

Congress: Let USPS operate as a business

Holly Bowen/Moscow-Pullman Daily News

~~Those of us in the newspaper industry have to empathize with the U.S. Postal Service.~~

While we certainly wouldn't give up the Internet, with its wealth of information and convenient methods of communication, we can't deny the global network has taken a toll on our line of work.

Want to find out the latest news? Pull up your favorite news website - no need to wait for the print edition. Want to write a letter? Forget about your stationery - just send an email.

But while many newspapers are adapting - albeit some more reluctantly than others - to this brave new digital world by beefing up online content and posting updates on social media, it's far too late for the USPS to consider jumping on the email and online bill paying service bandwagon.

That's why the agency needs to bolster and evolve its other services, ones that cannot simply be replaced by the click of a mouse or keyboard.

And it also needs to be given the authority to make decisions about its own future without our do-nothing Congress getting in the way.

The Postal Service receives no government funding, yet it's at the mercy of lawmakers who so far seem hesitant to make major changes to the way the agency operates.

The USPS lost \$16 billion last year alone, most of it on payments to its retiree health fund.

Lawmakers in the Senate and House recently proposed plans that would end Saturday mail delivery and phase out door-to-door delivery, in addition to altering the way the agency calculates its health care costs.

Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe, along with the Senate plan, also wants the USPS to be able to ship alcoholic beverages. It's currently losing that business to private shippers like UPS and FedEx.

We're sure plenty of Northwest breweries and wineries would be glad to have another option to transport their products across the world, especially if the additional competition results in lower shipping prices.

While the utility of printed correspondence is fading fast, we can't - at least not yet - digitally transport objects like beer and wine bottles. The same goes for almost any other physical item purchased online.

It sounds like Donahoe is trying to move the USPS into the 21st century - something it should have started doing years ago - but until Congress agrees to back off and let the agency make its own business decisions, we doubt any real change will happen anytime soon.