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FDR's Ghost Preventing Us From Going Postal

Shikha Dalmia | September 15, 2011

Just as a hanging concentrates the mind, the impending bankruptcy of the U.S. postal service is prompting it to come up with some creative revenue-generating ideas.

The service has lost about 25 percent of its first-class mail business in the last five years, something that is making it exceedingly difficult for it to support its huge employee base. The *New York Times* reports that labor currently represents 80 percent of the Postal Service's expenses, while it accounts for 53 percent at United Parcel Service and only 32 percent at FedEx. The upshot is that the agency is currently so low on cash that it will be [unable to make](#) the \$5.5 billion payment due this month to finance postal retirees' future health care. And it will completely run out of money to pay employees sometime early next year.

It is asking Congress for a bailout, obviously. But as our elected leaders ponder whether to give postal retirees our hard-earned dollars now so that we can live in poverty in our old age, the agency has decided to save about \$3 billion in revenues annually by selling many of its buildings, [according](#) to the *Wall Street Journal*.

About 28 percent of the agency's buildings are listed on the National Register of Historic Places and some 800 are decorated with murals and sculptures done in the New Deal era. Postal officials assured the *Journal* that these federally-funded "murals and sculptures" were not meant to provide jobs at that time but to "help boost the morale of people suffering the effects of the Great Depression."

Yeah, it must have been such a thrill for Americans wondering how they were going to find the next meal for their hungry children to walk into a lavish building paid for with their tax dollars.

But let's stay positive, here: The agency has already raised \$140 million by selling some of these morale-boosting properties. Among them is its Palm Beach office. The Florida mogul, Jeff Greene, who bought it for \$3.7 million plans to put commercial offices in it. Likewise, the agency sold its Westport, Connecticut, office to an Atlanta real-estate company that will lease it out as retail space or for a restaurant.

This is a great move about which enough good things can't be said. But, hey postal service, one good idea points to another. Why just sell the buildings? Why not sell the whole business so that we taxpayers never have to worry about you again?

The Cato Institute's Tad DeHaven wrote a paper discussing exactly this [here](#).

And retired postmaster general William Henderson wrote an op-ed in the *Washington Post* suggesting this [here](#).