

Mr. Speaker, as somebody who has worked for years on helping communities find ways to promote livability, I am excited to see the attention that has been accorded lately to the livable communities movement.

It is clear that we do not need a lot of new rules and regulations and mandates and stipulations to be able to make sure that we achieve that goal. It is indeed the simplest step for us to take for the Federal Government to just be a constructive partner with State, local governments and the private sector, working with them to make communities work better. One small but important step would be to have Federal agencies like the post office obey the same rules and regulations requirements that we require on homeowners and businesses.

There are over 40,000 post offices all across America who are these little outposts that bring communities together, and there are opportunities from coast to coast, border to border to be able to promote livable communities by being constructive partners. Unfortunately, the post office has not always lived up to that ideal. Today, in the USA Today, there is an article about Tully, New York, and their struggle with the post office. Last week, it was Byron, California, and Discovery Bay.

Now, I bring this forward not with any animosity toward the Postal Service. To the contrary. I think it is terrific that we can, for less than a dollar, send three handwritten letters all across the country, have them be delivered in a matter of days, that they are delivered by employees who give back to the community, who usually do not just give the postal service but they do so with a smile.

It is a critical function that helps unite and bring people together. In fact, main street post offices are one of the anchors of small town America that add to the business district, that add to the flavor of those communities; and, in fact, that is why it is so important that the post office be a good citizen and a full partner for livability.

That is why my legislation has been endorsed by the Trust for Historic Preservation, by main street associations representing small- and medium-sized businesses all across the country, why the National Governors Association is concerned about this, why the post office itself has recently declared a moratorium on closing and is readdressing its relationship with the community. They claim far fewer problems than in the past and that there is a new era under Postmaster Henderson.

I have met with the Postmaster General. I am impressed with his commitment, but I think the best way to express this commitment is to stop fighting this legislation and get behind it, to make clear its support for a new era of partnership.

Why should the post office be exempt from planning, zoning and building codes that homeowners and businesses in communities across the country must adhere to? Why, since the post office is such a critical part of our community, should the community not be as involved with potential relocation issues as they are in helping pick which version of the Elvis stamp we are going to have?

I have discussed on the floor of this House in the past problems we have had in Leon County, Florida, where the Postal Service decided that it would not abide by the same groundwater environmental standards for runoff on their parking lot as other private businesses; or where in Ball Ground, Georgia, the Postal Service was not going to abide by a comprehensive plan to help metropolitan Atlanta deal with its critical environmental problems.

Well, after making, as it were, a Federal case out of it, the personal intervention, I think, of the Postmaster General, it looks like we are moving towards resolution in Leon County, Florida, and in metropolitan Georgia. But it should not have to be a major battle. It is time for the post office to stop fighting this legislation. It is time for the post office to institutionalize with us to make sure that the Postal Service is a full partner for the next millennium of livable communities in America.

Mr. Speaker, this small step can lead the way for the Federal Government itself across the country to provide that sort of partnership for livability.