On Saturday delivery, House leaders are driven by ideology

Fredric V. Rolando

In the last week of May, two Republican members of Congress, Rep. Tim Griffin (AR-2) and Rep. Morgan Griffith (VA-9), became the 217th and 218th co-sponsors of House Resolution 30, the sense of the House resolution, drafted by fellow GOP Rep. Sam Graves (MO-6), that urges the continuation of six-day mail delivery. That means an official majority of the House of Representatives (435 members) supports the preservation of Saturday delivery. Unfortunately, that did not stop the anti-government ideologues who have been waging a war on the Postal Service in recent years.

Of course, the NALC does not oppose replenishing the highway trust fund. We know that 700,000 construction workers could lose their jobs if the fund runs out of money in August, which it will if Congress does not act. Hundreds of federally funded highway and bridge maintenance projects and new construction projects would be forced to shut down. That cannot be allowed to happen. A great country and a modern economy cannot function without world-class infrastructure. So the trust fund must be replenished.

But that does not mean we should degrade the nation’s postal networks to pay for it. We are not a poor country that needs to adopt such “robbing Peter to pay Paul” policies. We are one of the richest countries in the world. We are the United States of America, for God’s sake.

So why are we even talking about this? Historically, Congress has funded the highway trust fund by raising the federal gasoline tax. Currently we all pay 18 cents per gallon at the pump to keep our roads and bridges in good repair. But that fund is running out of money because the gasoline tax has not been raised since 1993, and the value of the tax has declined by 40 percent in inflation-adjusted dollars even as our aging highway system has deteriorated.

A majority of the Senate wants to close corporate tax loopholes to raise money for the trust fund, but that bill faces a GOP filibuster as well. Sadly, the House leadership has once again allowed ideology to trump common sense with its proposal to attack the Postal Service to resolve a funding crisis for the highway trust fund.

GOP House leaders have tried and failed with this tactic before—last year they called for using mail service cuts to first finance the extension of unemployment insurance benefits and then to restore benefit cuts for retired veterans. We stopped them then; we must stop them again.

Of course, there is one “postal” solution to the nation’s public investment crisis that Congress should consider. It could fund a national infrastructure bank with voluntary savings accounts offered by the Postal Service. Such a bank could issue bonds to rebuild our highways and bridges and the rest of our nation’s crumbling infrastructure. So rather than dismantling our postal infrastructure to rebuild our transportation infrastructure—robbing Peter to pay Paul—why don’t we strengthen both at the same time? Why don’t we preserve good postal jobs and create new construction jobs at the same time? The only thing holding us back is blind ideology. That has got to change.

On the Postal Record