



December 5, 2023

The Honorable Tina Smith
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510-2310

Dear Senator Smith:

This responds to your November 22 letter to Postmaster General Louis DeJoy, regarding postal operations in the Minnesota-North Dakota District.

I appreciate the opportunity to address some misinformation that has spread through the media and clarify our policies and operations. Let me begin by stating unequivocally that the U.S. Postal Service does not prioritize the delivery of mail or packages based on the customer or sender, including businesses such as Amazon. This is an unfortunate and inexplicable falsehood that I regret to see congressional offices also expressing publicly.

We frequently receive questions during the holiday peak season about the delivery of packages compared with other mail. The Minnesota-North Dakota District, and the Bemidji Post Office in particular, are now handling a larger volume of packages, including Amazon packages, than in months and years past. During our holiday peak season, package volume rises significantly across the nation. Because packages in general take up considerably more physical space than letter mail or flats, a period of high package volume (such as peak season) can lead to Post Office loading docks becoming overwhelmed with all manner of packages, which must be cleared for normal mail operations to resume. Thus, a high package volume always has the potential to interfere with the flow of letter mail, regardless of where those packages originated. The Postal Service Reform Act of 2022 codified that mail and packages must travel in an integrated network, to make the law consistent with our historic practice.

Fortunately, the Postal Service has well-established procedures and guidance to help every facility in the country prepare for the busiest time of the year. Moreover, the dedicated and knowledgeable employees of the Postal Service understand these logistics and have been working tirelessly to ensure we are prepared for the deluge of packages we process each holiday season. In the Minnesota-North Dakota District specifically, "hiring hubs" in major metropolitan areas have allowed the district to hire dozens of new employees since August, with dozens more in process. These hiring hubs have been so successful that we are looking to replicate them in other Minnesota cities. The district is also holding widespread job fairs; advertising on billboards, social media, and postal vehicles; and recruiting potential applicants at all postal stations through signage and business cards. As a result of these efforts, the district has received over 800 applications since September and has a steady stream of new employees onboarding each week.

Although the district's total complement is below its intended goal for peak season, please be aware that that complement shortfall is spread across two very large states, and service remains generally stable. Moreover, Minnesota-North Dakota District officials confirmed that for the most part, all mailpieces and packages, including in Bemidji, are being delivered daily. Some Post Offices are experiencing instances of delayed mail, which is typical during peak season, and we are mitigating and addressing those instances as they are identified. Additionally, contrary to misinformation reported in the media, the Human Resources Manager for the Minnesota-North Dakota District and the Bemidji Postmaster confirmed that we are regularly approving requests for scheduled sick leave.

I would also like to address the disappointing allegation in the media and to Members of Congress that Postal Service employees are not being paid appropriately for their work. As you know, Postal Service mail handlers, clerks, and mail carriers, who bear the heaviest burdens of peak-season volume increases, belong to national postal unions, and we have and will continue to pay these employees in accordance with each union's collective bargaining agreement. More specifically, rural carriers are paid a biweekly salary based on the characteristics and evaluation of their delivery route, such as the number of mailboxes served, mail and package volume, and mileage driven, rather than on the number of hours they work. These characteristics were last evaluated in October, before peak season began and before Amazon package volume grew in Bemidji, so some rural carriers are now working longer hours than they were previously. However, following the implementation of the Rural Route Evaluated Compensation System earlier this year, rural routes are now continuously evaluated, with the new evaluation relying on data from the previous six months. This compensation system was the subject of a collective bargaining agreement forged over some time and was negotiated and settled through arbitration with the National Rural Letter Carriers' Association. Thus, the current exceptional package volume for a route will factor into the route's new evaluation (and ultimately its pay), even if that volume wanes before the evaluation period ends. As mentioned, it is disappointing to hear that the compensation arrangement is being conflated with comments on package volume from a specific commercial source. We do not understand the motivation of spreading this kind of misinformation. It is our hope that our workforce and policymakers would be encouraging volume from all sources, including commercial customers, to help secure the financial recovery and future of the Postal Service.

Once again, I appreciate the opportunity to correct these misconceptions that have appeared in the media and are cited in your correspondence. Please know that dedicated postal workers across the Minnesota-North Dakota District are working diligently to ensure your constituents receive timely delivery of all mailpieces and packages, regardless of sender.

Thank you for writing.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Michael J. Gordon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Michael J. Gordon
Director, Government Liaison