

(April 19, 2007) Leaders Hope Mail Service Will Improve

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Local political leaders are hopeful that recent publicity about poor mail service on the Southwest Side and steps being taken by the U.S. Postal Service to remedy it will lead to lasting improvements in service.

Cong. Dan Lipinski (D-3rd), joined by Ald. Michael Zalewski (23rd), convened two meetings in recent months with U.S. Postal Service representatives to discuss ongoing delivery problems in the 60638 ZIP code served by the Clearing Post Office.

Ald. Frank Olivo (13th) has also held meetings to discuss similar problems in his ward, which in addition to 60638, takes in the 60629 and 60652 ZIP codes served by the Chicago Lawn and Ashburn post offices.

One recent study found mail service in Chicago to be among the worst in the country, and Lipinski recently released a statement welcoming U.S. Postmaster General John Potter's proposal to improve mail service here by hiring new letter carriers and improving delivery procedures.

Lipinski's statement also called on the independent Inspector General for the U.S. Postal Service to conduct an evaluation and audit of the situation and recommend options for improving service.

Lipinski said he was pleased that Potter "has responded to the continuing mail delivery problems in Chicago. Over the last several months, I have heard complaint after complaint from my constituents concerning very poor mail service.

"People are waiting weeks for overdue deliveries of essential items, such as prescription drugs and checks. I have worked closely with local elected officials... and met with local Postal Service officials to advocate for improvements.

Lipinski also noted that he had sent a letter to Inspector General David Williams calling for a full evaluation of the Chicago-area mail delivery problems.

"I look forward to reviewing the results of this outside evaluation once it is completed," he said.

"At the same time, we have all heard past pronouncements and past promises of improvements from local Postal Service officials. I am certainly hopeful that under (Potter's) leadership, and the new leadership of Chicago Postmaster Gloria Tyson, those words will not only mean action but also real results," for the millions of Chicago-area residents who depend on timely mail delivery, he added.

"It turns out that what I thought was only a problem on the Southwest Side was a problem all over the city," said Zalewski on Tuesday.

"This week I must have seen 10 carriers out there with supervisors accompanying them with clipboards, so they are obviously making sure the mail is being delivered properly," said the alderman.

USPS spokesman Mark Reynolds said the Postal Service contracts with an outside service to conduct regular audits of mail service in the city, and that work is ongoing.

He said that the supervisors recently seen accompanying local mail carriers are conducting another survey to make sure all the addresses on file are accurate.

One common complaint from residents is that mail is being delivered to wrong addresses.

And just this week, the campaign staff of 15th Ward aldermanic candidate Felicia Simmons-Stovall complained that brochures sent out to ward residents addressed to "registered voter" or "current occupant" were returned stamped "undeliverable."

"Without seeing the specific addresses I could not tell why they were undeliverable. This may be an example of us having the wrong addresses on file," said Reynolds.

Reynolds was non-committal when told the Simmons-Stovall staff suspected that union mail carriers may have returned the mail because Simmons-Stovall's opponent, Toni Foulkes, had strong union backing.

"I have no way of knowing that. But if the addresses were good, we would have to look into the situation further," said Reynolds.

Another common complaint of residents and business owners in recent months is that their mail was being delivered very late or not at all.

And USPS personnel said that was occurring because the post offices were short-staffed and some carriers had to help deliver mail on routes whose regular carriers were ill or on vacation.

And Reynolds said this week that the USPS is in the process of hiring 200 new carriers to solve the staffing problems.

"We hope to have them on the streets in a couple of weeks," said Reynolds.

"I think the residents have accepted the late deliveries and are just waiting for the announced improvements to be instituted," said Olivo on Tuesday.

He said he was glad to hear the Postal Service was hiring more carriers.

"(Late deliveries) were the biggest problem. I was surprised to hear that a carrier could be out sick for up to a year and no one would be hired to replace him," said Olivo.

He noted that Chicago postal authorities are asking all the wards to set up community advisory panels to deal with the postal issues, and his ward is forming one nLeaders Hope Mail Service Will Improve