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CONGRESSMAN'S REPORT

by

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NO JUNK MAIL FOR CONGRESSMEN!

In the recent postal rate debate I said that the housewives of America were tired of being made a conveyor belt between the mailbox and the wastebasket. The House voted for substantial increases in third class rates (the category for advertising circulars). If the new provisions are approved by the Senate, an extra \$108 million in revenues will have to be paid by the direct mail advertisers and much will have been done to halt the flow of "junk mail" and to close the gaping postal deficit.

Now a new type of "junk mail" is moving through Postmaster General Day's system. And the faces of many Congressmen are a little red, as I think they should be.

Some of my colleagues are beginning to take advantage of a new provision in the postal laws allowing Congressmen to send speeches, etc., addressed only to "Postal Patron." For example, I could but won't send a speech to every household and business in Tucson merely by giving the Tucson post office a sufficient number of copies in envelopes marked "Postal Patron." Furthermore, I could send these speeches under the Congressional franking privilege--no postage.

This new law was attached as a "rider" to a completely unrelated bill, and it passed the House after 2:00 a.m. September 26, minutes before we adjourned. Most of the Congressmen didn't even know we were being asked to approve such a radical change in Congressional mailing rights. Had such a provision been openly presented to the House, I would have strongly opposed it. Had there been a roll-call vote, I am sure the measure would have been defeated.

Of course, there are some arguments in favor of "Postal Patron" mail. For example, the mailman merely places one item in each box, without having to laboriously sort out the right envelope for each address. For years, it has been possible to send material to persons free in rural areas without addressing each envelope. The new "Postal Patron" service extends this painless movement of Congressional "wisdom" to urban areas.

Back in 1934-35 and again in 1953-54, the Post Office Department adopted regulations whereby commercial third class mailers could send out circulars without any addresses. Cries from angry housewives ended this practice in both instances.

Many people object to having their mailboxes cluttered by advertising material. I sympathize with them. Furthermore, I feel that if junk-mailing privileges are bad for commercial interests, then they are as bad or worse for Congressmen. I intend to do something about it and will join with some other Congressmen of both parties in introducing bills to repeal this new--and I think generally unpopular--privilege.

P.S. Many frustrated citizens have asked me what they, as individuals, can do to halt the flow of advertising mail. While I would hesitate to recommend such a measure, I will pass on what one harried housewife tells me she is doing. She opens the inspection flap, removes the customary business reply card, pastes the card on the outside of the original envelope, marks it "Air Mail" and mails the envelope with all its contents to the sender. She also writes a message on the envelope to the effect that she does not want the firm's merchandise and wishes her name removed from its mailing list.

Of course, such a method of response hits the mailing business in the pocketbook, where it hurts most, and I can imagine that repetition of this housewife's technique would prompt advertisers to purge their lists of such obstreperous "characters." Since most direct mail advertising can show a profit if only 1 or 2 percent of addressees place an order, this unexpected expense would upset their operations. In fact, if this idea really got around, I can imagine it would end "junk mail" for good.