



PERSPECTIVES

by Rinaldo S. Brutoco



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Cards and Letters (Part 2/3)

“Keep those cards and letters coming.” Really now, is buying stamps all we can do to save the Post Office? Is delivering cards and letters all we should expect of the Post Office because there is more of a “personal touch” with them than with email? Is there more we need the Post Office to do for us? Is there more that we need to do?

Last week we reported on how Benjamin Franklin created the Post Office as the “essential glue” that connected the Colonies, served as the military correspondence expediter in the Revolutionary War, and was the source of revenue for building “post roads” which provided the commercial veins for a young nation. When we look at the United States Postal Service (USPS) today, many people are unaware that more than 75 percent of all prescription drugs from the Veteran’s Administration go through the Post Office. When the postal delivery times are intentionally lengthened, as has happened under Postmaster DeJoy, it is a life and death matter for those veterans. They can’t afford to not have their medications. For that matter, neither can the elderly who also obtain their prescription drugs largely through the Post Office. A diabetic can’t wait until it’s convenient to restore postal service after the election.

In his nationwide injunction issued last week to DeJoy and the USPS, Federal District Court Judge Stanley Bastian 1) reversed the personnel changes and overtime limitations DeJoy put in place, 2) ordered the street located “blue boxes” that had been removed be replaced, and 3) ordered that the mail sorting machines taken out selectively in “blue” states be immediately repaired. As of this writing, DeJoy is refusing to fully comply.

Apparently, the Trump Administration intentionally sought to slow down the mail to prevent mail in ballots from getting out to voters and returned to clerks in various states, as a way to suppress Democratic turnout. However, it is literally a matter of life and death to slow down the delivery of medications. That is one of the most vital functions the Post Office fulfills, and until recently one that it did flawlessly. Why would we want to shut it down? Neither UPS nor FedEx really wants that business, and frankly they also don’t want to have to deliver to every rural and more US address with the same high-quality execution as pertains to drug delivery. Those are tasks routinely handled with great distinction by the Post Office. Private companies really don’t want to compete there.

On the subject of competition, I trust everyone is aware that the USPS delivery services, particularly its overnight and 2nd Day services, are putting competitive pressure on UPS and FedEx to keep rates as low as possible. Without a Post Office, you can expect to see dramatic increases in UPS and FedEx charges for every one of those ubiquitous packages that show up so frequently at your doorstep. Imagine paying even a relatively small 20 percent increase in the cost of package delivery for every package you receive because USPS wasn’t there to hold prices down.

And what about that Post Office tradition that began in 1775 of providing funds to build the “post road” system? We reported last week that providing those funds was one of the two primary reasons the Post Office was created by the 2nd Continental Congress. It was the Post Office revenue, the fees paid by the Post Office to have mail moved around the country, that financed much of the early transcontinental railroad structure with mail cars for the startup railroads of the day. Moving forward in time, it was also the Post Office that paid to subsidize the first freight and passenger air service. Those mail bags that filled aviation pioneers’ aircraft literally paid for “building” the aviation routes across the country just as they paid to build the post roads of the 18th century.

Looking into the future, the Post Office could fill that role once again by providing mail transportation subsidies to railroads that would move the mail at speeds in excess of 150 mph, the current top speed for the Amtrak Acela on the East Coast. Imagine the savings for passengers, the reduction of airborne congestion, and the dramatic improvement to air quality if we moved the mail over distances of 750-1000 miles on trains instead of airplanes. Now that’s a “green” solution for climate change which would actually save time and money and be a more comfortable way to travel those distances for passengers and freight. Why can’t the Post Office help us again by building these new high-speed rail systems we so desperately need between cities like San Diego, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, San Francisco, Reno, Portland, and Seattle in the West? And how about we link up San Diego with Phoenix, Albuquerque, and Santa Fe in the Southwest? And what about linking several cities tying into Washington, D.C.? Each of those steps could be accomplished by obtaining existing rights of way for most of the journey, allocating money to straighten out the tracks, purchasing appropriate new equipment, and where necessary, double tracking on the same right of way to permit traffic to flow in both directions simultaneously. Post Office revenues could once again help advance our transportation systems while improving and lowering the cost of Postal delivery. All of that, and a dramatic reduction in CO2 emissions as well!

So, what does this bold and productive vision require? Just two things: the financial resources to provide the infrastructure over which the mail could move and the will to build it! Now back to those cards and letters. You know, there isn’t anything quite as personal and pleasant as receiving an actual piece of personal “snail mail.” So, even though that is the least of what the Post Office does for us, isn’t it great the Post Office is around for my grandchildren to receive birthday cards and my friends the personal notes I send? Stay tuned next week as I write an in-depth review of USPS finances to achieve all of this and how we can, quite easily, keep that “snail mail” flowing so the Post Office can serve us in uniting and building the “post roads” of the future.