

News from Senator

BOB DOLE



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NINE-DIGIT ZIP CODE SHOULD BE VIEWED SKEPTICALLY

WASHINGTON -- Senator Bob Dole (R.-Kansas) says he is skeptical about the post office's plans to institute a nine-digit zip code. The Senator recently told his colleagues in the Senate that, "The Energy, Nuclear Proliferation and Federal Services Subcommittee recently held hearings on the postal service's plan to implement a nine-digit zip code. This proposal would cost both the government and private business hundreds of millions of dollars, and deserves the careful scrutiny of Congress. In addition, this is the type of proposal which angers and frustrates the people we represent. Such seemingly unimportant matters touch our constituents many times each day, and foster frustration at government overkill," Dole said.

Numerical Proliferation

"Mr. Bolger has said that this system will be voluntary, that individual citizens will not be asked or expected to use nine digits in their personal correspondence. I take him at his word, for I think it is clear that Americans will not stand for or comply with such a directive. It is too much to ask of our constituents to tolerate the silly inconvenience of numerical proliferation, and if this plan should be implemented for heavy mail users, I think it is important that this not become the first step towards a requirement that all of us use the nine-digit zip when we write home," said Dole.

Cost to Business

"My primary concern lies with the cost to businessmen of gearing up for the nine-digit zip code. By all accounts it will cost businessmen and non-profit corporations up to a billion dollars to convert their mailing lists. A quick telephone survey of businessmen and newspapers in my state of Kansas confirms the great expense of this change, running in the thousands of dollars for each business. Telephone conversations also reveal another fact -- not many businesses intend to comply if they have a choice. If the nine digits are to be voluntary, as Postmaster General Bolger states, I am not sure enough businesses will use nine-digits to justify the purchase of hundreds of millions of dollars in new postal equipment," Dole said.

"But the use of the new, longer zip code will not be voluntary. In his letter of November 17, Mr. Bolger says the following:

This voluntary participation factor makes it difficult for the postal service to estimate the cost impact of the implementation of this program on business mailers. However, the postal service will offer appropriate rate incentives to those mailers to encourage participation.

"Translated, this means that large mailers will have to pay higher postal rates if they don't agree to use all nine digits. This is hardly 'voluntary'. The postal service will penalize those who cannot afford to comply with its new system.

"Given the pressure the postal service is going to bring to bear on businessmen to spend thousands of dollars in making the conversion, we had better be certain that the post office's savings will heavily outweigh the cost to the private sector. I see no need for this country's taxpayers to pay half a billion dollars a year in converting so that the postal service can save half a billion dollars in expenses," Dole said.

"While I am skeptical that the nine-digit zip code can be justified, few of us in the Senate have irrevocably made up our minds. But the burden is on the postal service, and the benefits must be clear," said Senator Dole.

"Finally, I hope that the Congress can develop a consensus. The House Governmental and Individual Rights Subcommittee held hearings in September, but according to its chairman the Committee came away with 'more uncertainties than answers'. We need answers, and if the case of nine digits remains uncertain, we should block implementation," Dole said.