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The 2020 Election won't destroy the Post Office

Remember when institutions like the Post Office were non-partisan? Over the past weeks, media outlets have reported fears and accusations of sabotage about the USPS and mail-in voting for the 2020 presidential election. Some quick facts may help in the midst of the political noise.

The Postmaster General is not a Trump appointee. He was unanimously selected by the non-partisan Postal Board of Governors just a few months ago. The Post Office can handle a surge of millions of pieces of first class mail in a short time period; have you ever heard of Christmas cards? Right now, USPS has the largest amount of cash on hand it has ever had. It's still in the hole, but it's certainly not collapsing. Yes, things are changing at the post office, but can you think of a place in our country that isn't?

There are six individuals who serve on the Postal Board of Governors, all of which require confirmation by the Senate. When the board has a quorum, it can make major financial and operational recommendations and review proposed decisions by USPS leadership. But during the Obama Administration, the USPS went through a long period in which it didn't have a quorum of governors to weigh in on its financial and operational challenges. Senate Republicans and President Trump prioritized appointing the board to finally get a quorum. In a season of very challenging Senate appointments, all six of the Board of Governors passed overwhelmingly, and they finally have a working quorum again. The Board of Governors did a national search for a new Postmaster General, and then unanimously hired Postmaster General DeJoy. The convenient conspiracy theory the left is pushing that the President brought in a new Postmaster to secretly undercut the election is just not true.

Budget issues and reforms have been a long time coming for the post office. In the 90s, email quickly started taking the place of first class mail. In 2010 the post office handled over 78 billion pieces of first class mail, but in 2019 that number fell to just under 55 billion pieces. Fewer letters means fewer stamps, which means less revenue for USPS from its primary revenue source. The USPS still sees itself as a letter-carrier service, even though its dominate revenue stream is packages. More needs to be done to clear out old sorting machines and restructure service around packages.

In 2006 Congress added to the problem with a misguided requirement for USPS to pre-fund pensions for its employees for three-quarters of a century, which set the USPS on an even more unsustainable financial path. Seeing consistent budget and operations issues over the past 15 to 20 years, Congress has discussed—but not actually passed—real USPS reform to protect our vital mail service. In other words, there are real problems at USPS, but they were not caused by COVID-19 and are not a clandestine plot by the President to steal the election.

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, USPS predicted it would lose over \$22 billion in 18 months, but that proved to not only be false, but enormously so. Yes, first class mail delivery is down, but package delivery is up. In fact, package volume is up over 50 percent this year, and the USPS has more than \$14 billion on hand, the largest amount they have ever had on hand. In addition, USPS has a \$10 billion line of credit from the CARES Act, just to make sure it will not run out of money this year. USPS isn't insolvent and not being bled dry.

It is true, many more Americans than usual are considering voting from home in the 2020 presidential election. Apparently some Americans don't want to stand in line to vote, even though they stand in line at the grocery store every week. Voting is their right, and it should be protected. But the belief that the post office can't handle an additional 100 million pieces of mail right before the November election, **ignores the fact** that last year during the week of December 16, the post office handled over 2.5 billion pieces of first class mail in one week. Additional ballots in late October are a minor bump compared to the surge of cards around Christmas and Mother's Day every year.

The USPS did proactively warn some states that their deadlines for absentee voting could be too close to November 3 for the increased number of people who may choose to vote by mail. Some states mail out their ballots using "marketing mail," which takes up to 10 days to arrive, but they allow voters to request ballots just seven days before the election. It was entirely appropriate for the USPS to remind states of the typical mail times and encourage them to get ballots out earlier this year. Oklahoma even created special green envelopes for absentee ballots to help our friends at the Postal Service process them as quickly as possible.

Earlier this week, photos went viral of locked mailboxes at a Burbank, California, post office. Immediately, accusations flew online that the Trump Administration had orchestrated the locked mailboxes to begin to dismantle mail-in voting. However, USPS quickly pointed out that the locks have been a security measure in place since 2016 and that the mailboxes were still operational using a mail slot on the other side. That's just one of many false social media stories that have widely circulated and been promoted to fan this fake news into a flame. Speaker Pelosi even encouraged her members to hold

press conferences around post offices to advance the false narrative, and many dutifully complied to spread panic about home medicine delivery, critical mail, and election ballots. Once again, a lie gets around the world seven times before the truth gets its boots on.

We should continue to encourage voters to get their ballots in early and push the USPS to enact operational measures consistent with other spikes in first class mail volume. The Postmaster General has already wisely agreed to suspend any previously agreed changes or operational reforms to avoid even the appearance of interfering in the election. But after the 2020 election, ongoing Postal Service reforms should continue, and we should continue looking for ways to keep our vital public mail service solvent. Politically engaged postal workers are free to share their presidential preferences off duty, but they should not use their position to influence the election. That undercuts trust in the Postal Service and denigrates one more place in American life that used to be non-partisan. For the first time ever, last week a person told me that they worried about mailing in their ballot this fall, because they didn't trust that their postman would deliver their ballot because of their political affiliation. That doesn't help our republic.

We have great people serving us every day in post offices around the nation. Let's get them the support they need, but we should not allow this to become an election-year political hot mess. People should get the facts before they believe everything they read on the internet.

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Source: Fox News