

**U.S. Congressman Bill Pascrell, Jr.**
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**Pascrell Op-ed: The U.S. Postal Service is nearing chaos and we must save it**

PATERSON, NJ – U.S. Rep. Bill Pascrell, Jr. (D-NJ-09) [published an opinion editorial](https://www.northjersey.com/story/opinion/2020/05/01/rep-bill-pascrell-why-we-must-save-u-s-post-office-opinion/3046501001/) in the North Jersey (Bergen) Record on the dire challenges now facing the United States Postal Service and the need for quick reforms to save America’s post offices. The text of the essay appears below.

Even as postal workers are helping keep America alive during this pandemic, [the United States Postal Service is nearing a breaking point](https://www.northjersey.com/story/news/factcheck/2020/04/10/fact-check-coronavirus-wont-force-us-postal-service-shut-down/5126557002/) and may soon go bankrupt without emergency intervention — intervention Donald Trump is threatening to block.

The USPS is not alone in its vulnerability during this crisis, with virtually all businesses and institutions facing unbearable strain. But COVID-19 has exposed its longtime weaknesses and lack of federal support, key reasons your mail right now may be slower than usual or irregular.

Like many services we take for granted, it is difficult to capture the full scope of USPS’s infrastructure and reach. With over 600,000 career and other employees, USPS handles nearly half of the world’s mail through over 30,000 locations stretching from the Florida Keys to the Arctic Circle. It processes in just over two weeks what it takes UPS and FedEx together to send in a year.

Critics of the USPS like to point out that it is a money-losing operation 13 years straight because people today send fewer letters. While both assertions are technically accurate, they are not fully connected nor an adequate explanation for postal woes.

Many Americans are often stunned to learn that the post office receives effectively no support from the federal budget. The Postal Reorganization Act of 1970 rendered the agency fully independent. This framework forced it to act like a business without federal help. In other words, the post office was simultaneously forbidden to turn a profit but still subject to congressional oversight.

In late 2006, Congress hamstrung USPS further by forcing it to prefund all its employees’ health care benefits at least 50 years into the future. This was designed by Republicans as an anchor to wreck the USPS, and it has: nearly all the post office’s red ink since 2006 bleeds from this onerous obligation.

So the problems the post office is now enduring did not come appear suddenly with this virus. Furthermore, while Republicans’ quest to ransack the post office is the primary cause of the agency’s enfeeblement, Democrats too have dropped the ball to protect it. The 2006 law was passed at the end of a session without significant Democratic opposition, and our failure to repeal it in 2009 and 2010 was a major blunder.

But this isn’t a eulogy because the post office remains a central part of our lives today. Try to imagine the American engine running without it. It would be chaos and catastrophe in every community.

Without question, just weathering this pandemic will only be a stop gap. Modernizing the post office is critical to its future. This includes offering postal banking service accounts to the quarter of Americans who don’t have access to banks clustered in both rural and urban zip codes. Going forward, we should also evaluate resuscitating a postal congressional committee or subcommittee, and even begin to consider reversing the post office’s quasi-business hybrid of 1970 and putting the Postmaster General back in the executive cabinet.

But, in this moment, Congress must focus first on passing the funding necessary to keep the post office going through this crisis. Our dedication to USPS must flow from a single principle: the post office is not a business that must turn big profits or be killed, but a public service upon which our nation relies absolutely.

Last week, Donald Trump vowed to oppose any aid to the agency unless it quadrupled its rates. In ordinary times, such a demand would be ludicrous; coming now, as mail remains a lifeline to millions of Americans stuck at home, the idea of drastically raising what it costs to send and receive a package is borderline insane.

What is motivating Trump’s refusal to support our post office? Probably several factors.

He is driven by Republicans’ decades-long drive to privatize the USPS and their hatred of labor unions. Incredibly, Trump’s blocking of USPS aid is likely tied to his fear of unfettered democracy as the post office would be the engine of any nationwide vote-by-mail operation if the pandemic endures. We cannot even dismiss that he is being lobbied by his developer friends who are licking their chops at the idea of cannibalizing the USPS’s invaluable real estate.

Perhaps, it is because at base Trump is an arsonist, and the idea of torching an institution that dates to our national founding is irresistible to him.

Trump is using the cover of our titanic struggle against this virus to render a death blow to the United States Postal Service. In the last three years he has incinerated innumerable institutions and traditions. It would be a tragedy beyond words if he were allowed to do the same to our post office. Saving our vibrant post office must be nonnegotiable.

Rep. Pascrell has been a leader in Congress demanding reform to return the USPS to its former glory and strengthen it so it remains an integral part of American life, goals he outlined in a well-received [April 2019 essay](https://washingtonmonthly.com/magazine/april-may-june-2019/congress-is-sabotaging-your-post-office/) in Washington Monthly. Pascrell is a cosponsor of H.R. 2382, [the USPS Fairness Act](https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/2382) that would finally remove the health care prefunding anchor that has been strangling USPS since 2007. Pascrell is also a strong supporter of widespread postal banking, and in June 2019 [his bipartisan amendment](https://pascrell.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=3942) allocating $1 million to begin funding a postal banking system was passed by the House of Representatives.