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NEWS from U.S. Senator Bob Dole

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DOLE OPPOSES GAO RECOMMENDATION OF POSTAL SERVICE

WASHINGTON, D.C.--Senator Bob Dole today expressed opposition to a recommendation by the U.S. General Accounting Office which calls for accelerated closings of 3rd and 4th class rural post offices. Dole pointed out that the \$100 million anticipated savings was relatively insignificant in comparison to the total \$2.3 billion deficit realized by the Postal Service in 1974, and he called for further Congressional study before such action is taken.

"When you consider that some two million families would be affected by the suggested closing of approximately 12,000 additional rural post offices, the relative benefits of the small savings deserve careful scrutiny," Dole said. "On the basis of the information we now have, I would have to oppose any immediate implementation of the recommendation."

The GAO report to Congress was made June 4, recommending that the U.S. Postal Service should "accelerate" its moves to close 3rd and 4th class rural post offices, many of which regularly operate at a deficit. GAO officials believe that Congress should amend the 1971 Postal Reorganization Act to give the Postal Service clear authority to substantially speed up the closings, provided there will be "no decline" in mail service to rural customers.

Dole called the report "useful" on the general subject of postal service deficit operations, but expressed doubts about its recommendations.

"The central problem involved here," Dole said, "relates to who decides whether the substituted mail service is as good, and at what point? The letters

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I've been receiving from rural residents in Kansas indicate that substituted service is not as good, and I don't see how accelerating the process of closing the small post offices is going to improve the record.

When Congress enacted the Postal Reorganization Act in 1971, it stipulated the Postal Service must provide "prompt, reliable and efficient services to customers in all areas." It further directed that, "No small post office shall be closed solely for operating at a deficit." Under this provision, the Postal Service has proceeded cautiously in the closing of rural post offices. GAO officials want Congress to reword the provision in such a way that the Postal Service will have a clear mandate to proceed with closings more rapidly where it feels that equivalent mail service can be substituted, by rural route extension or contractor-operated community post offices.

The GAO report indicates that the Postal Service is now applying the closing provision "restrictively, requiring stringent criteria in addition to economy to be met before an office can be considered for conversion." The report also states that increased Postal Service costs are largely attributable to rising salary costs, which have more than doubled since 1968.

In light of these facts," Dole said, "it would seem that Congress should take a close and careful look at the principal reasons for the Postal Service deficit before revising its Act of 1971." Senator Dole suggested the Senate Post Office and Civil Service Committee should consider holding hearings on the revision, in order to hear differing opinions on the matter.