



We're glad that journalism matters to you!  
Get unlimited digital access for just 99¢.

REGISTER

Already have an account? [Click here to log in.](#)

Postal workers and other supportive union members take part in an informational picket in downtown Everett Monday. They oppose possible privatization of the U.S. Postal Service, which is being explored by the Trump administration. (Photo Bob James)

JULIE MUHLSTEIN

## Postal workers rally, raise concerns about privatizing mail

In downtown Everett and across the nation, letter carriers make their case as White House pushes change.

By Julie Muhlstein

Sunday, October 14, 2018 1:30am

LOCAL NEWS JULIE MUHLSTEIN



For almost 28 years, Kurt Eckrem has delivered what lots of people call snail mail.

In a time when even email sometimes isn't answered fast enough, when efficiency means a text message, the [U.S. Postal Service](#) is being challenged.

Eckrem, a rural carrier with a route on the Tulalip Indian Reservation, didn't deliver letters or packages Monday, the federal Columbus Day holiday. Instead, he rallied with other postal workers and supporters carrying "U.S. Mail Not For Sale" signs in downtown Everett.

Their informational picket, outside the Wall Street Building, was one of more than 100 around the country. Postal workers were protesting the White House's Office of Management and Budget proposal to privatize the agency.

"If you know anything about the background of the post office, it is a public service. It was never designed to make a profit," said Eckrem, 63, president of the [Washington Rural Letter Carriers' Association](#). The union is one of four representing postal workers.

"It's a universal service. We deliver to every mailbox in the country," Eckrem said. "None of the other companies do that."

Bob James, who also rallied Monday, heads the [National Association of Letter Carriers](#) in Snohomish County.

"The USPS is in the Constitution," James said. "What differentiates the Postal Service, it's not so much looking at the profit as much as we are trying to do our best to serve the American public."

In April, President Donald Trump signed an executive order creating a task force to study the Postal Service, saying it was on "an unsustainable financial path." The task force, which hasn't yet released recommendations, is expected to endorse privatization, according to [The Washington Post](#) and other news reports.

"The goal of the rallies is to get the public to contact their legislators," Eckrem said. "We need to get the public interested in the issue."

In Congress, [House Resolution 993](#) was introduced in July. It expresses that Congress “should take all appropriate measures to ensure that the United States Postal Service remains an independent establishment of the Federal Government and is not subject to privatization.” There’s a companion, [S. Res. 633](#), in the U.S. Senate.

As a rural carrier, Eckrem believes privatization would mean much higher prices for some.

“In my opinion, there would be rather significant price hikes in the rural areas. There’s a good possibility people would have to pay to get mail delivered in rural areas,” Eckrem said. “They’d be going after profitable parts in the cities. The outlying areas are not profitable.”

While the notion of snail mail has credence, considering online bill-paying and other ways technology has made a paper letter a thing of the past, people also use the Postal Service in new ways.

“The volume of first-class mail is very much declining,” Eckrem said. “The volume of advertising mail is steady. But packages — it’s amazing. With the internet, it’s crazy the things we deliver.”

Eckrem said the Postal Service is now delivering about 70 percent of Amazon packages. “They’re trying to get their own delivery service,” he added.

And a “last-mile” agreement has the Postal Service delivering some packages for UPS and FedEx, Eckrem said. “We drop off what’s not profitable for them,” he said.

There are other considerations.

“Vote by mail, how would that be impacted?” Eckrem said. “The easier it is to vote, people are going to vote.”

And for convenience, people use the mail for delivery of prescription medications, dog food, diapers — all sorts of needs. “People don’t realize it,” James said.

Eckrem expects to retire soon, and isn’t worried about any change affecting him. James, who carried mail in south Snohomish County, is already retired, but still holds his union position until January.

They worry about current and future workers.

“We’ve got a lot of young people, a lot of single mothers, a lot of veterans,” Eckrem said. “The pro-privatization argument blames unions. It is a good job, a good middle-class job — what we all aspire to. And the unions have, through negotiated contracts, accomplished that for workers.”

Under privatization, he believes, “it will not be a good middle-class job.”

“We need the politicians to listen to their constituents,” Eckrem said. “If enough say we don’t want this, then we’ve accomplished something.”

He also thinks anyone claiming postal workers haven’t adapted to change aren’t paying attention to online shopping.

“If you had told me that at age 60-something I’d be delivering toilet paper for a living, I’d wonder what kind of life I had,” he quipped.

*Julie Muhlstein: 425-339-3460; [jmuhlstein@heraldnetcom](mailto:jmuhlstein@heraldnetcom).*



ADVERTISEMENT



# SMOKEY ROBINSON

LIVE IN CONCERT



**FRIDAY, JULY 12 • 7PM**  
AT THE TULALIP AMPHITHEATRE

**TICKETS ON SALE NOW!**

SMOKEYROBINSON.COM | /THESMOKEYROBINSON | @SMOKEY\_ROBINSON

**TULALIP RESORT CASINO** | **SUMMER CONCERTS**

Schmieder | 21+ EVENT

ADVERTISEMENT



*Wish you were here!*

**WIN A TRIP FOR 2 TO**  
**HAWAII**

**ENTER NOW**

ADVERTISEMENT

ADVERTISEMENT

Wish You Were Here!

WIN A TRIP FOR 2 TO  
**HAWAII**

ENTER NOW

Hawaii.com

Top photo credit: The Surfjack Hotel & Swim Club

This Week's Ads

[View All >](#)





**Granite Falls woman dies in Whatcom County motorcycle crash**



**After 40 years in fire service, South County chief retires**

## Most Read

**1**

**Apartments proposed near major Arlington intersection**

**2**

**Death of a woman found on north Everett road ‘suspicious’**

**3**

**Everett sketcher Elizabeth Person illustrates children’s book**

**4**

**2 finalists chosen for Granite Falls schools superintendent**

**5**

**Next stop MIT for Jackson scholar, swimmer — and politician?**

### HeraldNet Comment Policy

We welcome relevant, respectful comments.

Please read our [Comment Policy](#) before commenting.



Comments for this thread are now closed





 Recommend Tweet Share

Sort by Best ▾

**Houseboat** • 7 months ago

Taxpayers dollars do NOT and never have funded the USPS; the service runs entirely on revenue generated by its own business.

Therefore, when paid right-wing posters here and elsewhere like to spout off saying "As a taxpayer, I want the service privatized", you know they are full of you-know-what.

I am very happy with the service USPS provides. The postal service is both less expensive (usually) and more reliable (always) than either of the two large private carriers (UPS and FedEx). Just last week, I made a major mistake, and shipped a package using FedEx (to save a few dollars for a long-distance large package trip). Of course, the item inside the package got totally destroyed, which is par for the course in my experience with both FedEx and UPS.

In ten years of shipping items with USPS, only one of my packages was ever delivered damaged -- one package out of about 1,500. Meanwhile, both FedEx and UPS have managed to damage at least 1/4 of my packages. Also have had more than a few packages get "lost" through FedEx and UPS.

Every small businessman learns the hard way to avoid FedEx and UPS as much as possible and instead use USPS as much as possible. Privatizing USPS would actually severely damage the US economy because it would dramatically raise shipping costs across-the-board.

3 ^ | ▾ • Share ›

**Not hyperostotic** • 7 months ago

Privatizing postal delivery will cause the law of supply and demand to dictate mail delivery. Do you hear that Elbe, WA? Gascoyne, ND? Eldora, IA? Baraboo, WI?

2 ^ | ▾ • Share ›

**JP** • 7 months ago

I just cringe if i'm expecting a package from the USPS.

Tracking system is just a web page were data is never entered.

I have had two packages in the last 18 months that were last seen in Federal Way postal facility, never to be seen again.

I have been home waiting on a package delivery only to get a slip in my mailbox telling me I need to go to Post Office (after) mailman finishes route.

Unfortunately every postal worker I have ever had contact with has the stereotypical government worker mentality X 1000. I don't hold them personally responsible for the cancerous mindset that has been ingrained for many generations.

Time to shut this Dog and Pony show down. Just like our educators, no reason to be competent if you can't be fired.

1 ^ | ▾ • Share ›

**Smooth to Operate** ➔ JP • 7 months ago

Do you live in the boonies? A secured building?

1 ^ | ▾ • Share ›



**JP** → Smooth to Operate • 7 months ago

Ya I live in unincorporated East County.  
FED EX and UPS have no problem pulling down driveway to deliver.  
USPS not so much!

^ | v • Share ›

[Show more replies](#)



**All444** • 7 months ago

The government never ran the postal service well. It's a blessing to the taxpayer to have this privatized.

^ | v • Share ›



**Smooth to Operate** → All444 • 7 months ago

Yeah, it's been going downhill since Benjamin Franklin served as the Postmaster General until November 7, 1776. It's been going downhill for centuries ever since. \*HEAD DESK\*

Here's what the post office actually does. It's a list of facts.

I think we should privatise it. pay minimum wages and allow anyone in the process who's willing to work for nothing. Possibly terrorists? They would love to handle Americas mail!

<https://facts.usps.com/>

2 ^ | v • Share ›



**Natural Causes** • 7 months ago

**“The USPS is in the Constitution,” James said.**

Yep it is. This is exactly what it says: ***To establish Post Offices and post Roads***

That's it. There's no other language at all and definitely nothing says something like "Congress shall not infringe on the right of the Post Office to exist". Which means Congress can giveth Post Offices and Congress can taketh Post Offices away.

**“If you know anything about the background of the post office, it is a public service. It was never designed to make a profit,” said Eckrem, 63, president of the Washington Rural Letter Carriers’ Association. The union is one of four representing postal workers.**

And, by golly, thanks in part to the union, it never has made a "profit". But, that doesn't mean it needs to be a monstrous drain on public resources, either. As a taxpayer, I'd be happy if they just came with a couple of hundred million dollars a year of breaking even. The Post Office has always been one of the most dysfunctional governmental bureaucratic soul sucking money pits in our country's history and should be held accountable.

^ | v • Share ›



**Houseboat** → Natural Causes • 7 months ago

" As a taxpayer, I'd be happy if they just came with a couple of hundred million dollars a year of breaking even".

The USPS uses ZERO taxpayer dollars; it is run entirely through revenue it generates from shipping services and postage sales. So, yes, you are an uninformed idiot who watches Fox News.

The USPS is currently in debt solely due to a 2006 GOP-enacted scam law which requires that billions of dollars in yearly profit it generates be set aside to pay for the health benefits of future employees -- employees who haven't even been hired yet. Because no business can possibly set aside 70% of its yearly operating profit and still remain in the black, the USPS is now bankrupt because of this 2006 law.

yearly operating profit and still remain in the black, the USPS is now, because of this 2006 law, perpetually in the red -- even though it otherwise would be doing just fine. No other public or private business is required to do such a thing.

Basically, some billionaires and their think-tank men in a smoke-filled room said to themselves, "USPS owns billions of dollars in assets -- real estate and other things. If we can work with our GOP cronies to ram through a law which will artificially drive USPS into debt, we can get our hands on all of that real estate at bargain-basement prices, as well as break up postal unions who typically support the Democrats. We'll arrange to have some of our paid liars to go on Fox News and say bad things about the USPS as propaganda, and the suckers will believe anything they say. They really are that stupid."

The end.

3 ^ | v • Share ›



**Harry 904** ➔ Houseboat • 7 months ago

People who call other people "idiots" are on the verge of being deleted by the editor. We try not to do that around here. Just so you know.... you have been warned. So you won't be surprised if and when it happens

BTW Natural Causes has been one of the most intelligent and civil commenters on this forum and respected by both sides of the political spectrum. His opinions are all well researched and thought out, unlike some who post here.

^ | v • Share ›

[Show more replies](#)



**Smooth to Operate** ➔ Natural Causes • 7 months ago

Oh stop. it's corruption from the right that is undermining the postal system. They want to privatise it. They suck money out to divert to their pet project. It's a relatively new tactic.

It's the same strategy though. You cause the problem(like smash world economy) and then say you are the only one to fix the problem.

3 ^ | v • Share ›



**Natural Causes** ➔ Smooth to Operate • 7 months ago

STO - my comment simply states facts that everyone knows. Your willingness to support government waste, inefficiency, and ineffectiveness in all shapes and forms, no matter who's in power, has always left me slack jawed in amazement. I have to remind myself that, based on what little you've shared about yourself, you likely don't pay any income taxes and, because of credits you probably get because of the size of your family, you end up being reimbursed for whatever social security taxes you might pay. OR, you could just be on disability which I believe means you don't pay any income/SS taxes at all. As such, I do acknowledge it's kinda hard to bite the hand that feeds you.

Beyond that, again from you've shared in various comments, it's quite apparent you've led a challenging life. My sincere appreciation for your service to this country as well as empathy for the challenges you've faced has been severely undercut by your constant vicious attacks on my thoughts and opinions even as I stopped responding to your comments several months ago and don't respond to them now, except in this instance.

I fully expect you will report this comment and, as such, it will eventually be deleted. Before that happens, let me just say I sincerely wish you the best in all your future endeavors and hope you find some semblance of peace in your life.



^ | v • Share ›

[Show more replies](#)



Subscribe



Disqus' Privacy Policy

---

**Herald***Net*  
EVERETT, WASHINGTON



© 2019, Everett Herald and Sound Publishing, Inc.

[About](#) | [Contact](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Newsletters](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Contests](#) | [About Comments](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Social Media](#)