

(This is from the Congressional Research Service)

## Federal law relating to rural post offices

While Congress designed the USPS to be a self-supporting entity, the nation's legislature also requires the USPS to serve the public as a whole. This "public service obligation," as it often is termed, is located in the PRA's chapters on "postal policy" (39 U.S.C. 101) and the USPS's "general authority" (39 U.S.C. 403):

\* "The United States Postal Service shall be operated as a basic and fundamental service provided to the people by the Government of the United States, authorized by the Constitution, created by [an] Act of Congress, and supported by the people. The Postal Service shall have as its basic function the obligation to provide postal services to bind the Nation together through the personal, educational, literary, and business correspondence of the people. It shall provide

prompt, reliable, and efficient services to patrons in all areas and shall render postal services to all communities" (39 U.S.C. 101(a)); and

\* "The Postal Service shall provide a maximum degree of effective and regular postal services to rural areas, communities, and small towns where post offices are not self-sustaining. No small post office shall be closed solely for operating at a deficit, it being the specific intent of the Congress that effective postal services be insured to residents of both urban and rural communities" (39 U.S.C. 101(b)).

Congress also assigned the USPS the general duties to

\* "receive, transmit, and deliver throughout the United States, its territories and possessions ... written and printed matter, parcels, and like materials and provide such other services incidental thereto as it finds appropriate to its functions and in the public interest... (39 U.S.C. 403(a)); and

\* "establish and maintain postal facilities of such character and in such locations, that postal patrons throughout the Nation will, consistent with reasonable economies of postal operations, have ready access to essential postal services" (39 U.S.C. 403(b)).

Additionally, Congress has underscored the USPS's duty to serve less densely populated areas by including a provision in annual appropriation laws that reads, "none of the funds provided in this Act shall be used to consolidate or close small rural and other small post offices in [this] fiscal year."