

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

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Opening Statement

Subcommittee on Government Operations Chairman Gerald E. Connolly (D-VA) Hearing on “Protecting the Timely Delivery of Mail, Medicine, and Mail-in Ballots” August 24, 2020

I want to thank Chairwoman Maloney for working with me tirelessly to ensure the Postal Service, which has been a part of the American fabric since 1775, has a future. The Postal Service is not only fighting for its economic survival, it’s fighting to maintain 120 years of professional service — rid of a rotten patronage system that served elected officials and not those who rely on mail delivery every day.

We are here today to save the Postal Service. We have in front of us a newly appointed Postmaster General (PMG) and the Chairman of the Board of Governors who selected him for that post. We have a PMG who, six weeks into a complex and awe-inspiring new job — in the midst of a global pandemic and just weeks before a contentious presidential election where the Postal Service will pay an unprecedented role — decides to announce a sweeping reorganization that he admits could slow down mail and will undoubtedly infuse uncertainty and confusion throughout the Postal Service and into our neighborhoods. He announces these and other abysmally unsupported changes without engaging staff, unions, trade organizations, mailers, mail recipients, or, Congress. In fact, Congress was told Mr. DeJoy did not yet feel prepared to respond to any questions we might have for him, yet he felt confident enough to freeze overtime, delay mail delivery, and announce a sweeping reorganization. And Mr. Duncan, congratulations on being the rubber stamp. The Postal Service Board of Governors is required by law to represent the public interest, not the President of the United States.

Today, the Postal Service employs 650,000 people and is the foundation for a more than \$1.7 trillion mailing industry that employs more than 7.5 million people. But at the turn of the last century, the U.S. Post Office was nothing more than 77,000 patronage positions rife with “gross incompetence” and often “embezzlement of funds.” It was rural America, in fact, that used its political voice to professionalize the Post Office. Instead of traveling miles to the closest general store to pick up mail from a sycophantic political hack, rural residents lobbied Congress en masse for Rural Free Delivery, an innovation that brought mail delivery to even the most distant of homes. The massive, grassroots lobby effort brought those with acumen and expertise into the Post Office and refocused political leaders on what they were elected to do: serve the people, not their political parties. As a nation, the people transformed a Post Office into a Postal “Service.”

This history lesson resonates today — yet another reckoning for this country and the U.S. Postal Service. Here, again, the people of the nation have stood up, loudly and consistently to condemn attempts to turn a crown jewel of our federal government — by far the most trusted agency among the hundreds that serve this nation — into a spoils system honeypot. We cannot let that happen. I will not let that happen.

During this pandemic, the Postal Service is a lifeline to the delivery of lifesaving prescription medications, food and pantry staples, stimulus checks to pay rent and utilities bills, Census forms, and even simply coupons that allow those struggling in poverty to afford their weekly groceries. What leader would think that even the possibility of slowing down mail in a time of such crisis is a good idea? What leader would take steps to freeze overtime for a workforce literally risking its lives every day to deliver mail to the people of this nation — and struggling to find enough capacity to get it done?

As the new PMG, Mr. DeJoy has recklessly cut hours and delayed delivery times in the pursuit of unsupported “operational efficiencies.” He has never once asked Congress for help, despite a team of Members ready to provide financial and other support. The Chairwoman and I, along with a collection of hundreds of Members have been fighting to provide the Postal Service with \$75 billion in support — to pay overtime and hazard pay costs to the dedicated workforce, to invest in a modernized and green postal fleet that doesn’t explode, to pay for information technology investments that can streamline communications from trucks and planes that are running late with important cross-country or international mail deliveries and to optimize workforce scheduling. Mr. DeJoy and Mr. Duncan have failed to work with Congress to get this enacted. Thus far the passenger airline industry has received \$25 billion from Congress, but the Postal Service has yet to receive a dime.

On August 18, 2020, the PMG announced he would put a hold on some of his sweeping operational changes. Yet, this announcement did not commit to reversing the cuts to service and capacity that have already been made. It did not include an agenda to support election mail that demonstrates a commitment to helping the Postal Service fulfil its historic role in the upcoming election. Lastly, the PMG is still not advocating for additional funding for the Postal Service, despite the fact that his own Board of Governors has unanimously endorsed a \$75 billion rescue package.

The recent operational and organizational changes Mr. DeJoy made to the Postal Service have resulted in delivery delays across the country. These delays have real impacts and consequences. Most devastatingly, these actions have damaged the Postal Service’s credibility with the American public, which I fear may be irreconcilable.

I applaud my colleagues in the House for passing the Delivering for America Act, a bill that would restore the service delivery standards and operations in place before Mr. DeJoy’s tenure and ensure that election mail is prioritized for expedited delivery, as has been the practice in previous elections.

We must restore public confidence in the Postal Service and its ability to support voting by mail during the pandemic. We must get the Postal Board of Governors to wake

up and do its job of oversight of the Postmaster General. And we must be vigilant against continued efforts to coopt and undermine the institutions on which our republic depends.