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WASHINGTON REPORT
Congressman Edwin D. Eshleman

16th District—Pennsylvania



The postal crisis has been very much on the minds of all Americans in recent weeks. Any interruption of the mail service causes almost unbelievable disruption in the daily routine of our society. Movement of the mails is an absolutely essential activity in this country.

Business cannot operate, government cannot function, and millions of individual citizens are faced with emergency situations if the mails are not delivered. A postal strike naturally becomes a matter of wide concern.

The postal workers in the 16th Congressional District merit the praise of all of us for their recognition of responsibility in the face of the mail crisis. When confronted by emotional pleas to act upon grievances by walking off the job, postal employees in Lancaster County, Lebanon County and Middletown elected to keep working. In so doing, they set an example of dedicated public service.

York and other cities the local letter carriers want (and deserve) better pay and better working conditions, but they recognized that there is a right way and a wrong way of seeking and attaining change.

The postal strike was wrong. It was illegal, violating both the letter of the law and the spirit of an oath sworn by all federal employees. To condone the strike is to condone unlawful activity and faithlessness to a freely sworn statement.

In addition, the work stoppage was an obvious extension of a dangerous philosophy. That philosophy is something I call government by muscle which simply means that a group wanting something attempts to pressure the Congress regardless of the consequences to the rest of the society.

Congress was a target of postal pressure. While intimidation is the worst possible way, and usually the least productive way, of approaching any legislative body, in the case of

the mail crisis Congress was not faultless.

Legislation for raising postal pay had languished in a congressional conference committee for months. In fact, the House of Representatives passed the postal pay bill last October. The Senate passed its own version of the legislation in December thus setting the stage for a conference to work out the differences between the two proposals.

The conferees first met in March of this year. Small wonder that the postal workers became frustrated by inactivity that seemed to border on unconcern.

Yet, the postal crisis is just one more issue where Congress has been too slow to act. On issue after issue, inactivity has been the principal reaction on Capitol Hill.

I cannot help but think that this inaction is tied to the ineffectiveness of the old timers who run the Congress. There are 21 committees in the House and 19 of the 21 committee chairmen are in their 60's, 70's, or 80's. This year three chairmen will be in their 80's, seven in their 70's and nine in their 60's.

The vitality of Congress is bound to be affected by the overwhelming number of graybeards at the top, and the lack of vitality is translated into a lack of action on many matters, including those as serious as the postal situation.

I think it is important to say again that we owe the postal workers in the 16th District a debt of gratitude. They certainly will be deserving of the benefits settled upon in the present negotiations.

And, let us hope that their example of responsible public service will help to prevent another postal crisis in the future.

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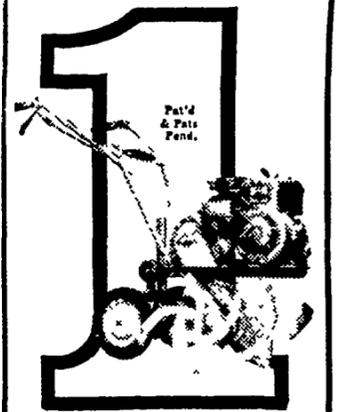
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