

The Delray Democrat

How to Destroy the Post Office¹

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Why does the Republican Party want to destroy the United States Postal Service? The Postal Service is a government agency; isn't that reason enough?

In what passes for a theory of government in the modern Republican Party, the goal is to reduce government to a size where it can be "drowned in a bathtub." That countless Americans may be drowned as well is of little concern to a Party whose existence depends upon pleasing the obscenely wealthy: "Leave the money on the table, and no kissing."

In a grotesque parody of Dwight D. Eisenhower's warning that "Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed," the Republican Party's paymasters view every dollar spent on Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, or the Affordable Care Act as a dollar taken from them.

Enacted by Democrats over furious Republican opposition, these programs enjoy substantial support because they are lifesavers. Not for want of effort, Republicans have been unable to eliminate them.

The Postal Service is the latest government program on the chopping block. Contrary to Republican claims, the Postal Service is not a victim of its own inefficiency but rather of Republican malfeasance. It is a living example of the old quip that "Republicans campaign on the theme that government doesn't work, and then they get elected and prove it."

Republicans controlled both Houses of Congress as well as the White House in 2005. After Democrats took control of both Houses of Congress in 2006, Republicans passed a bill in the lame-duck session that imposed crippling burdens on the Postal Service, including a requirement to pre-fund its employees' pension and healthcare costs for 75 years at an annual cost of \$5 billion over the following 10 years. No other company is subject to such a requirement.

The law also prohibited the Postal Service from raising regular mail rates by more than the Consumer Price Index. This inhibited its ability to respond to spikes in fuel and healthcare costs. It was also a gift to competitors, who had lobbied for the legislation and took advantage of the lower rates by contracting out some of their own deliveries to the Postal Service. In the year prior to passage of the bill, the Postal Service reported nearly \$1 billion in profits. It has been losing money ever since.

There are two additional reasons the Postal Service is in Republican crosshairs. Most immediate

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is the fact a substantial percentage of votes in November will be cast by mail, and high turnout almost always favors Democrats.

Second, the Postal Service is unionized, so its employees (disproportionately people of color and women) earn a living wage with decent benefits. Having all but destroyed unions in the private sector, Republicans have been targeting public sector unions for the last decade. Now they sense an opportunity to hobble if not destroy the Postal Workers union.

In February 2020, the House passed a bipartisan bill that would undo the damage from the 2005 bill, but it will die in the Senate. Sensing an opportunity to realize its proposal to privatize the Postal Service, Trump is insisting that a \$10 billion loan will be contingent on approval by the Treasury Department.

Although Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin has exercised no oversight over the businesses that have already received \$500 billion in bailout funds, and refuses even to divulge their names, he is threatening draconian concessions as a condition of his approval.

APWU President Mark Dimondstein eloquently and appropriately [responded](#) to these threats as follows:

Postal workers provide an absolutely essential service to everyone in the country – no matter how rich or poor we are or where we live. During this pandemic, postal workers have continued to bind the nation together and deliver essential medicine, supplies and information to a public that is confined to their homes. At a time when the country needs us now more than ever, Mnuchin and his Wall Street cronies are attempting to exploit the crisis to raise prices, demonize heroic postal workers and cut service, all so private delivery companies can profit. It's a power grab. Shame on them.