

The most powerful tool the Federal government has to make our communities more livable is not necessarily a rule, regulation, or a mandate placed upon the public, but simply to play by the same rules as the rest of America, to have Federal agencies like the United States Post Office obey the same rules and regulations that we require homeowners and businesses to follow.

There are over 40,000 post offices across America. They are both the symbols of how we connect to one another and of a very real part of each and every community. Time and time again we find that the post office on Main Street anchors the business opportunity. It is a source of pride for people in local communities. Often it is an historic structure.

Each of these post offices is an opportunity for the Federal government to promote livability by being a more constructive partner. While there are many legitimate efforts and real progress by the postal service in some areas, I see too many examples where the post office has fallen short of the mark.

A good example is to be found in my own hometown of Portland, Oregon, where land use planning has been a hallmark for a generation. There is perhaps no American community that has worked harder to manage growth. Most recently, our community has finished a 20-40 growth plan to prepare for growth over the next 40 years. It involved over 17,000 citizens, businesses, and all the local governments for 5 years.

Yet, the postal service, with over 500 facilities in a fast-growing region, acknowledging that it is playing serious catch-up, made no attempt to coordinate its facilities with the planning of the rest of the community.

Knowing where growth would be concentrated in the years ahead would have enabled the postal service to make strategic facilities decisions in a way that would take advantage of change, rather than trying to continue to play catch-up. The Federal government cannot afford to pursue independent strategies on its own.

Opportunities in this case were lost for coordinated planning to avoid mistakes and save

money, time, and effort.

Too often the postal service uses its exemption from local land use laws to avoid making investments that would be prudent not just for the community but for its own customers. Again, in my own community, I had a post office under construction where the city received a communication from the postal service that they would not cooperate with us because they were immune from all local laws.

Despite the fact that any other business or the city itself would have been required to, for instance, put in pedestrian sidewalks, the postal service decided they would not even accede to this modest requirement. We got them to put in half the sidewalks only by threatening to block the entrance to their facility.

To assist the post office in partnering with communities, I have introduced the Community Partnership Act, which would require the postal service to obey local land use laws and planning laws and environmental regulations and to work with local citizens before they make decisions that could have a wrenching effect on communities.

It is ironic that our postal service gives the public more input into what version of the Elvis stamp we are going to print than on decisions that could be literally life or death for small town America.

I am pleased that our legislation, H.R. 670, has a Senate companion bill by Senators Baucus and Jeffords, and that they have attracted a broad coalition of supporters, including Governors, mayors, cities and counties, a host of preservation action groups, and I believe is the only environmental priority of both the National Association of Homebuilders and the Sierra Club.

With its 240 bipartisan sponsors, this bill would easily pass if it were brought to the floor for a vote. I will continue to work with the bill's supporters on and off the Hill, and hope that we can achieve floor action.

But in the meantime, I would hope that the leadership of this Chamber and the conferees on

the Postal-Treasury bill would at least include language that would encourage the postal service to, at a minimum, make public their capital plans for communities as a result of their 5-year capital investment plan.

In Blackshear, Georgia, last year, the public was notified that their post office might be moved in less than a month. The service management delivered the verdict that it would be closed, a new one would be built, and a new site was chosen on a highway away from town.

Now a great fight has ensued with the Rotary Club, the chamber of commerce, the American Legion, their local historical society, both the Republicans and the Democrats joining with over 1,000 postal patrons in opposing the move.

This type of pitched battle does not have to occur if the postal service would start working with our communities earlier. I would hope that this committee would bring its good offices together to encourage that common sense approach.