



Debunking the Postal Service's Opinion Poll on Saturday Mail

On February 6, Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe announced that the Postal Service plans to end Saturday mail in August 2013. In an attempt to demonstrate support for this plan, which bypasses Congress' authority to set postal policy, the Postal Service commissioned an opinion poll conducted by IPSOS. The polling, which asserts that 80 percent of Americans support the Postal Service's plan to end Saturday mail, has a number of flaws worth examining.

Flaw Number 1: The survey was conducted online. Fielding a poll online ensures that it is biased against Americans who are not online – the very people who would be most impacted by dropping a day of delivery. Senior citizens, rural residents and low-income Americans have less access to high speed Internet, or simply prefer to use other methods of communication. These are the groups who most depend on Saturday mail, and we shouldn't exclude their opinions on the matter. Pew Research Center also conducted an opinion poll post-announcement, and their independent results found much higher levels of opposition. Pew's results indicate that 32 percent of the population opposes dropping Saturday mail and that opposition increases to 44 percent among those who send and receive letters weekly.

Flaw Number 2: The survey used a blended sample of panel and non-panel sources. This means that the survey included traditional online opt-in panels and non-panel sources. Opt-in panels recruit people to take the poll, and typically provide incentives to encourage participation. Opt-in panels are viewed skeptically by academics and researchers, so blended panels often replace them, but even in blended panels, the opt-in component can bias the results.

Flaw Number 3: The survey fails to put Postal Service losses in context. The survey asked about the Postal Service's fiscal year 2012 \$15.9 billion loss without putting it into proper context by explaining the key driver of the loss. The unnecessary mandate to pre-fund future retiree health care, which Congress requires of no other agency or company in the country, has caused 80 percent of the Postal Service's red ink since it was put in place. If participants knew that the vast majority of the Postal Service's financial problems could be addressed simply by dropping that mandate, they might not be as ready to give up their services.

Flaw Number 4: The survey makes undocumented assertions. The survey makes a number of claims that the Postal Service cannot verify as true. The Postal Service asserts that:

- *Dropping Saturday mail "will allow the Postal Service to be financially stable."* But by the Postal Service's own overinflated estimate, this change will only save \$2 billion a year, a small sum compared to the 16 percent reduction in service that results from cutting a day of delivery
- *People will "not experience an interruption in service" from losing a day of delivery.* In reality, because mail will not be picked up on Saturdays, or processed on Sundays, all mail users will see a delay in the time it takes to get a letter from point A to point B – that is by definition an interruption in service.
- *Prices won't increase "in the near future" because of the change.* Because USPS won't be visiting every address to deliver mail on Saturdays – which impacts the marginal cost of delivering a package on that day – Saturday package prices will likely increase.
- *USPS will "NOT become a burden on taxpayers."* Dismantling the Postal Service virtually assures that it will become a burden on taxpayers in the future. Eliminating one service only begets eliminating another. Once you break it, you can't put it back together again.