

# Imagination, innovation are keys to our future



**Imagine it's November 2020, the 10th anniversary of PAEA II, the postal reform law that amended the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act of 2006.**

Thanks to the law's Vote by Mail provisions, letter carriers are delivering millions of information packets on ballot initiatives and secure mail-in ballots that have boosted voter participation above 75 percent.

The Postal Service subsidiary Last Mile Express, a joint venture with Costco and Amazon, has a new Wednesday night residential service, moving beyond its Saturday guaranteed delivery. It has broken into the Fortune 500, while the expanded USPS Parcel Select service has generated billions of dollars in carbon credits for FedEx and UPS under the 2010 climate change law.

The USPS Green Bank, the backbone of a national infrastructure program, has more than 20 million accounts with \$100 billion invested in green bonds issued to finance home and office energy retrofitting, high-speed rail and other clean energy projects. It also provides low-cost remittance services to tens of thousands of Americans each day.

Letter carriers are using sophisticated new scanners as they deliver USPS shipping materials and office supplies from Staples and Office Depot to 18 million-plus home-based businesses. More than 10 million people have signed up for a USPS Twitter service, receiving brief messages from letter carriers who check in on their elderly relatives once a week.

**Sound farfetched? Certainly, the timing of PAEA II is doubtful—it took us 12 years to get PAEA I—but the rest need not be.**

The Postal Service has constantly evolved to meet the needs of a changing nation. It has always added new functions while fulfilling the old ones as long as they are needed. Our past, you see, can be an inspiration for what comes next.

The Post Office Department served the early republic as the primary means of personal and political communication, distributing letters, books and broadsides. As the country expanded during the 19th century, it began moving mail-order merchandise

from Sears, Roebuck and Montgomery Ward (the Amazon and eBay of the day), even as the telegraph began to replace some letters.

In the early 20th century, the Post Office nurtured the civil aviation industry with air mail and bolstered the growth of magazines, even as newspapers delivered by mail declined. By mid-century, the POD was a linchpin in the nation's financial system, handling hundreds of millions of bills and payments flowing between households and businesses, even as phone calls supplanted telegrams and personal letters. It even operated a postal savings bank into the 1960s.

Over the past 25 years, sophisticated mail targeting made the Postal Service a highly effective marketing tool, as first the fax, and then the Internet, began to replace traditional business mail functions.

**Going forward, there are two key questions:** Can we find new, useful ways to use existing postal networks—the retail network, the mail processing network and the last mile delivery network? Can we continue to provide affordable, quality mail service—serving the old functions—even as we take on new ones? With the arrival of companies like eBay, Netflix and GameFly and the new uses of the mail such as Vote by Mail, the answer to both questions should be a resounding “yes.”

With a little creativity, our retail network could provide low-cost financial services that banks no longer offer. Our mail processing networks could be used as e-commerce warehouses and recycling centers. And the last mile of every residential delivery could be ours—placing letter carriers at the critical juncture between customers and national retailers, local entrepreneurs and every business in between.

In the next few years, we will have to imagine and fight for a viable future and work with the Postal Service at the bargaining table to make it all possible. If we can convince the Postal Service and Congress to work with us, I am absolutely confident we will succeed.

Happy holidays, brothers and sisters—and remember, imagination and innovation are the keys to our future. ☒