



## Montana Viewpoint: The thing about the United States Postal Service and the prez

Jim Elliott

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President Trump doesn't like the Post Office. It isn't because he doesn't like standing in line to buy a stamp, in fact I doubt if he has ever had to stand in line, let alone ever had to buy a stamp.

No, he doesn't like the Post Office because they do business with Amazon. A lot of business. He doesn't like Amazon because it is owned by Jeff Bezos. He doesn't like Jeff Bezos because Jeff Bezos owns the Washington Post. He doesn't like the Washington Post because they say nasty things about him. Very nasty. It's true, I think they lie awake at night thinking of nasty things to say about him.

So, there you are. If you do business with someone the president doesn't like he doesn't like you.

Last week Trump appointed a friend and major contributor as Postmaster General. Nothing unusual about that. But the Post Office, like everybody, is hurting financially from the Coronavirus epidemic, and they have asked for a \$10 billion loan to help them out.

"Sure," says the President, but the President thinks the Post Office needs to charge Amazon more for delivering their packages. "Maybe we can work something out." You get the picture.

He is not alone in not liking the Post Office. There are any number of influential people in Washington who don't like it and think it should be closed and the resulting loss of mail service should be run by private enterprise. They have done their best to demolish the P.O. and they are beginning to have some pretty good success at it.

The Cato Institute, an influential libertarian policy organization, is big on privatization, and one of their many gripes is what they call the "cross subsidization of rates." Instead of charging everyone the actual cost of their personal mail delivery, the Post office has to charge everyone alike.

Because it costs less, says Cato, to deliver a letter in the city, and more to deliver one in the country, that means that city folk are covering costs that they have not incurred and the rural customers are making out like bandits. In some places this is known as pooling resources. In Cato land it's socialism. People need to be responsible for their own decisions, says Cato, and a person's expenses are based on decisions they have made.

If people choose to live in the country they should be willing to shoulder the actual cost of their mail service. That argument might hold for people who actually do make a choice to live in the country, but for those who were born in the country it seems a wee bit unfair. But tough. If you can't afford to live in the sticks then move to a city.

But if these powerful guys don't like the Post Office, there are plenty of people who do. A Pew Research poll taken in October 2019 found that 90% of the respondents had a favorable opinion of the Post Office. That has to be right up there with ice cream.

One of the arguments for privatization is that the P. O. is not doing a good job. Really? In 2011 the United States Postal Service was rated the best of the G-20 nations (those with the largest economies) by Oxford Strategic Consulting. In 2019 it was ranked 8th out of 170 national postal services by the Universal Postal Union.

All this in spite being saddled by a 2006 law that requires the Post Office to pay \$5.5 billion annually to fully cover the potential costs of their retirement health care system. For costs 75 years into the future. That \$5.5 billion is the difference between profit and loss for the Post Office.

Happily, the House recently passed a bill to eliminate this requirement and a bill introduced in the Senate by Sen. Steve Daines, R-Montana, would do the same. Of course, the president would still have to sign it if it passes. Good luck.

In my lifetime I have found the occasional letter for someone else in my mail box, as I'm sure have you, and sometimes it takes a day longer that I think it should for a letter to reach me. But that's life and I don't see any reason to hold a grudge about it, and I bet you don't, either.