



Ralph Nader Wants You to Save the Post Office

By [Devin Leonard](#)

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Ralph Nader, the consumer advocate and presidential candidate, has inundated the U.S. Postal Service for decades with suggestions. Even in better times, he was concerned that American citizens were being short changed by the agency, which lost \$5 billion last year, thanks to the proliferation of e-mail and the added burden of having to pre-pay its retiree health benefits. Today, Nader is more adamant than ever that stamp buyers should have a say in the USPS's fate. He talked to me about how to fix the USPS post office and how he relishes going to the post office.

Why are you so interested in the U.S. Postal Service?

Well, it's a very important government service. It's been relentlessly attacked by the Cato Institute and Heritage Foundation types and there's really nobody defending it. Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe was brought in to do the following business plan: Cut services, sell off historic buildings, set up postal kiosks in Wal-Mart ([WMT](#)), and raise rates. I mean, that's a prescription for disaster.

What's your solution?

For years we've been urging the post office to put a message twice a year soliciting membership in a post office consumer action group. Basically, over 100 million residents will get a nice postcard that says, "Do you want to participate in postal service decision-making?" The businesses, the mailers do, the unions do, Congress does, and the post office does, but residential postal users do not. Our best guess is about 2 million people will join it and pay \$25 a year. That would hire full-time watchdogs and negotiators on behalf of residential postal users. Look what they've lost over the years. They're verging maybe on losing Saturday delivery.

Well, who do you think is at fault for the problems? Do you think it's all the Postmaster General?

Well, it's Congress because they're the ones who passed that notorious legislation to prepay health care for 75 years. I mean, that's a testimony to Congress thinking postal workers are immortal. I mean, they're ultimately responsible. And the post office has not been well managed. It's been a nepotistic succession, you know.

How so?

The postmaster generals are all promoted from within. And you'd think that would make a difference. Nonsense. The guy who was the most innovative was once head of the Tennessee Valley Authority. I forgot his name.

You mean [Marvin Runyon](#)? [Editor's note: Marvin Runyon ran the USPS from 1992 to 1998.]
Yeah.

He was only there for four years.

Well, you know, it was like his last career move.

Doesn't e-mail and the disappearance of first class mail have something to do with this?

Why didn't the postal management anticipate the e-mail revolution? They know they missed the boat. But they're not the only ones. The other thing is they're almost incapable, apart from this recent Amazon ([AMZN](#)) deal, of finding new revenue ideas. It's crazy. There are probably 15 million parents that would like to teach their children how to write thank-you notes. They could set up a children's thank-you letter campaign. Parents could come down and teach their child at a little table how to write a personal thank-you note. That could bring in a billion dollars a year. I meet with every Postmaster General. Then I'm declared persona non grata because they're blistered by moonbeams, you know.

Do you go to the post office often?

All the time. Are you kidding? It's the center of the community.

This interview has been edited and condensed.