

Mr. Speaker, one of the most exciting issues that has arisen in this new year has been that of livable communities. It received prominence in the President's State of the Union address. Just this last week, on Friday, it was the feature article in the National Journal. The Saturday New York Times front page political memo had again an issue about livable communities. It is in large part an expression of how government can be a partner with citizens, with the business community, to try and really achieve what it is that Americans deeply care about because, at heart, Americans care when their children go out the door in the morning that they are safe, they want that family to be economically secure, they want them to be healthy physically and in terms of their environment.

One example of that partnership that can make a difference for livable communities is the impact that the local post office has on small and medium sized communities particularly around the country. The post office is a symbol of how we connect to one another. The mail collection and distribution is vitally important in terms of community dynamic. Time and time again we find that post office on Main Street is an anchor for that Main Street business activity; it is a source of pride for people in the local communities; often it is a historic structure.

Unfortunately, when it comes to the location of that service, historic post offices around the country are being in some cases removed from those historic downtown locations. In some cases they are being, the post office simply has not been the type of neighbor that our communities deserve, and it is sadly not unknown for the postal service to not play by the same rules that the Federal Government imposes on others.

I have a series of examples in my office where these historic outposts have abandoned historic downtown locations to be located in a strip mall at the edge of town, perhaps without any paved sidewalks. Many communities in, for example, Portland, Oregon, where I am from, there is a lot of work to try and plan for the future to be able to promote a more livable community, and in fact the Oregon planning model is heralded by some as the most advanced in the United States. But despite the notoriety, despite the outreach, the Postal Service, for instance, was completely clueless to the work that we have been doing in our community to plan facilities for the next 50 years. It does not have to be that way.

I am introducing legislation this week that would require the Post Office to obey local land use and planning laws, to have them work with the local communities before they make decisions that can have such a wrenching affect on the fabric of community. I find it ironic that in case after case the Post Office gives the public more input into what version of the Elvis stamp it is going to produce than decisions that really can be life and death for small town America.

We also have a provision in this bill that makes some minor technical adjustments over what we had in the previous session of Congress because we have been listening to people in the Postal Service and we want to give them necessary flexibility. We do not want it to be a straightjacket, but we do want it to be a model of how America can and should work.

I would hope that, as we are promoting livable communities around the country, that the Federal Government will lead by example, by acting the way we want other actors and actresses to behave to promote more livable communities. I would earnestly request that my colleagues join me in sponsoring this legislation to make the Postal Service a full partner in assuring the livability of America's communities.