



Congress Keeps its Hand Around the Neck of USPS

Tad DeHaven

The postal reform bill passed in the Senate last week is further evidence that politicians shouldn't be entrusted with running a hotdog stand, let alone the nation's mail. The U.S. Postal Service is supposed to operate like a business, but congressional micromanagement makes that impossible. Nevertheless, 62 senators voted for an eye-glazing 191-page bill that would keep Congress's hand placed firmly around the USPS's neck.

Here's a summary from the [Washington Post](#):

The bipartisan measure passed 62 to 37 and would give the Postal Service nearly \$11 billion to offer buyouts and early retirement incentives to hundreds of thousands of postal workers and to pay off its debts... The measure also would permit the end of Saturday mail deliveries in two years, only after USPS determines it is financially necessary. The Postal Service also could move forward with plans to shutter thousands of post offices and hundreds of mail distribution centers — but senators placed several restrictions on when, where and how outposts in rural communities could be closed. The bill also modifies mail service standards to ensure that the Postal Service preserves the overnight delivery of mail sent to nearby communities, but allows USPS to slow the delivery of mail destined for destinations farther away...

Senators have worked for more than a year to give USPS the ability to set postage rates and delivery schedules and to determine the fate of unprofitable post offices free of congressional intervention, but senators eager to protect home-state interests added several restrictions. They agreed to strengthen the appeals process for customers opposed to closing a post office; to force USPS to wait until after Election Day to close postal facilities in states that permit voting by mail; and to permit the Postal Service to co-locate post offices in government-owned buildings to save space and money. Senators also approved a plan that forbids the Postal Service from closing a rural post office unless the next-nearest location is no more than 10 miles away.

Over at the leftish *Mother Jones*, [Kevin Drum](#) lists the bill's "reforms" and concludes that "We are ruled by idiots." Drum's beef is that the bill doesn't make it easier for the USPS to increase prices to generate more revenue. There are arguments for and against higher postal prices, but the fundamental problem—in my opinion—is that prices are set by the

government instead of market forces. It is impossible to know what the appropriate prices for postal services should be in the absence of a competitive marketplace for mail. Similarly, Congress dictates that mail be delivered six days a week. Why in the 21st Century must practically every home in the country receive mail six days a week? Again, allow market forces to decide how often people receive mail. Perhaps some people would be willing to pay to receive mail seven days a week. Or three days. Or no days. Instead, we remain stuck with the one-size-fits all government approach that reflects parochial and political, rather than economic and financial, considerations.

As for Drum's conclusion, I'll leave that up to readers to decide. I will say that this video of Sen. Tom Carper (D-DE), one of the bill's sponsors, making the case for using wind farms to power a new fleet of battery-operated USPS delivery vehicles doesn't help:

