

Governing in Crisis Teaching Guide

Former Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe The Challenges Facing America's Most Respected Agency

Interview Summary

In 1775, at the request of the Continental Congress, Benjamin Franklin organized a postal system for the colonies. Several years later, Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution expressly gave Congress the power "To establish Post Offices and Post Roads," and a recent study by the Pew Research Center reveals that the U.S. Postal Service is the most respected of all federal agencies. However, the Service, which has been the subject of both unusual financial demands and significant operating constraints, is in a perilous financial condition, warning that it may run out of funds by September. This is occurring at a time when many states are emphasizing vote-by-mail provisions for the November elections, and neither the Administration nor Congress has seemed eager to provide relief. Patrick Donahoe, a Pittsburgh native and University of Pittsburgh graduate, was a lifelong employee of the Postal Service, and served as the United States Postmaster General from 2010 until he retired in 2015. He discussed the proud history of the Postal Service, possible solutions to its current problems and its ability to meet the needs of the country in the November election.

Please watch or listen to the interview using your favorite video or podcast app: [YouTube](#), [iTunes](#), [Spotify](#), [Google Podcast](#), [Stitcher](#), [Amazon Music](#).

The Governing in Crisis series videos, podcasts, and resource materials are available at:
www.iop.pitt.edu/governing-crisis.

Video Topics

- (0:00) Introduction
- (5:40) U.S. Postal Service Innovation
- (8:31) The U.S. Postal Service's shift from government subsidy to self-funding
- (9:48) Federal operating requirements of the Postal Service
- (13:26) Plans to put Postal Service on sound financial footing
- (21:20) Assessment of New Postmaster General Louis DeJoy
- (26:50) Elections, Vote by Mail, and the Postal Service

Potential Uses

- Post a governance series video on Canvas and ask students to respond to a discussion question about the video, as well as comment on 1-2 of their classmates' posts.

- ❑ Show a clip of the video during class to enrich learning, emphasize a point, and/or contextualize a topic.
- ❑ Create a resource folder on Canvas that includes governance series videos, accompanied by “learn and do more” documents, as well as other links to support student growth related to current events.
- ❑ Incorporate a governance series video into pre-class readings for a live discussion using or adapting the questions below.

Suggested Written Reflection Questions

- ❑ What is the role of the U.S Postal Service and why is it important? Since its reorganization as an independent agency in 1971, how has the U.S. Postal Service changed?
- ❑ What did you find interesting in the interview? What is something that you disagreed with?

Suggested Classroom Discussion Questions

- ❑ The *Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act of 2006* altered U.S. Postal Service responsibilities, functions, and regulations. According to Former Postmaster General Donohoe, the act imposed “a burden that was almost impossible to fulfill.” What are the financial issues that the U.S. Postal Service faces today? How did the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act lead to these current problems?
- ❑ How have contracts with organizations like Amazon, FedEx, and UPS helped the U.S. Postal Service? Why are these partnerships necessary for the continued operation of the Postal Service?
- ❑ Health concerns arising from the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the need and want for vote-by-mail services. What are the benefits and challenges of voting by mail?

Related Reading

- ❑ Read the *Article I, Section VII, Clause VII* for an overview of the legal history of the postal power, including references to landmark cases.
- ❑ Watch the full *video of the speech* Former Postmaster General Donahoe gave to the National Press Club in 2013.
- ❑ Read Former Postmaster General Donahoe *plan from 2013 to fix the USPS business model*.
- ❑ Learn how *USPS responded to Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans*.
- ❑ *USPS warns* that mail in ballots could be delayed, causing voters to be disenfranchised this fall.

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