

Select Committee on Modernization of Congress

Hearing 10/31/2019: *Congress and the Frank: Bringing Congressional Mailing Standards into the 21st Century*

Testimony of Rep. Rodney Davis

Chairman Kilmer, Vice Chairman Graves thank you for allowing me to testify in my capacity as the former Chairman of the Franking Commission. Last Congress as Chair of the Commission I was able to work with Rep. Susan Davis and others to make some meaningful strides in improving the Franking process. For example, we were able to make the submission process 100% online by getting rid of paper forms, digitizing everything which has made it easier for Member office's day to day use. But there is much more to do in reforming the process, bringing the rules that govern the Franking process into the 21st Century, and most importantly, there is finally an appetite on both sides to roll up our sleeves and make some improvements.

Rep. Steil who was appointed by Leader McCarthy to serve on the Franking Commission this year has done a terrific job so far and together we are encouraged by the recent bipartisan negotiations to make substantial changes to the Franking rules and process, some of which were highlighted by current Chairwoman Davis in her testimony. The three main buckets that we are focusing on making improvements are: speed of approval; transparency; and developing regulations that work for 21st Century communication platforms.

Let me outline a few of the reasons why these reforms are in such need. First, the existing regulations are burdensome and bureaucratic, we are literally measuring the size of pictures and counting the number of times the letter “I” is used. Staff precedent has not been updated in the regulations which makes it hard for staff and members to understand and follow the rules. It’s hard to follow rules, that are not written down and transparent. I also think we should re-visit when Franking is needed, what should be Franked and the appropriate consequences if the rules are not followed. Does it make sense that a Facebook ad going to 500 people at a cost of \$20 is subject to the same review as a physical mailer going to 100,000 people at the cost of \$50,000? Furthermore, the expectation of privacy is not the same as it was ten years ago and as a result, we support increased transparency standards for Franking. I believe that with greater transparency comes a check and balance with constituents and the American taxpayer that should replace the role of staff here in DC measuring pictures and counting “I’s”.

Finally, as the members of this committee contemplate recommendations keep in mind three things: members need to send communications to their constituents; reasonable regulations are necessary to prevent abuse; and finally, that regulations and guidance need to be transparent, accessible, and easy to understand. Beyond those basic premises I encourage the members to think bold and outside the box, new ideas are welcomed.