

The Postal Service Outrage

By: Dave Johnson - February 10, 2013

You are probably hearing that the Post Office is “in crisis” and is cutting back Saturday delivery, laying people off, closing offices, etc. Like so many other “crises” imposed on us lately, there is a lot to the story that you are not hearing from the “mainstream” media. (Please click that link.) The story of the intentional destruction of the U.S. Postal Service is one more piece of the story of crisis-after-crisis, all manufactured to advance the strategic dismantling of our government and handing over the pieces to billionaires.

Here are a few things you need to know about the Postal Service “crisis”:

The Postal Service is the second largest employer in the United States after Walmart. But unlike Walmart, which gets away with paying so little that employees qualify for government assistance, the Postal Service is unionized, pays reasonable wages and benefits and receives no government subsidies. (Good for them!)

Republicans have been pushing schemes to privatize the Postal Service since at least 1996. In 2006 Republicans in the Congress pushed through a requirement that the Postal Service pre-fund 75 years of retiree costs. The Postal Service has to pay now for employees who are not even born yet. No other government agency – and certainly no company – has to do this.

Unlike other government agencies (like the military) since 1970 the Postal Service is required to break even. Once more: the Department of Defense is not required to break even.

While required to break even the Postal Service has to deliver mail to areas that are unprofitable for private companies to operate in. A letter sent from a small town in Alaska is picked up and transported across the country to a farm in Maine for 46 cents. While the Internet and recession have eaten into some of the Postal Service's letter business, magazines, books, newsletters, prescriptions, advertising, DVD services like Netflix and many other services still depend on the Postal Service for delivery. And many people for one reason or another still send letters. In a democracy these people are supposed to count, too.

But along with requiring the Postal Service to break even, Congress has restricted the Service's ability to raise rates, enter new lines of business or take other steps to help it raise revenue. In fact, while detractors complain that the Postal Service is antiquated, inefficient and burdened by bureaucracy, the rules blocking the Postal Service from entering new lines of business do so because the Postal Service would have advantages over private companies. For example, Republicans in Congress forced the Postal Service to remove public-use copiers from Post Offices and even blocked the Postal Service from setting up a secure online system that allowed Americans to make monthly bill payments.

The Postal Service is a public service for We, the People, not a business. The Service is hamstrung by people who pretend it is supposed to compete and then won't let it. They won't help with taxpayer dollars and say it has to compete in the marketplace (again: the Department

of Defense is not required to break even.) Then they give it rules that no private company could survive. Then when it gets into trouble, say that government doesn't work, start laying people off, selling off the public assets, and saying it has to be "privatized" (so all the gains will go to a few already-wealthy people instead of to the public).

Manufacturing A Crisis

So Republicans have hamstrung the Postal Service, forcing it into "crisis" and are now "solving" the crisis by working towards dismantling and privatizing it. Here is how it works:

Require the Postal Service to "break even." (Again: the Department of Defense is not required to break even.)

Require them to serve all areas of the country. (Which is a service to democracy and should continue.)

Keep them from raising or lowering rates as needed.

Keep them from using their competitive advantages to compete with private businesses.

Require them to pre-fund 75 years of health benefits.

When the Postal Service has the inevitable resulting financial "crisis" complain about government and unions and demand their buildings be sold, employees laid off and the service be dismantled and given to private companies.

If you don't see the pattern yet, try this:

Cut taxes,

Double military spending,

Obstruct all efforts to fix things,

Wait a few years, then scream loudly about a "deficit crisis" and say we have to severely cut back on government — the things we do to make our lives better.

This is not the way an informed democracy is supposed to operate.

Part Of Bigger Assault On Government

The postal service "crisis" is just one more instance of the ongoing pattern of government by lies, hostage-taking and manufactured crises. This is one more assault on a government service.

The "fiscal cliff" was a manufactured crisis, engineered to force cutbacks in the things We, the People do to make our lives better. The "debt ceiling" was a manufactured crisis, engineered to force cutbacks in the things We, the People do to make our lives better. The 2010 "tax deal" was a manufactured crisis, engineered to force cutbacks in the things We, the People do to make our lives better. Etc., etc., on and on...

And the Postal Service "crisis" is one more manufactured crisis.

Not Governing, But Destroying Government

Republicans don't talk about governing, they talk about killing government, and when they get power they don't govern, they destroy government. They appoint industry lobbyists to agencies that are supposed to oversee their own industries — and they don't oversee their industries. They appoint polluters to the agencies that are supposed to protect us from pollution — and they let the companies pollute. And they appoint people who have called for getting government out of

areas like education, medical care, etc. to head up and dismantle those departments for the benefit of the companies they came from.

This is not the way our government is supposed to operate. This does not serve We, the People and does not help us make our lives better.

The Push To Privatize Public Assets

Privatization means dismantling government and public assets and turning them over to private companies. It involves “contracting out” or even ending the services that were performed by We, the People (government) to make our lives better. Instead these services are operated for profit, which the citizens (and certainly not the employees) share none of the gains.

To be clear about this: contracting out government services “saves money” by laying off people who have good wages with benefits, and rehiring them at minimum wage with no benefits, while removing the accountability that goes along with a government service. For example, when a city “contracts out” its garbage collection, what happens is all the city employees who had government jobs doing this work are laid off. The private company that contracts to do the service “saves money” by hiring employees at a much lower wage with no benefits. It doesn’t have to meet the standards of government agencies, doesn’t have to be transparent, doesn’t have to use well-maintained equipment, etc. Obviously the city employees and the places they used to shop are worse off, but their lower wages mean everyone else’s wages come under pressure, too. So the “money saved” comes at a great cost to the public.

This same process occurs in all instances of privatizing or “downsizing” government. The public receives less service, wages generally are lowered, but a few people make a bundle at the expense of the rest of us.