design is to show that--

5 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: [Interposing]
6 Sure.

7 MS. TORRANCE: --they have this
8 many down hours so that they can attempt to take
9 away our no layoff protection at the signing of
10 the next contract negotiations. We know the
11 purpose.

12 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: Hum. When do
13 your negotiations come--

14 MS. TORRANCE: [Interposing]
15 November 2010. So by that time they will have
16 accumulated thousands of downtime hours across the
17 country. It's not just here, they do it
18 nationwide.

19 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: Just on a
20 personal comment, I have seen and I'm very
21 familiar with the practices of the Postal
22 Services. And certainly one of the Post Offices
23 in my District is the Jackson Heights one, which
24 I'm sure you're very familiar with, being so
25 extremely overcrowded and one of the few that also

1 provides passport service. And I know that there
2 are always empty windows at that Post Office--

3 MS. TORRANCE: [Interposing] Yes.

4 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: Always. And I
5 also recognize that there isn't 100% manpower at
6 any given time, people are on vacation or they're
7 out ill or, you know, various things so they're
8 not operating with a full percentage but at the
9 same time it seems kind of ludicrous that those
10 windows should be closed when there is so much
11 that needs services.
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13 And I agree with you. I think one
14 of the awful things is that although modern
15 technology and we're so advanced covers a lot and
16 certain it has its very big advantages, it
17 excludes an entire population. I mean it seems
18 almost wild because we make certain that we keep
19 everyone alive, living longer, and then we have
20 governmental services that exclude that entire
21 population. It's just ludicrous to do that and
22 I've always spoken out against that.

23 Because as much as we may have
24 emails and computers, I can tell you that I go to
25 senior centers and even though they're learning

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2 computer, they don't have them at home. And the
3 time that they have to spend learning it as a
4 result, they use the Postal Services to pay their
5 bills. They're not online paying their bills.
6 And somehow it seems like the Post Office has a
7 block about accepting the fact that masses of
8 people, including myself, do not pay online.

9 MS. TORRANCE: It is so true.

10 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: And as a result
11 I think that we're going to have to address that.
12 Do my colleagues have any questions? Um-hum.
13 Inez do you? Oh yes, Inez Dickens.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER DICKENS: Thank you
15 Madam Chair. Good morning.

16 MS. TORRANCE: Good morning.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER DICKENS: There's a
18 Postal branch at 140th Street between Adam Clayton
19 Powell and Fredrick Douglass Boulevard that is
20 being threatened with closure. That catchments
21 area is very huge.

22 MS. TORRANCE: Yes.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER DICKENS: And the
24 residents would have to go either to 125th Street
25 and Convent which is approximately 18 blocks, I

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was here figuring--

MS. TORRANCE: [Interposing]

COUNCIL MEMBER DICKENS: --or 138th Street and 5th Avenue which is approximately 6.5 blocks because we're talking City blocks.

MS. TORRANCE: Um-hum.

COUNCIL MEMBER DICKENS: Do you find that in certain communities that these areas, these small businesses and the residents are far less likely to have and/or to use computers in order to pay bills, etcetera?

MS. TORRANCE: Oh most definitely.

COUNCIL MEMBER DICKENS: And that therefore they rely upon the Postal System, maybe for money orders but also for their mail. Also the Postal System for the last 15 years has been encouraging people to purchase stamps online and/or through the mail.

MS. TORRANCE: Um-hum.

COUNCIL MEMBER DICKENS: Do you find that these small businesses do not do that and instead go to the Post Office to buy their rolls of stamps or their stamps that they need?

MS. TORRANCE: Yes. And most

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2 definitely, small businesses like the ability to
3 be able to come into a Post Office and take care
4 of their business.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER DICKENS: So that
6 means that during any time, these bad economic
7 times or any time, that small businesses, that
8 make up certain communities of color such as
9 Harlem--

10 MS. TORRANCE: [Interposing] Um-
11 hum.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER DICKENS: --and the
13 Upper West Side would be severely impacted
14 negatively if they are forced to go 18 blocks to a
15 Post Office in order to buy a roll of stamps.

16 MS. TORRANCE: That is definitely
17 true.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER DICKENS: Um-hum.
19 And could it be so adverse that in fact they could
20 lose money and eventually go out of business.

21 MS. TORRANCE: They would. And as
22 I've said, we've already proven that all of these
23 stations do generate more than enough revenue to
24 keep them open. And as you mentioned in some
25 communities also you have a lot of residents who

2 use the Post Office, use Post Office boxes rather
3 than having their mail delivered to their
4 building--

5 COUNCIL MEMBER DICKENS:

6 [Interposing] Because not all of the communities
7 have been totally developed--

8 MS. TORRANCE: [Interposing]

9 Exactly.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER DICKENS: --so we

11 have Postal mailboxes that have been broken into
12 or threatened--

13 MS. TORRANCE: [Interposing] That's

14 true.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER DICKENS: --and

16 certain communities we use the Postal mailboxes
17 because we have the fear of losing our checks.

18 MS. TORRANCE: Yes.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER DICKENS: Because we

20 don't use direct deposit in certain communities,
21 would that be correct?

22 MS. TORRANCE: That is very

23 correct.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER DICKENS: Um-hum.

25 All right, I just wanted clarity--I wanted it

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2 said, very simply, very clearly, and very
3 succinctly, for the record, so that my colleagues
4 would thoroughly understand the adversities that
5 certain communities would be faced with either
6 from the residents or both the residents and small
7 businesses.

8 MS. TORRANCE: And thank you so
9 much I appreciate it.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER DICKENS: Thank you
11 so much. Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: Thank you
13 Councilwoman Dickens. A question you may not have
14 the answer to but certainly we will check on it.
15 I know the Post Office that I use; the scale is
16 always out of order. The center, whatever that
17 you call it, generally is nonworking which means
18 that most of the times their equipment is
19 nonfunctioning. Equipment that the populations
20 we're talking about depend on. So they're being
21 disenfranchised in many ways and not just the
22 closing.

23 MS. TORRANCE: Um-hum.

24 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: They're being
25 disenfranchised in the maintenance of the Post

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2 Offices and the maintenance of the technology
3 that's there and the closing of the windows. So I
4 see it as a much bigger picture. And I see it as
5 a very dangerous picture and a very unpleasant
6 one. And I think I can assure you that whatever
7 we can do in this Committee, we're going to do
8 because I really, truly, and I think I have the
9 sentiments of my colleagues, that governmental
10 services such as postal services should not close.

11 They should be as accommodating as
12 they possibly can because the communities are very
13 diverse, they are multiple ages. And no age
14 should absolutely have to go without that postal
15 service. So if there are no more questions I want
16 to thank you and we will call our next panel.

17 MS. TORRANCE: Thank you so much.
18 I appreciate the ability to testify before you and
19 I appreciate--

20 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: [Interposing]
21 You're welcome.

22 MS. TORRANCE: --all of the
23 comments by all of you--

24 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: [Interposing]
25 Well you'll hear from us, really. I truly--

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MS. TORRANCE: [Interposing] Thank

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you.

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CHAIRPERSON SEARS: --mean that

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because it's--we'll do what we can. The Post

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Office is sort of quasi-independent which has been

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one of the difficulties with the Post Office.

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They're really hard for anyone, and I've never

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quite understood this, and I think this Committee

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will look deeper into exactly the Board of the

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Postal Services. Because I understand that as

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much as they will increase the fares, they're also

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fairly independent as to exactly what they do and

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how they do it.

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MS. TORRANCE: Yes.

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CHAIRPERSON SEARS: And it seems to

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me, I don't know how independent you can be when

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you depend on government and Congress to pass

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legislation for you so that you're enabled to do

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certain things. So I'm not sure where the

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monitoring is in Congress and I'm not sure where

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the final authority is. It seems to me it ends up

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with the Postal Service and that's wrong. That's

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really wrong--

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MS. TORRANCE: [Interposing] That's

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so true.

CHAIRPERSON SEARS: --so we will
certainly be on top of this. And thank--

MS. TORRANCE: [Interposing]
Thanks.

CHAIRPERSON SEARS: --you for
coming.

MR. WALL: Thank you.

MS. TORRANCE: Thank you again.

CHAIRPERSON SEARS: Yes. Um-hum.

[Off mic]

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON SEARS: Oh okay. So.

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON SEARS: Um-hum. We're
also joined by my colleague Larry Seabrook from
Manhattan, thank you Councilman for joining us.

[Off mic] The Bronx.

CHAIRPERSON SEARS: The Bronx,
sorry, sorry about that. How could I do that? He
was always whispering in my ear every time we sat
together, the Bronx, the Bronx, the Bronx.

[chuckling] Yeah we are. That's the first time
I've ever--it's because you're not sitting next to

me. See he always give me--I'm sorry about that.

We're going to hear from community residents, too, as I call them up. Annette Zaner [phonetic], if you will come up with Ellen Peterson Lewis. They are community people and I think before we get to the next panel of union members we will hear from community residents.

There he is. There's - - . We do love you. [Chuckling]

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON SEARS: No comment

[chuckling].

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON SEARS: Is there any testimony for the Committee? Okay. Thank you. Um-hum. Okay. Um-hum. Anyone may start but I'll call on Ellen Peterson Lewis first [chuckling]

MS. ELLEN PETERSON LEWIS: Thank you. Good morning. My name is Ellen Peterson Lewis and I am a senior resident in the Far West Village. I'd like to read into the record a very cold letter that both my husband and I received on August 25th, 2009.

Dear Postal Customer:

2 Thank you for responding to our
3 questionnaire for the proposed consolidation of
4 the West Village Post Office.

5 First of all I'd like to use--I
6 liked their code word consolidation, really is
7 code word for closing.

8 The Postal Service appreciates
9 receiving the views of those of you who have
10 submitted comments to the survey that was
11 conducted from July 31st through August 14th. Your
12 comments will be considered carefully as the
13 matter is reviewed further in my office and at
14 higher levels within the Postal Service.

15 When a final decision is made a
16 public notice will be posted in the lobby of the
17 West Village Post Office. Anyone disagreeing with
18 this decision will have the right to appeal to the
19 Postal Rate Commission in Washington, D.C.

20 And it's signed, sincerely,
21 Lorraine A. Castellano. And she--the address
22 there is Postmaster, New York District, United
23 States Postal Services, 421 8th Avenue, Room 3016,
24 New York, New York 10119.

25 My comment is that this is a very

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cold letter. And I do thank the Committee and
Chairman Sears for holding this hearing. And I as
a senior, my husband is a senior, for us to lose
the West Village Post Office on Hudson Street
would be a severe, severe handicap for us. We
walk to the Post Office in the morning. We mail
our letters there. We mail our packages there.
And we truly, truly have a sense of community with
our West Village Post Office. And thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SEARS: Thank you.

Next.

MS. ANNETTE ZANER: Annette Zaner
[phonetic], here today representing--oh.
Democrat--

CHAIRPERSON SEARS: [Interposing]

One moment because we can't hear you--

DR. ZANER: [Interposing] Oh sorry.

Is it on now--?

CHAIRPERSON SEARS: [Interposing]

Now it is. Okay thank you.

DR. ZANER: I'll start again. I'm

Annette Zaner. I'm here today representing the
Village Independent Democrats, otherwise known as
VID, to testify in favor of 2166-A in relation

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2 specifically to the projected closing of the West
3 Village Post Office at 527 Hudson Street in
4 Manhattan. And we thank the Committee for giving
5 us the opportunity to present this testimony.

6 VID is truly concerned that the
7 Post Office is a very important component of the
8 neighborhood. Village residents including many
9 elderly and many disabled individuals who depend
10 on a local postal service facility, closing this
11 Post Office would present a serious disadvantage
12 to such citizens. It would potentially
13 necessitate using public transportation to get to
14 the closest Post Office, making such a trip both
15 time-consuming and costly. And most of us, in
16 fact, do not pay online.

17 Many Village residents find it
18 difficult to navigate or simply cannot easily
19 afford City transportation. At the very least it
20 is shameful that now we are only notified as you
21 have just heard, we are only notified of potential
22 closings through mailings and/or newspaper notices
23 whereas passage HR 658 in particular would ensure
24 citizens the ability to participate in such
25 decisions at public hearings.

1
2 The USPS attempted to close this
3 Post Office, that is the West Village Post Office,
4 two years ago in October 2007. With the concerted
5 help of our elected representatives, Federal,
6 State and City, the USPS decision was reversed and
7 the Post Office at 527 Hudson Street was reopened.

8 VID is very hopeful that passage of
9 Resolution 2166 will be a step towards another
10 such decision. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: Hum. Thank you
12 very much. What did you get your doctorate in?
13 I'm just curious.

14 DR. ZANER: I beg your pardon?

15 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: What did you
16 get your doctorate in?

17 DR. ZANER: In Educational
18 Psychology.

19 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: Hum. Much
20 needed in this chamber, I can tell you--

21 [Laughter]

22 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: Do my
23 colleagues have any questions? That's very good.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: She might
25 be analyzing me.

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DR. ZANER: No, no, don't be afraid

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to ask me.

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CHAIRPERSON SEARS: That's true.

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We're joined by our colleague Council Member Peter

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Vallone from Astoria, Queens. Thank you for being

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here. It's interesting that they attempted to

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close it once before--

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DR. ZANER: [Interposing] Yes.

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CHAIRPERSON SEARS: --and there

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was, I guess a strong rally from all of the

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different levels, from the--

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DR. ZANER: [Interposing] And

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Representative--

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CHAIRPERSON SEARS: --officials.

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DR. ZANER: --Nadler was very

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helpful as well as our Assembly Member and Council

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Member.

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CHAIRPERSON SEARS: I think it's

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kind of unfortunate but unfortunately it happens,

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that there has to be that kind of pressure. And

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for those, you know, that voices are not as

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strong, they really get to suffer and things get

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done that they don't want to be done.

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DR. ZANER: It was interesting what

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2 they did two years ago. They closed it with signs
3 saying that it was being renovated or painted or
4 something. And then it was never going to open.
5 And so they did infect renovate it very nicely and
6 opened it after there were meetings with our
7 representatives--

8 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: [Interposing]
9 Um-hum. We're going to get a list of the proposed
10 closings to see what we can actually do about
11 this. But I--we're going to do everything to see
12 that we can get this Reso passed very quickly.

13 DR. ZANER: Wonderful.

14 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: So that we can.
15 And it's interesting because as before with my own
16 Congressman, he had a bill that was stuck in
17 committee, and I had said to him that perhaps
18 we'll do a Resolution. And it was his first
19 introduction to Resolutions.

20 And two weeks later he said he was
21 amazed at the influence of what we send from the
22 City Council because it really got out of
23 committee and it was an educational bill that he
24 had in. So I'm very hopeful that if we can pass
25 this out of committee when we have to and then

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2 from the Council that it can be very effective in
3 relaying the message of what this hearing is about
4 today. So I want to thank you both for
5 testifying.

6 MS. LEWIS: Thank you. Chairman
7 Sears may I make an addition to Dr. Zaner's
8 comment? About two years ago, closing the Far
9 West Village Post Office, what they were going to
10 do would be to reopen it as a--something very
11 similar to how the banks have opened these small
12 mini-offices where you go in--

13 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: [Interposing] Oh
14 yeah.

15 MS. LEWIS: --and you--

16 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: [Interposing]
17 Yeah.

18 MS. LEWIS: --use all the--

19 DR. ZANER: [Interposing]
20 Automatic.

21 MS. LEWIS: --automatic, thank you
22 Annette. [Chuckling] As an automatic service
23 center. And that certainly would--when we heard
24 about that that is when doubly, our electeds
25 really put pressure on the Post Office to open

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2 that as a full service Post Office station to meet
3 the needs of the seniors.

4 And the Metro, young woman who
5 testified earlier concerning the amount of money
6 that is generated out of that Post Office, I think
7 that it would be very interesting to see if the
8 Council could, find out exactly how much money is
9 generated out of the use of that Post Office, not
10 only our small, you know, Post Office but
11 throughout Councilwoman Dicken's--

12 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: [Interposing]
13 Um-hum.

14 MS. LEWIS: --Post Office up there
15 and so forth. Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: Thank you very
17 much.

18 MS. LEWIS: I didn't mean to go on
19 [chuckling].

20 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: Just for the
21 members of the Committee, every one of them will
22 have certainly constituents who will be greatly
23 affected by any proposed cuts. And certainly in
24 Astoria with my colleague Vallone, there are many.

25 I think we need to watch just what

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2 ones might be targeted as Astoria has several
3 mini-Post Offices but they're there because
4 they're very much needed. And on another note, is
5 that when these Post Offices close they create an
6 enormous burden on the remaining ones. And that's
7 an outrage to do that.

8 MS. LEWIS: [Interposing] Um-hum.

9 Um-hum.

10 DR. ZANER: [Interposing] Right.

11 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: --because it
12 means that there is such a delay--

13 MS. LEWIS: [Interposing] Um-hum.

14 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: --in really
15 getting some postal services so that that's
16 something that we really have to look at because
17 it's just not the right thing to do. Thank you
18 all very much.

19 DR. ZANER: Thank you.

20 MS. LEWIS: Thank you.

21 [Pause]

22 [Off mic]

23 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: Okay. You know
24 what? We have--well our next panel, we'll have
25 three together. We have Reverend Alonzo Jordan,

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2 Jim Musamichi [phonetic] and, oh I like this name,
3 Socrates Solars. Are they all here? I think I'm
4 pronouncing--Solanis? Am I pronouncing this
5 correctly? Is Socrates here? At least I won't
6 stumble over that. [Chuckling] Okay. you have
7 to correct me with the pronouncing of your last
8 name.

9 MR. SOCRATES SOLANO: Solano.

10 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: Ah, thank you.

11 Oh okay.

12 [Pause]

13 [Witnesses getting settled]

14 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: Um-hum. Any
15 one of you may go first. If not, we'll--all
16 right.

17 MR. SOLANO: Good morning Madam
18 Chair Sears. Good morning Madam Whip, Inez
19 Dickens, and Council Members in the Committee. My
20 name is Socrates Solano; I'm the Community
21 Representative for Congressman Charles B. Rangel,
22 who is the Chairman of the Ways and Means
23 Committee in Congress.

24 And I'm here basically to read a
25 statement that he's going to introduce later on

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2 today for the Congressional Record in support of
3 these two bills.

4 And it reads:

5 Madam Speaker, I rise today in
6 support of the Council of the City of New York's
7 Resolution Number 2166 calling upon the United
8 States House to pass HR 658 which is the Access to
9 Postal Service Act. Thanks to our work in
10 Congress, HR 22, the US Postal Service Financial
11 Relief Act has passed the House and similar
12 legislation has cleared the Senate.

13 This great legislation assists the
14 US Postal Service with financial expenses and
15 stops unnecessary closure of neighborhood Post
16 Offices, increasing community input as the Postal
17 Service reorganizes its branches throughout the
18 City of New York. If we do not follow up with the
19 speedy passage of HR 658, the Postal Service will
20 be forced to close over 700 locations throughout
21 the United States including 53 locations in New
22 York City alone.

23 In addition to the Borough of
24 Queens, Manhattan will be adversely affected with
25 the closure of 25 locations which includes my

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2 Harlem community. In my own District the Tejada
3 Post Office was almost a victim to these closures,
4 the well-regarded institution was named after a
5 member of the Third Battalion Fifth Marine
6 Regiment who was killed during combat operations
7 in Baghdad, Iraq on April 11, 2003.

8 He died at the tender age of 26 but
9 thanks to the help of people like District Leader
10 Maria Luna, City Councilman Robert Jackson,
11 Assemblyman Danny Farrell and Adriano Spiat, as
12 well as Council Member-elect Ydanis Rodriguez,
13 Community Board 12 and the Northern Manhattan
14 Improvement Corporation, a grassroots coalition
15 came together and demanded that it remain open.

16 We ought to work to make sure that
17 nothing of the sort happens in communities across
18 this great nation. Both these bills will assist
19 people in staying connected with the world while
20 not hoisting great financial burdens on New
21 Yorkers or other American who rely on these nearby
22 Post Offices.

23 Senior citizens and low income
24 Americans would be most vulnerable to these
25 shutdowns. And as Americans we ought to look

2 after the most vulnerable in our society. May the
3 Congress work as quickly as it can to alleviate
4 this problem and ensure that these Post Offices
5 remain open. Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: Why thank you.
7 You're from? Go ahead.

8 MR. JIM MUSAMICHI: Good morning
9 Chairperson Sears and the Committee. My name is
10 Jim Musamichi [phonetic]; I'm the President of the
11 Brooklyn Local American Postal Workers Union. And
12 I sit before you this morning very fortunate and
13 happy to testify that there are no scheduled
14 closings at this time in Brooklyn.

15 Several months ago however there
16 were 18 or 19 Post Offices scheduled to close and
17 if not for the efforts of Congressman Nadler,
18 Congresswoman Yvette Clark, State Assemblyman
19 Colton and the media putting the pressure on the
20 Postal Service, without any rhyme or reason or any
21 explanation, they just completely backed off.

22 My concern however is if they are
23 successful in closing any Post Offices in the
24 surrounding Boroughs, in particular here in
25 Manhattan, that the Post Office will again revisit

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2 because their comment is they're not going to
3 close these places right now.

4 As we speak in this chamber I
5 believe the Postal Service is going out of their
6 way to try and create contract postal units
7 throughout this City. And that will certainly
8 affect the sanctity of the mail. Contract postal
9 units are sections of stores, bodegas, where they
10 operate and sell postal products under the banner
11 of the Postal Service. However the employees that
12 work in these locations do not have background
13 checks, they're not screened, they're not trained
14 professionals. So there is a tremendous concern
15 as to what can happen with the mail.

16 I want to address a couple of
17 comments made by the Committee concerning these
18 Blue Rooms or standby rooms which are actually
19 running throughout this country. The location in
20 Brooklyn is at our general mail facility where we
21 have recovering, injured workers predominantly
22 working in this room.

23 And rather than have them work with
24 chairs with back support, they have removed all
25 the chairs with back support from the Post Office

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2 so these employees cannot go and work and produce
3 for this country on the workroom floors.

4 They've done this intentionally to
5 justify the elimination of jobs. And that goes to
6 their plan of running these contract postal units
7 and contracting out as much work as possible.

8 The other comment I want to address
9 that you made, Ms. Chairperson, is that the empty
10 windows that you see throughout Post Offices, they
11 are more than not just being manned by postal
12 workers. What the Postal Service has done has
13 removed the hardware, the equipment, that would
14 enable a person to go work. The equipment called
15 POS machines which actually does all the
16 processing of the postage and money orders,
17 they've been removed unilaterally by the Post
18 Office.

19 In Brooklyn we've challenged this
20 through the NLRB and unfortunately were
21 unsuccessful. The NLRB dismissed our charge of
22 unilateral action and no negotiation for this and
23 basically right now the unions' internal remedies
24 are pretty much getting to the point of exhausted
25 as far as trying to protect the sanctity of the

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2 mails, the staffing and the service given to the
3 public.

4 Also as we speak, which will
5 probably be the subject of another hearing,
6 they're downsizing the letter carrier craft in an
7 extreme way. And it is going to cause significant
8 delay in the deliver of mail throughout this
9 country. Every single Postal Service right now is
10 having a reduction in carrier routes which means
11 letter carriers are going to have to do more
12 streets along the way and it's going to take that
13 much longer for the public to get their--to
14 receive their mail. So aside from the lines in
15 each Postal Service throughout the City, this is
16 taking place also as we speak.

17 So I ask for your continued
18 support. I thank you for your continued support
19 and allowing us to come before you and testify.
20 Certainly the closing or consolidation as the
21 community leader stated would affect the life of
22 many people who use the Post Office as their bank.
23 Some of the stations we had scheduled to close in
24 Brooklyn, New Lutz, Cypress Hills, Halsey and
25 Bedford-Stuyvesant, the people are using the Post

2 Office there to do their banking, pay their bills.
3 Seniors would have miles to go out of their way.
4 And I thank you for this opportunity.

5 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: Thank you.

6 Yes.

7 REVEREND ALONZO JORDAN: Good
8 morning Madam Chair. This may be, with all due
9 respect, I was reading the Resolution and the late
10 Councilman, James E. Davis, former Councilman R.
11 D. Spigna [phonetic].

12 I'm from Queens, I'm representing
13 the Queens Branch of the NAACP, Larry Gadsden is
14 our President. And our concern was that there be
15 no bias in any of the closings. The gentleman
16 said there's none slated for Brooklyn. The other
17 concern, even though I'm from Queens we know Ms.
18 Dukes is the President of the National and the
19 State Branch of the NAACP. Also the Shirley
20 Chisholm Branch located in Brooklyn on Fulton.

21 So that was just our concern. I
22 came here this morning. I didn't--I apologize for
23 not getting a chance to read the whole Resolution
24 [chuckling] as some Congressmen might do when the
25 bill is passed by our illustrious President.

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2 But here where it says whereas the
3 two Boroughs, on page 8, that would be most
4 adversely affected, and the key word that stuck
5 out to me was most adversely. And on the next
6 paragraph where it says whereas the Post Office is
7 an important but often overlooked, and I think
8 Madam Chair that was the two words that stuck out,
9 Councilman Felder, with all due respect, was
10 adversely and overlooked.

11 And so we don't want anything, you
12 know, to come down the pike. So I commend you and
13 we commend you for your work. I was discussing it
14 with my wife who's worked for the government as
15 well. And it was just--I'm only 43 years old when
16 it was just unheard of in my short lifespan of
17 closing a Post Office.

18 This is a--I used to work at a
19 company called NEC in Long Island. And I had the
20 postal route. I started in the mail room. And we
21 know it's a vital, you know, entity for our
22 community.

23 So and our main concern is that
24 there is none closed, you know, any racial divide.
25 And like I said the late Councilman James E.

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2 Davis, I was with his brother several weeks ago at
3 a function, Council Member Artie Spigna
4 [phonetic], I'm a member of the United Black Men,
5 he's one of the founding members there in Queens.
6 And we just had that Post Office open a few years
7 back. And the late Shirley Chisholm was all three
8 concerns that we were worried about. So I commend
9 you and your work and we commend you as an
10 organization. Thank you very much for your time.

11 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: Well thank you
12 all for giving your time to really deal with what
13 is a very alarming issue. And I think you can be
14 assured that we will do everything we can to see
15 that this Resolution gets down to Congress and
16 follow up with that, it's not just doing it, it's
17 really--because there's just so much more that's
18 affected by doing this. And I think it just seems
19 like to me there's a pattern that's running
20 throughout.

21 You talk about the contracting for
22 the generally stationary stores and they become
23 stores of everything. And I've been in there when
24 they come in with packages, buying stamps and so
25 on as well as taking care of their own business.

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2 So it's not as straightforward as it should be.
3 But there's really a pattern here of really
4 closing, closing so much of services just as it is
5 outsourcing which has always been a big thorn here
6 in the Council.

7 So I want to thank you and let you
8 know that this is just the beginning for us. Do
9 my colleagues have any questions or follow-ups?
10 Oh yes.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER DICKENS: Madam
12 Chair, thank you. I'm requesting a hard copy of
13 Congressman Rangel's testimony so that it can be
14 entered upon the record. Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: Okay. thank
16 you for that. Thank you Councilwoman.

17 [Pause]

18 CHAIRPERSON SEARS: Is there anyone
19 else that's here that would like to testify that's
20 here this morning? If not I want to thank all of
21 you for being here. You've really shed light,
22 very important light on a very important issue.
23 And no further testimony, this meeting is now
24 adjourned.

25 [Gavel banging]

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COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS 50

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[Background conversation]

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CHAIRPERSON SEARS: Bill, let's

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take a group photo. Guys. Oh here he has them.

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Let's take a group photo. Peter, of the

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Committee, let's take a group photo. Yes. I want

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you guys in. We're going to take--

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[Off mic]

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CHAIRPERSON SEARS: Oh okay.

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[END 1002.MP3]

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Laura L. Springate certify that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Laura L. Springate". The signature is written in black ink on a light-colored background.

Signature _____Laura L. Springate_____

Date _____October 25, 2009_____