

Postmaster General testifies before a Senate Committee on mail crisis

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Reports and images from around the country of torn postboxes, dismantled mail processing machines, live animals delivered dead and the delayed shipments of medicine to elderly and veterans have ignited widespread public outrage. It is now very clear that the drive to wreck an institution older than the United States itself, to justify its privatization and sale to profit-driven corporations, is proceeding at a rapid pace.

The USPS expects to run out of cash by 2021, but it is the delivery crisis, particularly its potential impact on the US elections, which has created a deadlock in Congress, with the Democratic-controlled House passing a bill to provide an additional \$25 billion in funding and the Senate Republicans expected to reject it.

President Donald Trump recently denounced this appropriation effort, initiated partly to offset the losses caused by the coronavirus crisis and partly to insure proper functioning during an election in which mail ballots will be critical. Trump claimed, “This is all another HOAX by the Democrats to give \$25 billion unneeded dollars for political purposes without talking about the Universal Mail-in Ballot scam ... that they are trying to pull off in violation of everything that our Country stands for.”

Postmaster General Louis DeJoy testified before an emergency session called by the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs on Friday. Two competing and false narratives were on display, with the Democrats blaming Trump and the Republicans as sole authors of the postal crisis, while the Republicans essentially denounced the USPS as “a sort of perhaps unfixable problem,” in the words of Senator Rand Paul, which required complete dismantling and privatization.

Republican committee chair Ron Johnson of

Wisconsin started the meeting off by pointing out that DeJoy was not a Trump appointee, but rather had been chosen by “the bipartisan Postal Board of Governors.” All of these governors, however, whether Democratic or Republican, were appointed by Trump.

Ranking Democrat Gary Peters scolded DeJoy over the impact of the policies he has implemented since taking the reins in the spring. He revealed that his office had received over “7500 reports of delays from Michigan and around the country in less than two weeks. They have written to me about skipping doses of their medication and their small businesses losing customers or having to lay off employees, all because of changes that you directed.”

Among the changes instituted by DeJoy were an effective ban on overtime, leading to the piling-up of mail in facilities and lengthy delays.

As the WSWs had reported earlier on the hiding of COVID-19 deaths and infections at USPS by management, it was further revealed over the course of the meeting that the USPS leadership is hiding important data which reveal the internal operations of the Post Office.

DeJoy contradicted himself throughout the meeting. He claimed at one point, “We serve 161 million people. We still deliver at 99.5 percent of the time. We have significant efforts to continue to improve on that process,” and then later, “I won’t go as far as to not say that we had maybe a four or five percent hit on our service level for delayed, all sorts of mail, marketing mail, everything, because it got stuck on a dock and we’re drastically bringing that down.”

He even stated at one point, “Theoretically everyone should have gotten their mail faster.”

The Republican Senators received DeJoy with great fanfare and admiration, with former Florida governor

and now Senator Rick Scott introducing DeJoy with, “can you just talk about why you’re uniquely qualified” to lead the USPS and, “How does it make you feel when you have people make these unsubstantiated claims that you personally have a goal to slow down the mail?”

DeJoy is a major GOP donor, according to FEC Data since 2016 he has given roughly \$1.2 million to the Trump Victory Committee and the Republican National Committee each alongside smaller contributions to Republican House and Senate Candidates. Simultaneously, according to a report by *USA Today*, he and his wife may claim up to a total \$75,815,000 in assets from US Postal Service competitors.

Republican Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky inadvertently suggested the reality of the situation by asking DeJoy, “If you came in as a venture capitalist and a venture capitalist group took over the post office and named you CEO what would you do that you are unable to do because it’s a government agency?”

DeJoy thanked Paul for the question and answered, “Number one, the legislative reform that I would ask is what I said in my written testimony and opening remarks on integration of Medicaid and pension reform. I would like to be kind of liberated on pricing, it’s a very, very competitive market out there now. I would like more pricing freedom.”

The Postal Service Reform Act of 2018 was a bipartisan bill which had aimed to achieve part of what is outlined, the bill would have led to a retiree paying an additional \$1,600 or more per year in Medicare premiums, according to National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association President Richard G. Thissen.

Senator Paul called for further assaults on postal services to his own rural constituents, declaring, “We also need to look at—the easiest way to continue personalized service to each person individually at their house would be to do it less frequently, and frankly, people who live 20 miles down a shell road, if you told them they were going to get twice a week versus six times a week, I think we’d actually live with this.”

In the almost two-hour meeting, a critical element missing was any discussion on DeJoy’s move to centralize his leadership and create a new department responsible for sorting mail during an election cycle, which will be largely decided through mail-in ballots.

Senator Kamala Harris, who is a part of the Senate committee, decided to spend her time on the campaign trail rather than question an individual who may have conspired against her campaign. This only demonstrates the unseriousness of the Democrats’ posturing as defenders of democracy against Trump.

In stark contrast to the duplicitous role of the Democrats, who are equally as responsible for the manufactured crisis at USPS, postal workers in Wenatchee and Seattle-Tacoma in Washington have restored into service dismantled mail-sorting units. Workers in Dallas, Texas, have ignored the USPS’ directives.

The Senate hearing was largely political theater. Much noise was made about the \$25 billion which USPS needs in order to maintain its function of providing essential items such as life saving medicine to all Americans, but no such noise was made in regards to the \$738 billion budget to the US military approved last year, with even the so-called socialist Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez voting in favor.



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