# Mark Dimondstein: The U.S. Postal Service is owned by the people — let's keep it that way

         Mark Dimondstein | guest columnist

 As the tax deadline looms and millions scurry to get their forms sent on time, Tax Day is a good time to dispel the myth that the U.S. Postal Service is funded by tax dollars.

In fact, the Postal Service receives zero tax dollars for its operations. Without taking a dime in taxes, the Postal Service maintains the lowest prices for mail services in the industrialized world and delivers to 159 million addresses, six — and now often seven — days a week — all funded by revenue from the sale of stamps and other postal products.

While private courier companies only deliver where a profit can be made, the public post office provides universal service to everyone, no matter age, wealth, race, who we are or where we live.

It is little wonder that the Postal Service, a public institution enshrined in the U.S. Constitution and the crucial anchor of the growing e-commerce revolution, remains the most trusted federal agency. A recent Pew Research Center survey revealed that 88 percent of the population has a favorable view of the Postal Service, with the highest favorability ratings coming from young adults. Whether sending or receiving medicine, packages, greeting cards, letters, periodicals, catalogs or ballots, every person, household and business in this country is a postal customer.

Still, that persistent myth — that the Postal Service is a burden to taxpayers — is precisely the false narrative that led Congress to pass the 2006 Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act. That act manufactured a financial crisis by compelling the Postal Service to pre-fund all retiree health care costs, 75 years into the future — for workers not even born yet. This mandate transferred postal revenues to the U.S. Treasury and robbed the Postal Service of $5.6 billion a year over a 10-year period. No other company or agency faces, or could be expected to survive, such an onerous financial burden.

Adding to the absurdity is the fact that, prior to the 2006 law, the Postal Service had been reliably paying its annual retirement health benefit premiums on time.

Fast forward from 2006 to last year. Exactly one year ago, in April 2018 — again using the guise of taxpayer protection — President Donald Trump established a postal task force to study Postal Service finances. However, before the task force even published its findings, the White House Office of Management and Budget in a June 2018 report on reforming government laid bare their goal of selling the Postal Service to the highest corporate bidder.

Postal privatization, if allowed to move forward, would surely enrich some Wall Street investors and a few powerful corporations. For the rest of us, it would result in diminished postal services and higher prices. This is exactly what happened when other nations, such as the United Kingdom, went down this path. Evidence of this can be seen in both the OMB report and the task force report that followed in December, which called for higher rates, cuts to service and lower wages and benefits for postal workers, all as a first step toward total privatization.

Other task force “solutions” include eliminating delivery days, slowing service speed, allowing anyone who pays a fee access to your secure and private mailbox, reducing door delivery, undermining the universal service obligation and piecemeal privatization that will all undermine the future of a vibrant public postal service.

It doesn’t have to be this way. Congress should simply fix the pre-funding fiasco they created in 2006. In addition, the Postal Service should provide an array of expanded services such as increased financial services and paycheck cashing, notary and various licensing services, internet access and electric automobile charging stations.

Everyone who sends and receives mail and packages has a stake in making sure that the U.S. Postal Service remains owned by, and in the service of, the people. Ask your member of Congress to co-sponsor House Resolution 33 and Senate Resolution 99. Both resolutions oppose privatizing the Postal Service.

Let’s ensure that the postal eagle, symbolizing its public ownership, is never sacrificed on the altar of private profit and replaced by the vulture of corporate greed. The U.S. Postal Service operates without tax dollars and provides a necessary and popular public service. Keep it — it’s yours.

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