

On Saturday delivery, House leaders are driven by ideology



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As this issue of *The Postal Record* went to the press, the Republican leadership in the House floated a plan to “pay for” a replenishment of the Federal Highway Trust Fund with the savings generated by a legislated elimination of Saturday delivery and, perhaps, other service cuts. You read that right: They are actually contemplating destructive service cuts and the elimination of at least 80,000 good full- and part-time jobs—weakening the nation’s postal infrastructure—to fund other needed infrastructure.

The Postal Service gets no tax money, yet House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-VA) suggested that the alleged savings from eliminating Saturday delivery could be used to pay for an injection of money into the highway fund.

Such a measure would effectively funnel postage rate-payer funds to finance road construction. That not only makes no sense, it’s outrageous. In fact, it’s doubly outrageous because the only reason we are even talking about cutting Saturday delivery is that Congress imposed on the Postal Service in 2006 a crushing and unfair burden to pre-fund future retiree health benefits decades in advance.

That mandate caused losses between 2007 and 2012, and it has turned operating surpluses in 2013 and 2014 into reported losses. If this recent trial balloon turns out to be true, NALC will fight it with everything we have. Fortunately, we know that a clear majority of House members support Saturday delivery and we will urge every one of them to oppose this measure.

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.