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ONE HUNDRED SEVENTH CONGRESS

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM

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November 26, 2001

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The Honorable David Dreier
Chairman
Committee on Rules
U.S. House of Representatives
H-312 Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Martin Frost
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Rules
U.S. House of Representatives
H-152 Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Dreier and Ranking Member Frost:

I understand that you will be considering the Defense Appropriations bill tomorrow. I am writing to urge you to adopt a rule that allows the Obey amendment to be in order.

I support the full amendment, but as the Ranking Minority Member of the Government Reform Committee, which has jurisdiction over the Postal Service, I want to draw your attention to the importance of the amendment's funds to secure the mail. Anthrax in the mail has caused unprecedented damage to this country's mail system. If the Postal Service is unable to ensure the safety of our mail, the entire system is threatened. And while it is developing a long-term strategy to secure the mail, the Postal Service is also taking immediate steps that require immediate funding.

I have been working with the Postal Service to help it develop its long-term plan. At Chairman Burton's and my request, the National Academy of Sciences convened a panel of experts to examine the proposals that are being considered to sanitize mail. The Postal Service actively participated in the meeting. In addition, also at Chairman Burton's and my request, the General Accounting Office is convening a panel of experts to examine operational changes that the Postal Service could employ in securing the mail. These panels are helping answer questions about how best to secure the mail in the long-term.

The Honorable David Dreier
The Honorable Martin Frost
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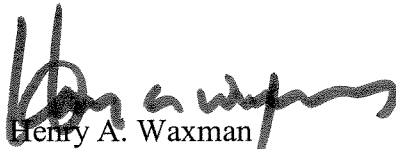
But the Postal Service is also taking immediate steps to increase the safety of its workers and decrease the risk to the public. For instance, it plans to install detection devices in processing equipment that would be able to detect hazards like the anthrax that was contained in the Daschle letter. These efforts will provide needed protections for postal workers who have been threatened by the attacks in the mail. They will also decrease the risk that a contaminated letter will reach the public. The Postal Service estimates that these steps, combined with an initiative to retrofit collection boxes, will cost over \$300 million.

The Postal Service also urgently needs to redesign its facilities to protect workers from anthrax particles that become airborne during mail processing. It is modifying major equipment to include automatic vacuuming. It is following a recommendation by the Centers for Disease Control by installing hepafilters in its ventilation systems. And it is changing the way that it cleans and maintains equipment. These measures are estimated to cost over \$300 million as well.

The funds provided in the Obey amendment are necessary to allow the Postal Service to take these immediate steps. These steps are the absolute minimum that the public and postal employees need to reduce the risk of threats in the mail. The Postal Service will continue to engage in a planning process to determine the appropriate long-term response to this threat. These responses will likely require additional funding. But the money requested now would allow the Postal Service to take immediate short-term steps to secure the mail as it continues to examine other long-term options.

I urge you to allow the Obey amendment to be in order. This is an important issue that deserves an up or down vote.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Henry A. Waxman". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Government Reform