

Postal union leaders: Pandemic-driven mail decline emphasizes need for USPS aid



By PAI

The decline in money-making first-class mail, as businesses closed due to the coronavirus pandemic, emphasizes—again—the need for federal aid to keep the Postal Service going, its three top union leaders say.

But Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., and GOP President Donald Trump—who schemed to stop vote-by-mail in his drive to steal the 2020 election—aren't listening.

That's because when Congress comes back to town on Nov. 30, the Senate's ruling Republicans will tackle a money bill to keep the government going beyond Dec. 11, while pushing aid to workers, unemployment benefits, anti-pandemic measures, and \$25 billion for the USPS, off to one side.

The USPS needs the money because the pandemic hit it hard in fiscal 2020, which ended Sept. 30, its year-end report showed. Revenue rose by \$2 billion, to \$73.1 billion, but operating expenses also increased, by \$2.3 billion, to \$82.2 billion, Trump-promoted Postmaster General Louis DeJoy reported. First class mail volume dropped by 4.2%, but the number of packages rose by 25.8%.

"These figures, driven by the economic shutdown's impact on first-class mail, show the need for federal assistance during the pandemic, just as other sectors have received," Letter Carriers President Fredric Rolando said. "Over the past eight months

and counting, the United States Postal Service has demonstrated its essential value, with tens of millions of Americans sheltering at home during this public health crisis while postal employees deliver needed supplies, medications, and much more."

"Meanwhile, the Postal Service has proven vital in protecting the core of our democracy—the right of citizens to choose their leaders—by facilitating an historic volume of mail ballots during that same health crisis. Perhaps never in its 245 years has the

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post office been more indispensable to the country."

They included yanking USPS's familiar blue mailboxes out of Democratic-led central cities and Black- and brown-populated neighborhoods, removing and disassembling special sorting machines that handled big mail ballot envelopes,

Mail volumes are in freefall, but if Congress doesn't pass aid for the USPS, there might not be a post office around once the economy recovers.

ordering trucks to leave postal sorting centers half-full or less, leaving piles of mail on the floor, in order not to deliver after hours, and banning overtime.

Under public pressure and, eventually, a court order, DeJoy stopped those moves, though he didn't reverse past destruction, before the election. And he vowed to resume them once the balloting was over—a point Postal Workers President Mark Dimondstein cited in leading a national day of action on Nov. 17 against DeJoy's destruction.

"The Postal Board of Governors who are enabling these destructive policies remain in place for the foreseeable future," Dimondstein warned in a post-election statement. "Postal reform legislation is needed," Dimondstein said.

That legislation, the postal unions add, would both increase areas where USPS can increase revenue—such as re-establishing postal banking—but also get rid of the yearly \$5 billion pre-payment of future retirees' health care costs which a GOP-run Congress and GOP President George W. Bush imposed in

2006. Without that expense on its books, USPS would have made money virtually every year until the pandemic hit, Rolando has said in the past.

Mail Handlers/Laborers President Paul Hogrogian mentioned that in lauding Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden's victory over Trump.

"We spent the past four years under Trump protecting our members and our jobs against threats of privatization, attacks on our collective bargaining rights, and our hard-earned benefits," he said.

"Now we have a pro-postal and pro-labor friend headed to the White House. During his candidacy, President-Elect Biden made several promises to the postal community: pushing to repeal the prefunding mandate that lead to USPS' financial instability; protecting service standards so Americans in urban, suburban, and rural areas receive first-class mail and parcels in a timely manner; and maintaining collective bargaining...We'll need to work hard to make sure these promises are kept."

Judge rebukes Trump's lawsuit allowing Pennsylvania to certify results

By Al Neal

The Trump campaign has stepped up to the legal plate more than 35 times since Election Day, Nov. 3, and out of those 35 legal "at-bats," they've made contact only once—on a technicality. If this were any sports team, Trump as team manager would likely face dismissal for a 1-35 win record. And in a way, the American people did dismiss an ineffective, and divisive president—whether or not he wants to acknowledge it is another matter.

On Saturday, Nov. 21, a federal judge issued a blistering order dismissing the Trump campaign's fruitless effort to block the certification of votes in Pennsylvania, while also shooting down claims of widespread fraud with mail-in ballots.

Following that loss for the outgoing president, around mid-day Tuesday, Nov. 24, Pennsylvania Sec. of State Kathy Boockvar certified the results of the Nov. 3 election in the state for president and vice president of the U. S., awarding its electors to Joe Biden and Kamala Harris. Gov. Tom Wolf quickly signed off on the certification. Together with the other battleground states that certified results in recent days, Pennsylvania is helping finalize the end of Trump's term in the W. H.

U.S. District Court Judge Matthew Brann wrote in his order that Trump had asked the court to disenfranchise almost seven million voters. In seeking such a "startling outcome," he said, a plaintiff could be expected to provide compelling legal arguments and "factual proof of rampant corruption," but that, he said, "has not happened."

Even if Trump had won this case, he would have needed to win a number of other lawsuits in other battleground states where he'd also asked to delay certification. In a show of utter desperation, Trump has also taken his efforts to subvert the will of voters beyond the courthouse, right to local lawmakers themselves—hoping to sideline the results completely through the installment of pro-Trump electors to the Electoral College.

Brann's ruling left it clear that Pennsylvania officials were free to certify election results that show Biden winning the state by more than 80,000 votes. He said the Trump campaign presented "strained legal arguments without merit and speculative accusations ... unsupported by evidence."

After Brann's ruling, the Trump campaign filed an emergency appeal Nov. 22, but now having officially certified the vote, that appeal is moot.

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RCEP creates world's largest free trade zone, but where does U.S. stand?



By Amiad Horowitz

On Nov. 15, a group of 15 countries, including the 10 members of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and other regional powerhouses like China, Japan, and Australia, made history by signing the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). The agreement establishes the world's largest free trade zone, covering almost a third of the world's population and GDP.

Many observers believe the signing of the RCEP is an indication of the declining influence of the U.S. internationally and highlights the growing power of East Asia in world economic affairs. During the presidency of Barack Obama, as part of his administration's famed "Asian pivot," the U.S. had pushed for an American-dominated free trade deal called the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). Trump scuttled the TPP as part of his administration's move to shake up U.S. international trade policies.

The RCEP has been eight years in the making; it offers many new opportunities for its members, as it removes many existing tariffs and makes it easier to increase their share of regional trade. The RCEP is expected to be especially significant in a post COVID-19 world, as many of the existing supply chains have been interrupted or permanently altered.

The RCEP is not without its critics, however. India was originally supposed to be a signing member but pulled out due to concerns that its economy would suffer under Chinese and Australian domi-

nation. Some observers say that without India as a member, the RCEP is much weaker than originally envisioned. Another criticism comes from the U.S.-led camp that has sought to "contain China." They believe that the sheer size of China's economy compared to most of the other signatories will lead to Chinese domination. Others wish that the partnership had included provisions for environmental and labor factors—a common complaint about most free trade agreements concluded in the capitalist world.

Despite these criticisms, the signatories of the RCEP have lauded this momentous moment for the "ASEAN plus five" nations. There has been special praise for Vietnam, which helped propel the partnership forward through its position as chair of ASEAN for the year 2020. Diplomats from Thailand, China, Australia, and even the U.S. have heaped praise on Vietnam lately for its regional leadership.

Many questions still remain. How will the next U.S. administration respond to the signing of the RCEP? Will President-elect Joe Biden continue the Trump administration's hostile approach to all things relating to China? Or will the U.S. become more engaging and try to revive a TPP-like free trade deal, so the U.S. is not left behind in East Asia?

Many pundits believe that the Biden administration will try to be more conciliatory towards China under pressure from major segments of Wall Street eager to pursue investments in China without tariff or trade war concerns. For his part, Biden has yet to make any statements regarding trade with China.

Some worry about Chinese domination, while other critics lament the lack of provisions for environmental and labor protections.

Cuba: Prensa Latina explains the Georgia Senate runoff election to its readers

By Emile Schepers

On November 10, the Cuban news agency Prensa Latina gave its Cuban and international Spanish-speaking readers a primer on the importance of the two runoff elections for Senate in Georgia, scheduled for January 5, 2021. The widely read and respected news bureau pointed out the role of the U.S. Senate in approving or blocking all legislation that the Biden administration might want, and in approving—or not—people the president names to the Supreme Court.

The importance of Prensa Latina's coverage of the article lies in the fact that the U.S. political and electoral system has unusual features that are often misunderstood by people in other countries around the world.

AMLO dice que debe atenderse salud sin afán de lucro

Xinhua News Agency

El presidente de México, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, dijo este sábado en la cumbre virtual del Grupo de los 20 (G20) que la enfermedad del nuevo coronavirus (COVID-19) ha dejado “lecciones importantes”, entre ellas que la salud debe atenderse sin afán de lucro y que la reactivación económica debe empezar por ayudar a los pobres.

Al participar en la cumbre de líderes por videoconferencia desde la Ciudad de México, López Obrador señaló que las crisis sanitaria y económica han causado sufrimientos y calamidades, pero también lecciones sobre salud, libertades, integración familiar y activación de la economía.

“La salud es un derecho humano fundamental que el Estado tiene que garantizar, haciendo a un lado el afán de lucro. La atención médica, las vacunas y las medicinas deben ser gratuitas y de aplicación universal, como lo establece la resolución de México aprobada en la ONU”, agregó.

En cuanto al rescate de la economía, el presidente mexicano aseguró que las acciones gubernamentales no deben centrarse sólo en destinar fondos públicos a empresas o instituciones financieras en quiebra, pues se tiene que empezar por los pobres.

“No convertir las deudas privadas en deuda pública, evitar el endeudamiento y menos aún si es en beneficio de pocos y a costa del sufrimiento de muchos y de las nuevas generaciones”, añadió.

López Obrador participó en el primero de los dos días de la cumbre del G20 a través de videoconferencia desde Palacio Nacional, donde estuvo acompañado del canciller mexicano,

Marcelo Ebrard, y los secretarios (ministros) de Economía, Graciela Márquez, de Salud, Jorge Alcocer, y Hacienda, Arturo Herrera, indicó la vocería del gobierno mexicano.

En su mensaje de cuatro minutos de duración, el presidente mexicano afirmó que otra lección de la pandemia era que se debía promover la alimentación saludable como prevención, tras recordar que la población enferma de hipertensión, diabetes y obesidad ha sido la más afectada.

López Obrador reiteró que la familia es “la principal institución de seguridad social” y se debía evitar su desintegración, así como no abandonar adultos mayores en asilos o albergues que no suplen los cuidados de familiares.

México es uno de los países más afectados a nivel global por la pandemia tras reportar más de un millón de casos confirmados acumulados y superar esta semana las 100.000 muertes por la COVID-19, según las autoridades de salud mexicanas.

El encuentro de los líderes, organizado por Arabia Saudí, país que ejerce la presidencia rotativa del grupo, tenía como objetivo de superar la pandemia y recuperar el crecimiento económico, abundó la vocería en un comunicado.

“En lo esencial, nuestra propuesta consiste en lo siguiente: Hacer realidad el compromiso de quitar montos de deuda y del pago de servicio de la deuda a naciones pobres del mundo. Garantizar que los países de ingresos medios puedan tener acceso a créditos con tasas de interés equivalentes a las que están vigentes en países desarrollados.”

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