

NEW DAY AT USPS



NEWS FOR USPS WORKERS, BY USPS WORKERS!

WHAT THE NATIONAL POSTAL FORUM MEANS FOR POSTAL WORKERS

The issue of privatization has been a major talking point for years within the postal service. Privatization is the process of selling parts of the public service, operated for the public good, to private interests which seek to maximize profit. When the postal service is discussed in these terms, this motivation to operate in the interest of profit would be directly at odds with the postal service's purpose: to provide a universal public service which delivers mail to every address in the country. Alongside this push to turn the postal service into a profit generating institution, the growing adoption of AI and automation threatens postal jobs and the livelihoods of postal workers instead of making jobs easier for us. When used to serve the goals of profit maximization, the use of these technologies leads executives to slash labor costs by laying off workers. Goldman Sachs estimates that 6-7% of the entire workforce of the country are at risk of being deemed "redundant" by the adoption of AI, with some estimates going as high as 14% with widespread adoption.

The lucrative "public-private partnerships" (PPP's) that the postal service engages in have already made some clerical and entry-level warehouse work redundant, with staffing levels kept to a bare minimum (a fact many workers across the postal service can attest to). Not enough clerks to work the point-of-sale counters, not enough mail handlers to operate the sorting machine— all due to automated processes that make the "Higher-Ups" believe tasks can be done with less and less people.

These staffing decisions made by management lead to lower wages and slower growth of those wages relative to the cost of living, decreasing benefits for workers, and a worse quality of service overall.

There is an annual conference held by the postal service in coordination with these private companies where these partnerships are made and developed. The future of the postal service is being discussed with the good of the few rich businessmen in mind and not to the benefit of the public or the postal worker. The National Postal Forum, or NPF, is a venue for the postal executives and industry capitalists to rub elbows and discuss the further auctioning off of the public service and the continued adoption of technology that threatens our jobs, rather than help us do those jobs better. It is the place for administrators to discuss the continued shift to the profit motive within the postal service and is designed to keep out the voices of the workers that actually do the work.

BRIEF HISTORY:

The NPF is a non-profit established in 1968 as the educational arm of the Postal Service. It was not created for everyday people, but for educating and promoting cooperation with business customers. This was a significant development for how the Postal Service operated with PPP's. The late '60's was a time of financial pressure for the post office, and especially for the postal workers who were struggling to make ends meet. The NPF's creation was a step in the direction toward the corporatization of the department under the Postal Reorganization Act of 1970, following the postal strike. It provided a new legal venue for capitalists, like corporate executives, and bosses of all stripes to discuss and set up new ways to increase profits. This could be done in full force at the annual NPF conference. For example, Jeff Bezos was a key speaker at the conference in 1999, and he was certainly not there to champion the service aspect of the post office (we've seen around 30 years of Amazon paying bottom dollar for USPS services).



After all, the NPF's goal is to "facilitate the growth of business partners" (the private aspect of a PPP), which comes at the expense of the workers and service of the postal system (the public aspect of a PPP). Apparently, many new developments and USPS products have come out of the NPF, such as zip codes, forever stamps, express mail, and Sunday package delivery. While some of these seem like neutral developments, it's important to think critically about who they were designed to serve. For example, zip codes made it easier for businesses to send mail to their customers. This new system allowed businesses to expand and target their markets at a greater level— facilitating "the growth of business partners". Do workers benefit from this? While the zip code system makes it easier for everyday people to send to each other as well, the workers (postal and non-postal) who make these commercial relationships happen don't see significant benefits to their economic and working conditions as the "business partners" increase their profits. The owners and their shareholders benefit from wider markets, all at the expense of the workers that perform the jobs that create the actual value of commodities. This is what the NPF was created to facilitate.

NPF TODAY:

The growing relationship between the USPS and private corporations is not just an abstract political issue; it has direct consequences for postal workers and the working class as a whole. The list of sponsors and partners involved with this year's National Postal Forum makes that reality clear. Companies such as DHL, Amazon Web Services (AWS), DCS, and Confluent are not public institutions concerned with improving the quality of life for workers or strengthening universal public service. They are corporations owned by capitalists and governed by one central objective: maximizing profits. Whether through logistics contracting, warehouse automation systems, or artificial intelligence designed to cut "operating costs," these companies profit by reducing labor costs and increasing efficiency for management.

USPS leadership works with these corporations under the logic that the postal service must "stay competitive" in the modern market. In practice, this means fewer workers doing more labor for stagnant wages while management searches for new ways to automate jobs, reduce staffing, and weaken labor costs. This is not a break from the Delivering for America plan, but a continuation of it. The language of "innovation" and "modernization" is used to justify consolidations, understaffing, and technological changes that primarily benefit administrators and private business partners rather than postal workers or the public. Some of these partnerships go even further. Amazon Web Services, for example, has contracts with ICE and CBP for cloud data storage and provides infrastructure used throughout the U.S. government. These are the same institutions involved in surveillance, detention, and repression directed largely against working-class and immigrant communities.

Postal workers should recognize what these partnerships represent. The issue is not that exploitation suddenly appears when private corporations become involved. Postal workers already face pressure from management to increase productivity and reduce costs. Privatization merely deepens these pressures by making profit generation a more direct priority. Our fight is not to defend USPS as a corporation competing in the marketplace. Our fight is to defend the working class within the postal service and to struggle for a postal system operated in the interests of workers and the public, not private profit. As long as the postal service continues to deepen its ties with private industry, workers will continue to face understaffing, job insecurity, speedups, and attacks on wages and benefits. Postal workers must oppose the corporatization of the service and fight for a future where technological development and public resources are used to reduce workloads, improve service, and strengthen the conditions of working people rather than enrich private companies and their shareholders.