Suggested headline

***Why is America’s postal service struggling?***

I have visited Benjamin Franklin’s grave at the Christ Church Burial Ground in Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love.

Old Ben must be spinning in it right now, his supply of brotherly love seriously tested.

The U.S. Postal Service he founded has become – let’s try to say this without profanity – a stumbling mess.

Per his will, the inscription he directed for the gravesite read simply, “Benjamin and Deborah Franklin.” Maybe this thoroughly American original was far-sighted enough to limit his eternal exposure to the post office’s reputation.

Obviously, there’s a story behind the hot blood I’m feeling toward the mail service. Multiple stories, in fact.

Several are personal. Another – and the most egregious – comes from a close acquaintance. All are recent, from 2025. The maddening tale ranges from the merely annoying to the outrageous, with potential for serious consequences. Taken as a whole, it paints a picture of the proud service Franklin fathered drifting toward failure.

By the way, allow me to make something clear. The men and women doing the everyday work of delivering mail locally seemed reasonable and caring when approached about my bad experiences. Don’t blame them.

It takes over-educated and over-paid higher-ups – no doubt tied to Washington’s dysfunctional politics – to engineer this kind of incompetence and indifference.

On to the stories:

* First, let’s start small, with erratic delivery times. Not all that long ago, one could set a watch by when the mail would come. Even neighborhood dogs knew when to stand watch at the window for the mailman. Not this year. The mail might show up early afternoon. Or supper time. Maybe 7:30. What happened? Don’t know, but the rumor mill suggests the service is chronically understaffed and looking for help.
* Moving on from the merely annoying to the infuriating. I manage the business side of our family farm in downstate Illinois. That means I pay quarterly income taxes to the Illinois Department of Revenue. I use tracking numbers to monitor delivery. The January payment envelope I mailed was returned to me, weeks later, claiming it was undeliverable because of a wrong address. It wasn’t wrong. Left with no other choice I re-mailed the payment to the exact same Springfield, Illinois address and it went through just fine. Why? Who knows. Fortunately, the Illinois taxman accepted the late payment was the fault of the post office.
* Well, one mistake can happen with anybody, right? So when April rolled around and it was time to send both yearly and quarterly federal and state tax payments, once again I obtained tracking numbers and mailed envelopes to the feds and the states of Wisconsin and Illinois. No problems with the states. But through the tracking I watched two envelopes for the feds – one for yearly taxes, the other for a quarterly payment – bounce around the postal system day after day after day. The system let me know delivery would be late. The notice should have read *really, really* late! Eventually, the envelopes arrived, so that’s something, but I could have walked them to Louisville faster.
* Those are personal experiences. Now for what happened to a close friend – let’s call him David to protect the innocent from retaliation because, well, you never know these days. Again, the topic is taxes, which can cause raw nerves even if everything is going right. David first filed electronically – like I’ll do next time – but then the roof caved in on him. Somebody had filed already using his Social Security number. To start fixing this nightmare, he had to file new forms through the mail to set a federal process of correction in motion. David has a refund coming, but was told that could take months to sort out. If you’re late paying taxes, you can expect penalties and interest. What are the chances the IRS will pay interest as it hangs onto David’s money? Leave that story for another day. David dutifully got a tracking number and mailed the forms. Readers know what happened next. Tracking showed nothing. Lost in the system. Nobody knows where. Pour a stiff drink and start over.

Look, I’m a news guy. I’ve followed the travails of the postal service over the years. I’m aware of its fiscal problems. I know there are those who propose privatization. There have been headlines the past few months during Trump Two about ordering cuts and reorganization.

What’s the right fix? No idea. But this level of postal disservice is not sustainable.

Logic suggests, with this much failure in my personal experience, there must be millions of other stories out there. That is truly alarming.

The USPS was established by the Continental Congress on July 26, 1775, with Benjamin Franklin as the first postmaster general. It’s been a good run; 250 years of proud tradition. It’s still a miracle. For less than a buck you can send a letter thousands of miles.

America needs our old, efficient post office back. Fix it.

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