



The Postal Service Crisis

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The U.S. House of Representatives met in an emergency session on August 22 to address widespread fears about potential sabotage of the U.S. Postal Service at a time when this vital public agency is needed more than ever to deliver medicine and other essentials and to facilitate mail-in voting.

Twenty-six Republicans joined 231 Democrats to pass [H.R. 8015](#), which addresses these concerns by:

- providing \$25 billion in direct emergency relief for USPS,
- requiring all official election mail to be treated as "first-class mail," and
- prohibiting the removal of mail sorting machines and mailboxes and reversing any already implemented changes that could delay mail delivery.

Pressure needs to be sustained to ensure that these changes become law.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has not responded to calls for similar emergency action, including [from some within his own party](#). Seven Senate Republicans have co-sponsored bipartisan [legislation](#) that would also provide \$25 billion in postal aid, while other Republicans have put forward a scaled-down \$10 billion proposal. With USPS forecasting Covid-related losses of up to [\\$50 billion](#) over the next decade, \$10 billion in aid is insufficient to ensure that the Postal Service can continue to provide essential services during the pandemic and for years to come. Among ordinary Americans, 90 percent of Republicans and 96 percent of Democrats [support](#) a postal relief package.

Without the force of legislation, U.S. Postmaster General Louis DeJoy is unlikely to address the concerns that have sparked more than [800 protests](#) in every state. In testimony before the [Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee](#) on August 21 and before the [House Oversight and Reform Committee](#) on August 24, DeJoy refused to reverse actions that have caused mail slowdowns and did not support the bipartisan Senate and House calls for \$25 billion in crisis relief. Leaked internal [USPS documents](#) reveal that DeJoy had detailed data showing significant increases in mail delays after his operational changes went into effect but did not share this information with members of Congress who requested it. DeJoy

reportedly continues to hold at least [\\$30 million](#) in stock in USPS contractor XPO. At a Congressional Progressive Caucus [hearing](#) on August 20, former Postal Board of Governors Vice Chair David Williams said that a full investigation of DeJoy's potential conflicts of interest was not conducted before he was hired.

Actions that Sparked the Current Postal Crisis

The Trump Administration has sought for years to weaken and privatize the Postal Service. In 2018, the White House Office of Management and Budget [recommended](#) selling off the public agency to for-profit corporations. More recently, President Trump has made numerous false allegations that voting by mail leads to widespread fraud and [commented](#) that without the emergency relief he opposes, USPS couldn't handle the crisis-level demand for mail-in voting.

On June 15, 2020, Trump ally and wealthy Republican mega-donor DeJoy became Postmaster General. He swiftly took actions that created a [mail slowdown across the country](#), including requiring trucks to adhere to rigid schedules, even if this would mean leaving mail and packages behind. Under DeJoy's watch, USPS also removed [671 high-speed mail sorting machines](#) and blue collection boxes from neighborhoods across the country.

Congressional offices were soon flooded with complaints of delays in receiving checks, medications and other essentials — as well as concerns about how the slowdown will affect mail-in voting. Ninety Congressional Democrats [called on](#) the Postal Board of Governors to remove DeJoy from his position.

In the face of mounting protests and requests to appear before House and Senate committees, DeJoy [announced](#) on August 19 a temporary suspension of his “initiatives” until the election, but did not promise to undo damage already done. This temporary move does not address concerns about the threats to the essential, affordable delivery services that USPS provides to every U.S. home and business or the decent postal jobs that support families, particularly families of color, in every U.S. community. These needs will continue long past November 3.

Key Takeaways from DeJoy's Congressional Testimony

- **DeJoy promised to expedite mail-in ballots to ensure timely delivery, but also vowed to push forward on operational changes that have led to significant service delays.** He continued to boast about forcing trucks to adhere to a rigid schedule in the middle of a pandemic-related package boom and staffing shortage. USPS managers [warned from the outset](#) that this would result in mail and packages being left behind.

- **Leaked internal [USPS documents](#) published by House Democrats on August 22 reveal the extent to which delivery standards declined after DeJoy's changes.** As of August 1, the on-time delivery score for 1st-class mail was down 8.1% below baseline, marketing mail was down 8.42%, periodicals were down 9.57%, and priority mail was down 7.97%.
- **DeJoy also refused to replace sorting machines and blue collection boxes that have been removed under his watch.** In testimony before the [Congressional Progressive Caucus](#) on August 20, former Postal Board of Governors member David Williams pointed out that it costs money to remove and destroy machinery and that a USPS analysis of collection boxes concluded that reducing them wouldn't save money.
- **When Senators asked DeJoy to provide analysis of potential impacts of his actions on seniors, veterans, and others who might suffer from delayed prescription deliveries, late fees on delayed bill payments, and other impacts, he refused,** apparently because such analysis was not conducted. In the House hearing, DeJoy acknowledged that he had not consulted with unions or other stakeholders regarding the changes.
- **DeJoy does not appear to grasp that he is leading a public agency with a social mission and a universal service obligation.** In Senate testimony, he confirmed a [Washington Post](#) report that he is considering further extreme cuts, and said that what he views as “unfunded mandates” are all potentially on the chopping block. Changes under consideration include raising package rates, particularly when delivering the last mile on behalf of big retailers (they've already announced [holiday surcharges](#) on commercial customers, which will likely be passed on to consumers); setting higher prices for service in Alaska, Hawaii and Puerto Rico; and curbing discounts for nonprofits.
- **DeJoy repeatedly referred to the Postal Service as a business rather than a service** in his Senate testimony and said he wants “pricing freedom” (i.e., the ability to hike rates). He claimed to be looking at ideas for revenue increases, but did not mention a single specific idea. The USPS Office of the Inspector General has estimated that expanding postal financial services such as check cashing, bill payment, and electronic money orders could generate as much as [\\$1.1 billion in annual revenue](#) while benefiting low-income Americans, particularly people of color, who now have to rely on predatory financial firms.
- **When pressed regarding Covid relief, DeJoy said during the Senate hearing that \$10 billion would be sufficient** — far less than the [\\$25 billion](#) the Postal Board of Governors requested earlier this year, which is the same amount in the just-passed House legislation and the bipartisan Senate bill.

What's at Stake in Maintaining a Strong Public Postal Service

Essential Services

- Postal workers have continued to work throughout the crisis, delivering food, medicine, stimulus checks, tax refunds, protective gear, and other essentials to all [157 million](#) U.S. addresses at least six days a week. This has been critical to our nation's public health, allowing more people so social distance at home, and to keep our economy moving.
- Until DeJoy's actions, postal workers had been performing extraordinarily well in handling a crisis-related spike in package volume — up [50 percent](#) during the quarter ending June 30, compared to the previous year.
- These services are particularly critical for rural, low-income, and older Americans, who are more likely to lack access to high-speed internet and to rely on USPS for bill-paying, communications with family, and other basic mailing needs. Across the country, an estimated [20 percent](#) of all Americans over 40 who are prescribed medication for a chronic condition get their prescriptions exclusively through the Postal Service. Veterans receive about [80 percent](#) of their prescriptions through the mail.

Democracy

- We must be sure that every eligible voter can vote safely and securely. An estimated [80 million](#) Americans will vote by mail this year, more than double the number as in 2016 because of public health concerns.
- The USPS, with its vast network covering every U.S. address, is the only entity that can handle vote by mail, and postal workers have been handling these ballots effectively for many years. The USPS handles three billion pieces of mail in the week before Christmas. Managing vote by mail won't be a problem — as long as DeJoy and the Trump administration let postal workers do their job.
- Undermining confidence in vote by mail would leave many Americans with little choice but to risk their health by voting in person. This would have particularly harmful effects on the poor and people of color, who face disproportionately high barriers to voting in normal times and are now suffering higher than average Covid infection and death rates.

Good Jobs and Economic Benefits

- USPS employs [630,000 people](#), including [97,000 veterans](#), in decent jobs with benefits that support every U.S. community and helps lift up wages and working conditions in their private sector competitors.
- The Postal Service has long been a reliable path to the middle class, particularly for people of color, who make up [40 percent](#) of the postal labor force. According to the [Center for Economic and Policy Research](#), postal workers are more than twice as likely to be Black as workers in the private sector. These good jobs are more important now, in the midst of an economic crisis, than ever before.
- The [total U.S. mailing industry](#) that relies on USPS employs 7.3 million people and generates an estimated annual \$1.58 trillion in sales revenue to the U.S. economy. This broader industry includes mail production and distribution (including USPS and private carriers), as well as jobs related to goods and services advertised and delivered through the mail.
- Private carriers rely on the USPS to handle the “last mile” of a significant share of their package deliveries, particularly in rural areas where USPS is the only carrier with a door-to-door network. In 2019, USPS delivered an estimated [31 percent](#) of Amazon packages. Since the first of this year, USPS has been [offering Sunday delivery](#) on UPS packages.

For more, see the IPS [Postal Service Research Hub](#).