

# Ending Saturday delivery is just one way to save itself while House, Senate are all tied up.

(Photo: Brett T. Roseman for USA TODAY)

## Story Highlights

- Ending Saturday mail delivery would cut costs by \$2 billion a year.
- 70% of Americans are OK with giving up Saturday mail delivery to help save the Postal Service.
- Yet Congress has repeatedly objected, but it also doesn't have a plan to reform the Postal Service.

Anyone who pays bills online, or sent an electronic Valentine's Day greeting instead of a card, should understand why the U.S. Postal Service is in deep trouble. But Congress is standing in the way of the service's efforts to save money — and itself.

Though members of Congress often claim they want the post office to function like a business, they veto exactly the sort of tough decisions a corporate executive would make. In the week since the Postal Service announced plans to end Saturday mail delivery, effective Aug. 10, numerous lawmakers have condemned the plan and vowed to block it.

They had the same reaction last year to the Postal Service's proposal to close thousands of smaller, money-losing post offices. Postal officials compromised by keeping the offices open while cutting their hours, but the service continues to hemorrhage money.

It has maxed out a \$15 billion line of credit from the Treasury, and hasn't had any direct taxpayer funding since the early 1980s. And although most of last year's net loss came from prepayments for retiree benefits — a clumsy mandate that Congress imposed in 2006 — the core business is also deeply in the red thanks to continuing steep declines in first-class mail.

With the service bleeding \$25 million a day, something has to change. And fast.

One of those things is six-day-a-week mail service. In the Internet era, Saturday delivery has become yet another nice-to-have benefit that Americans can live without. The plan to end it, except for packages, would save \$2 billion a year.

Polls show that almost three-quarters of Americans favor that tradeoff, but Congress has repeatedly objected, attaching provisions to spending bills to prohibit postal officials from acting on their own.

If lawmakers want to do something productive, they could pass a broad plan for saving national mail delivery. But they can't. Year after year, postal officials sound the alarm and urge enactment of a comprehensive bill to let the agency to save money. And year after year, Congress dawdles, unwilling to do one of its most basic jobs.

Last year, for example, Republican House leaders said they just couldn't find the time to bring a Postal Service reorganization bill to the floor — at the same time they were scheduling the 33rd vote to repeal ObamaCare.

At a Senate committee hearing on Wednesday, Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe begged senators not to renew the legal provision that bars the Postal Service from acting on Saturday delivery. He shouldn't have to beg. Lawmakers who won't make tough choices themselves have a lot of nerve criticizing the Postal Service for trying to preserve itself.

Sen. Tom Coburn, R-Okla., put his finger on the problem. "There's really 536 postmaster generals," Coburn said, referring to the 100 senators and 435 representatives telling Donahoe how to do his job. "The goal ought to be that there's one. The fact is, the post office is in trouble."

That's a message that needs to be delivered every day of the week.

*\* This our view has been updated to reflect the print version in the Feb. 15 edition.*

# **This will hurt Postal Service's future as well as tens of millions of Americans.**

(Photo: Dean Hoffmeyer, AP file photo)

The effort by Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe to end Saturday mail delivery is a non-starter on many levels.

**OUR VIEW:** Postal Service just trying to save itself

First, he lacks the legal authority to do this. Decisions on delivery schedule are the purview of Congress, and every year for the past 30 years, America's elected representatives have mandated six-day delivery — a requirement remaining in force today.

Mr. Donahoe isn't above the law. Further, his attempted power grab flouts the political will of Congress; as recently as the last session, which ended in January, a bipartisan majority of representatives co-sponsored measures backing continuation of Saturday delivery.

It's not surprising that many lawmakers have questioned Mr. Donahoe's legal overreach, or that his explanations are so evasive.

On the merits, it's a disastrous idea. The postmaster general proposes trading 17% of service for 2% in savings — an irrational business plan. Indeed, when the USPS asked the agency's overseer, the Postal Regulatory Commission, in 2011 to support ending six-day delivery, this illogic was one of the factors cited by the commission in declining to endorse the plan.

So, too, was the finding that the savings were wildly inflated. The commission also noted that ending Saturday delivery would disproportionately affect the elderly, rural communities and small businesses. Those small businesses create more than two-thirds of all jobs in this country, and forcing them to hire expensive private contractors on weekends would impose new costs.

So ending Saturday delivery would jeopardize the USPS' future by sacrificing its competitive advantage, hurt tens of millions of Americans — and it wouldn't even solve the agency's financial woes.

That's because most of the red ink has nothing to do with postal operations. Rather, 80% of the red ink stems directly from the 2006 congressional mandate that the Postal Service do something no other agency or company is required to do: pre-fund future retiree health benefits. That mandate accounted for \$11.1 billion in red ink in fiscal 2012 alone.

The postmaster general should address that problem, rather than seeking to override his authority by eviscerating a network that provides residents and businesses with the world's most efficient and affordable delivery service while uniting this vast country.

*Fredric Rolando is the president of the National Association of Letter Carriers.*

*\* This opposing view has been updated to reflect the print version of the Feb. 15 edition.*