

Postal Service Wastes Parts Funds

By Jack Anderson

With President Ford calling for government austerity, we have decided to help him by keeping a watch on waste. We will publish reports from time to time on government extravagance.

Postmaster General Ted Klasmann, for example, ordered local postmasters to send postal vehicles to private garages for servicing. His idea, apparently, was to save the fuel it requires to drive the vehicles to government repair centers.

But the private garages unhappily have been charging up to 50 per cent more for parts and repairs. When the extra charges are multiplied by 103,000 postal vehicles, the result adds millions to the cost of delivering the mail.

To make matters worse, the 5,000 employees of the government garages are now sitting around with little to do.

We have obtained postal documents which show some of the price differences the taxpayers have underwritten. In Fort Lee, N.J., for instance, a private contractor charges \$3.50 for a gas-line filter that is available for 38 cents in government maintenance centers.

A battery in Teaneck, N.J., set the taxpayers back \$44.90. The same battery costs only \$17.86 in government garages. The taxpayers also got stuck with a \$58 bill for two new universal joints, which were available at government garages for \$4.12.

We made spot checks in Detroit, Los Angeles and other cities, where we found similar examples. All across the nation, apparently, the taxpayers are paying excessive repair charges.

We also have found evidence of waste in the "star routes" which link post offices in different cities with airpost terminals and other transportation outlets. Private contractors move the mail over about 14,000 star routes at an annual cost over \$262 million.

Government auditors concluded after an investigation that 16 of 85 star routes in Illinois could be eliminated, saving about \$185,000, not to mention 88,000 gallons of fuel.

The Illinois example, according to our information, is typical of the waste in other states. Since the 85 routes which the auditors investigated represent less than 1 per cent of all star routes, the waste could be staggering.

Mail delivery, meanwhile, is deteriorating.

Footnote: Postal spokesmen say they are taking corrective action to straighten out the star routes and the maintenance mess.

CHINA TRIP—A congressional delegation, headed by Sen. J.W. Fulbright (D-Ark.), has just returned from mainland China, where it made headline news.

Now, constitutional authorities tell us that the study mission may have been illegal, because it was financed largely by the Chinese.

The Constitution states unequivocally that no federal employee shall accept any "emolument . . . of any kind from any King, Prince or Foreign State."

The House Ethics Committee was recently asked to interpret this clause. Concluded the committee: "Acceptance of travel or living expenses in specie or in kind by a member or employee of the House of Representatives from any foreign government, official or representative thereof is . . . prohibited."

Apparently, the Senate leadership was unimpressed by the House action which, incidentally, was endorsed by the General Accounting Office and the State Department.

In a memo quietly circulated, Senate Democratic leader Mike

Mansfield and Republican leader Hugh Scott claimed that "participation [in foreign-paid trips] is in the interest of the Senate and the federal government and the nation."

The Senate leaders noted that their own Ethics Committee didn't prohibit such trips. Since the constitutional ban provides no penalty clauses, Senators apparently feel free to accept the hospitality of foreign governments.

WASHINGTON WHIRL—With departure of former President Nixon and his top aides apparently no one is left at the White House who recognizes all the voices on the Nixon tape recordings. This makes it difficult for the White House to transcribe the conversations demanded by the courts. . . . Judge John J. Sirica, who took pains to make a study of the voices, is able to recognize them . . . There are more than 900 Nixon tapes, filed only by dates. It is a staggering task, therefore, to pick out the specific conversations requested by the courts unless the dates are given . . . So many men have claimed that they once played football with President Ford that a former Ford aide told us he has now met "about 300 people who played football with him at Michigan."

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