

File: Post Office Speech
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Part of this country's history is the story of the post office. As children, both you and I thrilled to the romantic tradition of Buffalo Bill Cody and the pony express.

But as adults, we are not thrilled by the sad story of postal service today.

Recently the Congress made a marked improvement in the post office--we abolished it. Well, not exactly--we eliminated the Cabinet Post Office Department and created the United States Postal Service.

Notice the new name--the U.S. Postal Service. That last word is service--and that is what it's supposed to provide. The Postal Service has promised us one day delivery within a 600 mile radius for first class mail and a 95 percent improvement in air mail delivery.

But let's look at what actually happens.

--An airmail letter from Chicago to Manhattan takes five days.

--A special delivery letter from Hartford to New York--120 miles--takes 34 hours. You can walk it faster.

--A pair of theater tickets are mailed from Broadway to Long Island and arrive long after the show is over.

You and I have our own horror stories of delayed or undelivered letters. Maybe the U.S. Postal Service should get a horse.

What hurts us--what hurts us in the pocketbook--is that we are paying more and getting less:

--In a dozen years, first class postage went from 3 cents to 8 cents--a 167 percent increase.

--In a dozen years, air mail rates have gone from 5 cents to 13 cents this coming spring--up 160 percent.

In these dozen years, all consumer prices went up 35.8 percent--and the cost of mailing a letter is part of that rise.

And do you know who sends most first class letters? It's not you and me. It's corporations, banks, and all of American business.

And do you know who pays for their increased postage? That's right--it's passed on to you and me in the form of higher prices.

So you and I pay a double increase--on our own letters, and on every business letter mailed every day.

When you open your pay envelopes and notice they are getting slimmer and slimmer as rising inflation takes a bigger bite, remember this hidden tax--postal increases. Remember it when each letter needs yet another stamp.

The problems you and I have trying to reach our friends and neighbors unfortunately don't end at the mailbox.'

Have you tried to make a phone call recently? As someone in the White House said just the other day, "I can *get* Peking faster than New York."

In 1961, AT&T spent 16.7 percent of its construction budget on service improvement. As the 1960's passed, that amount dropped--as service got worse. By 1968, the percentage was down by half--to 8.4 percent.

And what happens to the consumer? Sure enough--just as with the post office, as service goes down, prices go up.

A spokesman for Ma Bell recently told the Price Commission that utility rates will now rise 15 to 20 percent--and he called this increase unavoidable.

And have you tried to send a telegram recently? You remember what a telegram is--Western Union used to send them. Now, they would like to get rid of them entirely.

Telegrams are only a very small part of Western Union's business--but they are ^{an} important part of the communications network available to the American people.

And once again we have the same old story: service goes down, prices go up. If a telegram arrives late--or all too frequently not at all--the burden of proof is on you if you have a dream of getting your money back.

The other day we sent a telegram from my Senate office to Columbus, Ohio. It sat in the Western Union office in Columbus for three days. Finally, the person who was supposed to receive it called us. He had to go downtown to pick it up.

Since 1968, the basic cost of a telegram has climbed from \$1.70 to \$3.75--a jump of 120 percent. And, of course, if you want it hand delivered as most people do, that's a dollar and a half extra.

And now we have something new--the mailgram. This great invention is a Western Union telegram that the U.S. Postal Service delivers. In fact, it seems to combine the worst features of both services--it's expensive to send and slow to deliver.

All three of these basic services for the American people--the mail, the telephone, and the telegram--are important to you and me. We use them every day. We expect them to be reliable and worth the cost. But too often, they just don't work--and they don't work at ever-increasing prices.

This has got to stop. Or the American people will stop writing, calling, and cabling their friends and neighbors.

There are many things that need fixing in this country. The communications network of the American people is one of the most basic. If we can't reach each other, we can't help each other.



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