

## Transcript Post Office part 2

- Announcer: Welcome to Civil Discourse. This podcast will use government documents to eliminate the workings of the American government and offer context around the effects of government agencies in your everyday life. Now, your hosts, Nia Rodgers, Public Affairs Librarian and Dr. John Aughenbaugh, Political Science Professor.
- N. Rodgers: Hey, Aughie.
- J. Aughenbaugh: Good morning, Nia. How are you?
- N. Rodgers: I'm good. How are you?
- J. Aughenbaugh: I'm fine.
- N. Rodgers: This is part two of our post office series. In our last episode, we talked to Hillary Miller, who is the Scholarly Communications Librarian for VCU Libraries and she talked to us about copyright of postage stamps, which was really cool. Apparently, I can't be on one until I'm president or dead or some combination thereof.
- N. Rodgers: Actually, presidents also have to be dead but I'm thinking this presidency thing is looking better and better to me because I can do all kinds of stuff when I'm president. However, that is not the point of this podcast. That is just now, everybody knows my secret ambition so except not so secret but I have some questions for you, Aughie because I know that you have studied the post office and I know you know all things. I'm going to ask you some stuff.
- N. Rodgers: Hillary stayed with us. She's here in the room as well in case she wants to set straight about something if we get it wrong. Why do we have a federal post office? Who cares about the post? I mean, I care, clearly.
- J. Aughenbaugh: Because you still mail stuff.
- N. Rodgers: I still mail stuff, but I'm the only person me and Amazon are the only ... Me and Jeff Bezos, the only thing we have in common is that we use the post office.
- J. Aughenbaugh: We're on the planet together and you use the post office.
- N. Rodgers: Exactly and we're both breathing.

- J. Aughenbaugh: Yes, right.
- N. Rodgers: Anyway, what's the history of the post office in the sense of where does the post office come into play in sort of the American government history?
- J. Aughenbaugh: Okay, if you think about the post office today, so much of it is the delivering of packages, you mentioned, Amazon, et cetera or as Hillary mentioned in the previous episode of the podcast about commemorative stamps and people who want to either get on like you or people who buy and because these are really cool, et cetera.
- J. Aughenbaugh: In the history of the United States, the idea of the post office was to go ahead and connect the country economically. The huge concern of many of the founding fathers was, how do you connect the either regions of the country or the states economically because the big concern among many of the founders was that we're no longer part of the British Colonial Empire, how do we go ahead and pull together states that in many ways, weren't all that similar or weren't all that interested in working with one another?
- N. Rodgers: Georgia and Pennsylvania had drastic different views on the world.
- J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, different views on the world, yeah.
- N. Rodgers: See the constitution, if you're wondering about that.
- J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. For many of the founders the thought was you create a post office to go ahead and help unify the country. You bind the country together economically and you probably see the clearest representation of this first with the Federalist. I mean, because their basic argument in the Constitution in part was, some of the deficiencies of the government post-Revolutionary War was this hyper competitiveness among the states, economically and it was hurting the country.
- J. Aughenbaugh: Great Britain thought that there was a good chance that they would regain the colonies after the Revolutionary War because we were hurting ourselves. The French were waiting. Okay?
- N. Rodgers: Vultures, I'm sure.
- J. Aughenbaugh: Sure, right?
- N. Rodgers: Just waiting for us to fail.

J. Aughenbaugh: Of course.

N. Rodgers: Well, I mean, and revolution often fails.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes. Yes.

N. Rodgers: It regularly fails more than it actually works.

J. Aughenbaugh: Then you have countries who ...

N. Rodgers: Who waited to step in.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, who pick up the pieces afterwards and say, "Hey, we're going to bring order to the chaos that was created by the revolution."

J. Aughenbaugh: The idea behind the post office was, you mentioned Georgia and Pennsylvania. Hypothetically, if Georgia farmers grow something and Pennsylvanians want whatever they have grown, whether it be peanuts or cotton or whatever the case may be. Well, how do you get that good to the consumers in Pennsylvania?

N. Rodgers: You don't hop in your truck and drive there. I see.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, because in 18th century America, our transportation system was basically, in many ways, non-existent other than waterways, how were you going to get goods from one place to the next?

J. Aughenbaugh: The thought was, if you create a post office and the primary, if you will, method of delivering anything was by horseback, well, the government then would, in many ways, subsidize this new economy. If you think about capitalism, capitalism was the new economy in the 18th century.

J. Aughenbaugh: That was the primary logic behind the post office. It wasn't so that you could go ahead and talk to grandma. Okay. Let's send grandma [crosstalk 00:06:00].

N. Rodgers: Although that's a nice side benefit.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes, right?

N. Rodgers: Is that it allowed people to move further away from their families. I mean, until then ... Sorry, that didn't come out, right. Did it? Wow. Sorry, mom, I love you. It allowed people to move to cities to get jobs and do different

things or to different parts of the country where land was more available or whatever, you could still be in touch with loved ones.

J. Aughenbaugh: Sure. I mean, it helped with ...

N. Rodgers: There is some of that still, right?

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: There's still some of that sort of, "Hey, we can expand and still stay in touch."

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, historians and sociologists have all identified the fact that the post office, in many ways, helped create or helped aid in the migratory, if you will, patterns of the United States.

N. Rodgers: Pony Express, go out west because we'll be able to send you letters and packages from home. We'll be able to send you ... Well, probably not Godiva chocolate. Sorry, I went immediately to sending you Godiva chocolates. I don't know what that's about, but anyway.

J. Aughenbaugh: Okay, but you talked about the westward expansion in the United States. One of the ways that the westward expansion was supported was by the Pony Express. I mean, if you're going to go ahead with a couple hundred other people and move out west and create a community, on one hand, you want to move west. You want the land that was available or you want to get away from a city or you want to spark out on your own and create a different religious community. On one hand, you want to be away.

J. Aughenbaugh: On the other hand, how do you go ahead and support that community if you don't have access to basic goods and services that you will need to create that community? Well, the Pony Express helps with that. The government made an affirmative, if you will, obligation by creating the post office. That was one of the initial cabinet positions, which postmaster general and we still have that position today.

N. Rodgers: I know. I'm [inaudible 00:08:16] it.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: I'm [inaudible 00:08:17] it on my way to the White House saying postmaster general. I would like being a general without actually having to serve in the military, in the Armed Forces, because it would be, I'm

probably less likely to get killed being postmaster general than any other kind of general.

J. Aughenbaugh: You have spoken in previous podcasts your desire to run the Department of Defense, which is populated with a whole bunch of generals. The US Attorney General, okay, you just ...

N. Rodgers: I like general. I like the way it sounds. General Nia. Doesn't it sound good? That sounds good to me.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes. They're more than likely going to go ahead and say, "General Rodgers."

N. Rodgers: Oh, yeah.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, that kind of first name informality ...

N. Rodgers: Is for Beyonce not for me because if she was general, we just call her General Beyonce. That's what I would call her. Actually, I'd call her ma'am.

N. Rodgers: Okay, you have the post office as this connective thing, which it sounds to me like that never changed because I remember hearing about my grandmother getting the Sears catalog, which was you ordered things through the Sears Catalog, which was by mail. You ordered by mail shoes and you ordered all kinds of stuff, the stuff you couldn't make or grow for yourself.

N. Rodgers: I grew up in rural North Carolina and she grew up in rural Virginia. The only sort of connection to the big ticket, big city items was to get that giant catalog and order from that, which is part of, I guess, what you're talking about with that continuing on with the commerce and now we have Amazon and it's sort of come through all the way to modern times.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, that the US post office, in many ways, is a remarkable federal government institution, because it has changed as the nation's economy has changed. When it was first created, you're talking about a largely agrarian-based economy in the United States with a ...

N. Rodgers: Ninety seven percent farmers or something.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: Now, it's like exactly the reverse, it's like 3% of farmers.

J. Aughenbaugh: Reverse ... Farmers, but then when industrialization hit, many thought that the US post office would kind of sort of lose its value because when industrialization hit, you'd begin to see a change in the transportation system of the country.

J. Aughenbaugh: Instead of bridges and canals over waterways and instead of the use of horseback and carriages, you saw the rise of railroads. Many thought that the US Postal Service may not have as much of a need ... There wouldn't be as much of a need but the remarkable thing is the change in the transportation system made it easier for the post office to go ahead and do its work. It was faster to go ahead and deliver mail.

J. Aughenbaugh: It was, and again, the post office, in some ways made calculated decisions in regards to these changes in the transportation system. The post office as transportation changed, so did it and they think about automobiles. I mean, even today ...

N. Rodgers: Postal trucks.

J. Aughenbaugh: There you go. I mean ...

N. Rodgers: Who doesn't want to drive a postal truck?

J. Aughenbaugh: I mean, even today, mail is delivered in trucks and ...

N. Rodgers: Except in rural areas in somebody's car.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. Right?

N. Rodgers: Because, there are no trucks out there, they are, "You own a car? Here, you sit on the wrong side".

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, it's not cost efficient. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

N. Rodgers: Drive on the wrong side and put the mail in the boxes.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, I mean, it's not cost efficient to go ahead and have a fleet of postal trucks in a town that has maybe 5-10 thousand people. On the other hand, the Postal Service has changed in regards to its points of emphasis.

J. Aughenbaugh: You talked about your grandmother receiving the Sears Catalog or the JCPenney Catalog. Again, I grew up in a rural town and I remember when we would get those catalogs in the mail. Almost immediately, people in the family start identifying the pages to where things that they wanted.

N. Rodgers: Dog-eared within an inch of its existence.

J. Aughenbaugh: Within an inch of its existence, right?

N. Rodgers: Yeah.

J. Aughenbaugh: Okay, but again, so much of that was okay, we are going to be getting Christmas presents and who's going to deliver them to the house to be wrapped before your parents lie to you and say that there was Santa Claus. I'm sorry. Okay.

N. Rodgers: You are my childhood killer. Everything about my childhood you destroy eventually. I'm not telling you anything else about my childhood.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, I've already destroyed Schoolhouse Rock for you.

N. Rodgers: I know and now Santa. You are horrible. Okay, but that all got delivered by the Postal Service.

J. Aughenbaugh: Postal Service, of course because ...

N. Rodgers: I didn't even think about that that Christmas but you'd have to wait, pounce on the postman and hide that stuff before your kids got home from school.

J. Aughenbaugh: School. That's right. Okay

N. Rodgers: Otherwise, they'd know and that wouldn't be very secretive at all.

J. Aughenbaugh: Well and also think about how important the post office has been in regards to the dissemination or the inculcation of cultural values and norms. Just to give you an example, during World War I, the US Postal Service had discretion over what kinds of mailings and pamphlets could be sent out by political groups.

J. Aughenbaugh: The postmaster general and the 19 teens decided that the country as it was ramping up its World War I effort, didn't need to receive information from

socialist or communist organizations. That information was never delivered.

J. Aughenbaugh: We actually have court cases about this, where the authority of the postmaster general was challenged simply because the United States Congress had deferred to the postmaster general. Is this good stuff for Americans, patriotic Americans? Should they be reading this?

N. Rodgers: Well and then later, you get porn, right? Porn being sent across state lines turned into huge court cases with whether the post office should be delivering or can they refuse to deliver that and not if it's paid for and if it's wrapped properly and all that. I mean, as long as it's not wrapped in ... I mean, as long as it's not openly available ...

J. Aughenbaugh: Exhibited, right? I mean, because ...

N. Rodgers: Thank you, exhibited.

J. Aughenbaugh: I mean, because there's actually ...

N. Rodgers: If you get it in a brown paper wrapping, that's how male members of my family in childhood got the Playboy, was that it came ... Seriously, it came wrapped in around like brown paper bag kind of thing.

J. Aughenbaugh: That was a regulation of the United States Postal Service.

N. Rodgers: Makes sense. For some carriers, that would be really offensive to see the covers or the insides of those magazines. That makes sense to me. I mean, especially in the rural south, we had a very nice, slightly older lady who delivered our mail for years. I don't think she would have cared for that very much at all if she had dropped one and it fell open to one of those rather alarming pictures or alarming for her.

J. Aughenbaugh: There is a well-known Supreme Court case, in the late '60s, Stanley versus Georgia, where the Supreme Court said, "What you do in the privacy of your own house in regards to the possession of pornographic material is constitutionally protected," but the court made it very clear, the government can regulate the sale and distribution.

N. Rodgers: Oh and post office was the distribution.

J. Aughenbaugh: Distribution, and the post office ...



N. Rodgers: That's clever of the court. It's like the Supremes know what they're doing.

J. Aughenbaugh: Well, it does create a bizarre ...

N. Rodgers: Quite a bit of time.

J. Aughenbaugh: Well, it creates a kind of sort of bizarre dichotomy, which my students when we deal with that case in class always point out. It can be legal to go ahead and go out and buy it or have it mailed, but once you get it into your house, I'm like, "Yeah, you're golden," and their eyes just get huge.

N. Rodgers: You have to get there in the most secretive way possible.

J. Aughenbaugh: The way possible.

N. Rodgers: Once you get it, you can't be arrested once it's in your house.

J. Aughenbaugh: That's right. Okay. Think about all ...

N. Rodgers: That's ridiculous.

J. Aughenbaugh: It is ridiculous. Okay.

N. Rodgers: In case anybody was wondering

J. Aughenbaugh: Again, it speaks to the impact in the authority that the post office has, it has had throughout our country's history in major segments of American life from the rise of the economy or new economies or making sure our economies do work, to expanding cultural values, norms, et cetera. I mean, because for the longest time, people didn't buy stuff online, for you younger listeners, okay.

N. Rodgers: Yes, there was a time before the internet ...

J. Aughenbaugh: That's right.

N. Rodgers: ... Where you couldn't just go on Amazon and buy one of those in three of these and seven of these in different colors. I mean, that's ... People now say, "I'll just get it on Amazon," and I do have a moment, brief moment where I think, remember when you had to work for that, remember when you had to actually go to three or four stores and try to find it.

- J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, I mean, because you basically had two choices either you went to a physical bricks and mortar store and bought something or you ordered it from a catalog.
- N. Rodgers: Right and you got whatever the catalog had.
- J. Aughenbaugh: That's right.
- N. Rodgers: It wasn't 17 different colors of it and there weren't 45 different brands of it. There was that. You get that.
- J. Aughenbaugh: If you didn't live in a big city that would have many stores that you could possibly visit, what you were left with was the mail order catalog. You received a lot. You purchased a lot of things in the mail.
- J. Aughenbaugh: Again, for our listeners born and raised in big cities, you're like, "What are they talking about?" Okay, do understanding in its ...
- N. Rodgers: Even now in Montana, people get their drugs, like they order from online pharmacies ...
- J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.
- N. Rodgers: ... That's delivered by the post office. These are people who live in these small towns, I shouldn't say just Montana, small towns all over the nation. Sorry, I'm not picking on Montana.
- N. Rodgers: Montana is lovely, big sky. There's a big sky everywhere, but whatever. Apparently, it's really big in Montana but they order those drugs. That's the only way they can get them delivered because they don't have a pharmacy, they don't have a hospital, they don't have a clinic. That's life altering if the post office didn't deliver that stuff.
- J. Aughenbaugh: Again, this speaks to why we still have a post office today, right? I mean, because one of the arguments for getting rid of the post office and you see this arise, post-World War II, the nation's economy expands, booms, et cetera. Many people argued, well, we have plenty of private sector competitors who deliver packages, goods, et cetera.
- N. Rodgers: FedEx, DHL, UPS.
- J. Aughenbaugh: DHL, UPS, okay, et cetera. Why do we have ...

N. Rodgers: Those are the three big ones but there's a bunch of others.

J. Aughenbaugh: Why do we have ... We still have a postal service, right? Well, in part because the Postal Service is obligated to go ahead and deliver mail to all parts of the country. That's part of their charge.

N. Rodgers: Right. UPS wouldn't make money delivering to some tiny town in rural Arkansas when they're just delivering to two people.

J. Aughenbaugh: That's right.

N. Rodgers: They wouldn't make enough money. The market would say, "Well, then we're just not going to deliver to that place."

J. Aughenbaugh: That's right.

N. Rodgers: That means those people wouldn't get whatever it is they're having delivered, which if you're not getting the latest shoes, it's fine, but if you're not getting your drugs for your blood pressure or whatever else is that you're getting, that's a big deal. That's ...

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes. Okay. When the movement occurred to make the United States Postal Service a government corporation and Hillary mentioned this in the previous podcast, the United States Postal Service is what's known as a government corporation,

N. Rodgers: Is that what happened in '78 or did that happen before that?

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, it was roughly, yeah.

N. Rodgers: Okay. That's the copyrights, which is when it becomes its own corporation?

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, okay.

N. Rodgers: Okay.

J. Aughenbaugh: When it becomes ... The government has this type of agency. Again, it's not in the Constitution. If you look anywhere in the constitution, it should be like, "Where's this government corporation status?" It doesn't exist. I mean, it's like an independent regulatory commission. There's no mention of an independent regulatory commission like the Food and Drug Administration in the Constitution.

- J. Aughenbaugh: We've kind of sort of created it to fit the needs of modern times. We have government corporations. In addition to the United States Postal Service, we have things like Amtrak. Why do we have Amtrak? Well, in part because the private sector doesn't have passenger rail lines that many people in the country want and/or need. The government steps in and says, "Okay, we're going to do this, but we don't want to provide it ourselves." We created a corporation.
- J. Aughenbaugh: The government's created corporation to still meet this need. The post office is in that kind of sort of nebulous category. It's a government corporation. It is tasked with raising its own revenue, by and large, and to cover all of its expenditures. The post office ... The Postal Service can't go to Congress and say, "Hey, we ran a deficit of 350 million. Can you all help us out?" No.
- N. Rodgers: Can you throw some change by the way? Hey man, shake one of those cups?
- J. Aughenbaugh: Brother, can you spare a dime? No, they can't go to Congress and make that kind of claim, they ...
- N. Rodgers: Well, apparently though they can sell stamps for billions and then have to pay millions because they jacked that up, but, see earlier podcast.
- J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. If you look at the revenue stream of the United States Postal Service, you got stamps and as Hillary mentioned in the previous podcast, stamps, by and large, just cover the post office's cost of delivering mail. Do all pieces of mail need a stamp? No, because there are categories of mail.
- J. Aughenbaugh: You have category two, category three and I can't remember what category junk mails' in but businesses use it as advertising because it is cheaper for them in many ways to send out the junk mail than it is to pay for advertising and other media or other fora.
- J. Aughenbaugh: It may be cheaper for them to go ahead and send out a bulk mailing than it is to buy advertising time on a TV network, a local TV network or to buy advertising on Facebook or radio station or radio program.
- N. Rodgers: In almost all of that also involves a coupon because it gets you in the building ...
- J. Aughenbaugh: Building, yes.

N. Rodgers: ... Under the theory that once you're there, you'll buy other stuff or you'll spend more money than the coupon is worth.

J. Aughenbaugh: Again, it's ...

N. Rodgers: It's relatively cheap for them to send because that's done by weight, isn't it?

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: I bring 400 tons of this mailer and you put it in everybody's mailbox and three quarters of them get thrown away but one quarter of them ...

J. Aughenbaugh: Well, actually, [crosstalk 00:24:31] ...

N. Rodgers: ... Draws people in the store.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, because there are still people who will go ahead and open every single piece of junk mail. Ever fly, ever ...

N. Rodgers: Do not look at me with judgy eyes. Do not look at me with your judgy eyes.

J. Aughenbaugh: Every flyer, et cetera.

N. Rodgers: Yes. Yes. What if it's interesting? You'll never know.

J. Aughenbaugh: You'll never know.

N. Rodgers: How is it the members of Congress don't have to pay for their mail? What's up with that?

J. Aughenbaugh: Well, it's called the franking privilege.

N. Rodgers: Franking?

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: Tell me that's a person.

J. Aughenbaugh: No, I don't know the origin, but it's not related to a person.

N. Rodgers: That's too bad because if it's some guy named Frank ...

J. Aughenbaugh: There wasn't ...

N. Rodgers: ... who just was like, " I'm not going to pay for this. You guys have to send it." Oh no, it's not like that?

J. Aughenbaugh: No, no, no.

N. Rodgers: That means that Congress persons don't have to, for the flyers that they send out, they don't have to put postage stamps on.

J. Aughenbaugh: That's right. They don't have to and the post office knows this because the post office collects all that material from members of Congress and then sends it on out but interestingly, members of Congress have decreased their use of franking privilege because they recognize that many American voters today don't pay attention to that kind of stuff.

N. Rodgers: I know. I see you judgy eyes. I do, but I know that I'm a freak. I also like my postal office, like I like my local office. I like the people who work there. They're very nice. They're very friendly. They're very helpful. I have a very positive view of the post, which I know is mutantly strange.

J. Aughenbaugh: We will get to physical post offices in just a moment. There's like one last point that I wanted to go ahead and make about the modern United States Postal Service. Many people, including many members of Congress have said, "We ought to do away with the post office."

N. Rodgers: Get down with those people.

J. Aughenbaugh: Okay, because again ...

N. Rodgers: Not while I'm postmaster general, they won't.

J. Aughenbaugh: Okay, fair, fair.

N. Rodgers: I'll raise an army. We have trucks. I'm just saying, don't make us show up in our trucks with our uniforms and ...

J. Aughenbaugh: Because you are a general.

N. Rodgers: ... Throw mail at you because we will.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes, we will run you over with our nice little postal trucks.

N. Rodgers: That's right and we will ninja throw mail you.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes, right.

N. Rodgers: Anyway.

J. Aughenbaugh: Again, the argument is why replicate what already exists in the private sector? Okay, but we've already talked about how the postal service does deliver mail and provide functions that more than likely the private sector would not want to do because it wouldn't be cost efficient.

J. Aughenbaugh: Again, with the example of delivering mail to a small town in New Hampshire or Montana or Wyoming, I mean, it would not be a profit maker for many private sector corporations.

J. Aughenbaugh: The United States Postal Service today is like any corporation supposed to make money and we hear every year that the post office is in the red.

N. Rodgers: Yes, the post office runs a deficit, which apparently Amazon did for the first 15 years of its existence. You can do that as a corporation, but it seems like it's getting a little long in the tooth for the post office to continue having done it since that's been ...

J. Aughenbaugh: Okay, but ...

N. Rodgers: ... If I'm doing the math right, 40 years.

J. Aughenbaugh: Okay, but here's the deal. With the post office, the reason why it looks like it's running the deficit is because the United States Postal Service is the only corporation in the United States that is required by federal law to have enough money on hand to cover current and future pension liabilities. It's the only corporation and they ...

N. Rodgers: Whoa, they can't cancel their employee's pension? I need to be postmaster general. That is job security right there but, so I see. A lot of their money, a lot of their profit goes back into that then ...

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: Because 75 years is a long time and it's a huge service. I mean, there's a lot of people who work there.

J. Aughenbaugh: On paper, it looks like the post office is or the postal services run a huge deficit. In reality, more than likely and again, discussed in the previous podcast, we really don't know because like any corporation, they have broad categories of revenue streams and expenditure streams. We don't actually have that good of a handle on is the post office making money or not, making money in a given fiscal year?

J. Aughenbaugh: We generally know that more Americans are not mailing stuff. Demand for stamps, with the exception of commemorative stamps, is not generating as much money. The post office or the postal service has become quite competitive in regards to delivering packages. They will cut deals with online vendors like Amazon, et cetera where many of those operations, many of those individual transactions don't make a lot of money, but they want the contract. They want Amazon to use them.

N. Rodgers: Well, because in the aggregate they do make money.

J. Aughenbaugh: They do make money, but the individual transaction. If Nia, you go ahead and buy three or four books on Amazon and you want to buy next week, more than likely the US Postal Service isn't going to make a lot of money on you but if a half a million Americans do what you just did, more than likely the United States Postal Service is going to start making money because their contract with Amazon is based on volume, the number of transactions plus the volume of the goods actually being delivered to people's houses.

N. Rodgers: Well and if Amazon was, again, delivering to small towns in Arkansas, they would, by necessity, have to charge more for those things or they would lose money.

J. Aughenbaugh: Exactly, yeah, yeah.

N. Rodgers: One of their deals is that they don't charge that much money for their stuff, right? Your dollar 50 t-shirt, if you live in a certain part of the nation, becomes a \$5 t-shirt, you won't buy from Amazon but if it stays at a dollar 50 no matter where it's being delivered, then it's in Amazon's best interest to have that contract with somebody who's going to go there anyway because they're mandated by the federal government to go there.

J. Aughenbaugh: When, for instance, you have the choice of enrolling in Amazon Prime and if you do Amazon Prime, then almost all your shipping becomes what?

N. Rodgers: Free.



J. Aughenbaugh: Free, right? Well, how does that make sense for Amazon? It only makes sense for Amazon if they go ahead and work out a deal with companies that deliver packages in regards to volume of and location cost et cetera and that's if [crosstalk 00:31:32].

N. Rodgers: Well, yeah because if they deliver 500 packages to the same apartment building ...

J. Aughenbaugh: That's right.

N. Rodgers: ... That didn't cost very much money, relatively speaking, because you still have one carrier, one truck and one whatever.

J. Aughenbaugh: You think about the fact that the United States Postal Service is mandated by Congress to deliver mail in every town, every community, okay? UPS, the other private sectors, vendors, companies, they don't ...

N. Rodgers: They're not. They would charge Amazon an arm and a leg ...

J. Aughenbaugh: There you go.

N. Rodgers: ... To do that last chunk. It's in the post office best interest and Amazon's best interests to work together.

J. Aughenbaugh: Of course. Of course.

N. Rodgers: It's kind of a fundamental lack of understanding to just say we should just get rid of this thing.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah and again ...

N. Rodgers: Who uses the post office? It turns out millions of people.

J. Aughenbaugh: People do.

N. Rodgers: They don't know they're doing that.

J. Aughenbaugh: That's right and again the Postal Service like many government agencies or entities, even as a government corporation, they're not all that good at educating the public as to all the good that they do, right?

N. Rodgers: Well, yeah.

J. Aughenbaugh: I mean and again ...

N. Rodgers: Through rain and sleet and whatever, there's like a whole thing, right?

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: I can't remember what the thing is but they deliver in every weather and they walk across the desert with no shoes on ...

J. Aughenbaugh: Shoes.

N. Rodgers: ... Then they do all kinds of stuff to bring you your mail.

J. Aughenbaugh: That's right, okay?

N. Rodgers: Which is cool.

J. Aughenbaugh: We have that ...

N. Rodgers: They really don't like to suspend service. They do occasionally but they're ...

J. Aughenbaugh: No, they don't.

N. Rodgers: They don't really seem to like that very much because one of their things is sort of we are stalwart and we will deliver this to you wherever you are. You're hanging off the side of a cliff, we'll be down in a minute.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah and in many ways as we've discussed in previous podcasts, they are almost the stereotypical government civil servant.

N. Rodgers: Right.

J. Aughenbaugh: Okay.

N. Rodgers: I'm just a guy delivering the mail.

J. Aughenbaugh: That's right.

N. Rodgers: I'm not yeah here making billions. I'm not here making horrible decisions that are going to make your life terrible. I'm just here delivering the mail.

J. Aughenbaugh: That's right and we will show up in really crappy weather and deliver the mail. We will go ahead and deliver the mail even though you have a yappy dog that wants to rip off our leg, right?

N. Rodgers: We will also knock on the door if we know there's an old person living there and check to make sure they're okay.

J. Aughenbaugh: They're okay.

N. Rodgers: That happens a lot in rural communities.

J. Aughenbaugh: That's right.

N. Rodgers: The rural community I grew up in, the postal lady knocked on the door of our old folks in town just to make sure that they would ... She'd hear him call from the inside, "I'm okay," or "Hello," or whatever and she would know they were okay because that's an important function ...

J. Aughenbaugh: For many Americans, yeah.

N. Rodgers: ... Of that kind of service.

J. Aughenbaugh: For many Americans, that's the only government official they may even have interaction with.

N. Rodgers: That's true. It's the postal person.

J. Aughenbaugh: I mean, because think about how many government functions now you can completely do online and never have contact with a human being from getting and renewing a driver's license to getting ...

N. Rodgers: Passport.

J. Aughenbaugh: Passport.

N. Rodgers: You don't have to see a person to get a passport.

J. Aughenbaugh: Okay.

N. Rodgers: Unless you have some outstanding issues.

J. Aughenbaugh: Issues, yeah, right? I mean, but the mail gets delivered every day with the exception of holidays and ...

N. Rodgers: Sunday?

J. Aughenbaugh: That's right, okay? One of the things that you and I have talked about is and this kind of flows from what we just got done discussing is the importance of the post office beyond commercial economic transactions.

J. Aughenbaugh: There has been a huge push in the last 15 to 20 years to get rid of a large number of post offices that are no longer cost-efficient because why do we need post offices when we have now multiple generations of Americans who do everything online, right?

J. Aughenbaugh: The Postal Commission, that runs the corporation, has studied this at length, come up with a list, submitted list to Congress and Congress has to sign off on this and Congress almost inevitably denies, rejects every single one of their post office closings on the list.

N. Rodgers: Not in my district.

J. Aughenbaugh: Not in my district.

N. Rodgers: You're not closing that in my district ...

J. Aughenbaugh: Okay, because ...

N. Rodgers: ... Because I will hear about it.

J. Aughenbaugh: That's right.

N. Rodgers: My old constituents and my grumpy constituents and my constituents who don't like any change at all are all going to say, "What are you doing with my post office?"

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah and by the way, the people that Nia just described are the ones who tend to vote. They are the ones ...

N. Rodgers: Their vocal.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: Those people are vocal.

J. Aughenbaugh: Vocal and they will communicate and even if they're communicating with technologies that are two or three generations prominent, i.e. mail or how

about this rotary phones, they will communicate and they will make the lives of, in particular, the representatives in the House of Representatives very, very unpleasant, right?

N. Rodgers: Well, it's like military bases. Nobody wants a military base cut in their district either because you will hear about it. You will hear about it not only from the people who serve in the military there but also from all of the surrounding industry, all the ...

J. Aughenbaugh: That derived their income from [crosstalk 00:37:04].

N. Rodgers: Their income from those folks. I mean, similar post office is ... The post office in at least in some towns or from my childhood, do not destroy it, is that's also a place where people meet and they talk and they like there's a social and cultural aspect to a small town post office. If you want to get to know a small town, that's where you go hang out. You go and you stand in the post office because everybody comes through at some point.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, sociologists have studied how post offices in small towns have replaced courthouses as the meeting place for the public because in many small towns now, you don't have courthouses. The courthouse is usually in the ...

N. Rodgers: The seat, the county seat.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, the county seat but in small towns, where's the place where they go and because increasingly Americans are not members of organized religious faiths or groups and they're not attending church as much, what was it the Pew Family Trust in a poll last year went ahead and concluded that for the first time since they've been doing polling, less than 50% of Americans say that they regularly attend church service.

J. Aughenbaugh: What has replaced church, courthouse as a meeting place for a community? If you live in a large city, you're like, "Well, hey that's not as important because I'm always running into people," but in small towns there's got to be someplace for them to meet and the place where they frequently meet is the post office.

J. Aughenbaugh: When I teach public policy and we discuss government corporations and we get into this discussion about should we still have the United States Postal Service, I share the anecdote and it's very much like what you just described, Nia and that is this, when I go home two or three times a year to my small hometown in Pennsylvania and my mom and my grandmother,

neither of whom drive, one of the first things that they ask me to do is one, drive them to the grocery store and two, drive them to the post office.

J. Aughenbaugh: Then, I get to spend about two and a half, three hours at the post office listening to them talk and get caught up on what's going on in the community.

N. Rodgers: Because the postal service also ... Those people also know everybody.

J. Aughenbaugh: Sure.

N. Rodgers: If you need to know if somebody's doing okay, you ask the people at the post office because they know. They know if has so-and-so come out of a hospital yet or has so-and-so done this or that. I'm with you on that.

J. Aughenbaugh: Well, I mean, and you just gave an example of a snippet of conversation that I overheard last year when I took my mother and my grandmother to the post office.

J. Aughenbaugh: The person behind the counter at the post office, they were asked by my mother, "How's so-and-so doing?" He said, "Apparently not well because they haven't been in in the last four days to get their mail from their box at the post office." Now, he probably was violating some sort of, okay?

N. Rodgers: Oh, there are all kinds of rules about privacy and HIPAA and God knows what else.

J. Aughenbaugh: Rules, privacy. He merely commented that probably not all that well. That immediately led my mother to conclude that she needed to call.

N. Rodgers: Oh yeah, go check. Call and check on them.

J. Aughenbaugh: I was just amazed by this method.

N. Rodgers: The network ...

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, right?

N. Rodgers: ... Of how you find information out.

J. Aughenbaugh: I mean, because for many of us with the cellphone that is either permanently attached to our thumbs or to our ears, our network is, "Okay, I'm going to go ahead and shoot a group text and find out if we all know

what's going on with somebody who's no longer responding," but in a small town, that's not how they do things.

N. Rodgers: Yeah. Even people who have cell phones in small towns.

J. Aughenbaugh: I know, yeah.

N. Rodgers: I mean, my stepbrother lives in the same town my parents live in. He would never dream of doing that. He would ask somebody. He would say, "Who do we know can tell me something? You go find that person and ask them."

J. Aughenbaugh: Working at the post office in a small town is a position of importance and prestige.

N. Rodgers: Yes and people work there forever.

J. Aughenbaugh: Ever, right?

N. Rodgers: They retire when they're 967 years old.

J. Aughenbaugh: That's right.

N. Rodgers: They don't ... I'll put in my 20 years and go off to Tahiti and oh no, no, no, no. They have been at the post office since they were 22 or 23 and they're 90 and they're just now retiring because it's the hub of the town but it's, your right, there's also prestige and you used to be that you had to take civil service exam. I assume you still do.

J. Aughenbaugh: You still do.

N. Rodgers: You had ... There's a certain intellectual level that's respected. There's a certain just that you are a government official. You are doing the government's work and I think local people tend to have a respect for that.

J. Aughenbaugh: In the previous podcast about the post office and stamps, one of the comments that was made was about the trust. The United States Postal Service despite all the jokes that are made about the mail, why am I getting all this junk mail, they are always raising the price of stamps, et cetera, the United States Postal Service is still one of the government institutions that has high public approval rating because it still has these kind of vital functions. It has historically and it still has. It's one of those

remarkable government institutions that has changed to kind of sort of meet the needs of changing American life.

- J. Aughenbaugh: When the internet did hit big in the late '90s, I recall all these commentators, all this kind of prediction that the United States Postal Service would no longer be needed. Well, many have now argued it's needed more now than it probably was needed in post-World War II America.
- J. Aughenbaugh: Now, you have people saying, "Perhaps we ought to move away from the electronic media and electronic communication and get back to this era where people actually went to a physical structure and met people face-to-face."
- J. Aughenbaugh: This is what Robert Putnam discusses in his book, *Bowling Alone*. Social capital in American communities has declined because more of us no longer have face-to-face interactions. One of his measures is the fact that many people don't go to places or don't engage in activities like the post office.
- N. Rodgers: Hey, I love the post office. I, this year, decided I would write my sister a short story and I'm doing it on postcards. I went to the post office and I said, "Hi, I need 365 postal stamps for postcards." The very nice man said, "I'm sorry, what? Because that sounds like something a crazy person would request." I explained to him my project and he got all excited about my project and then he started saying, "Can I get you some postcards and what can we do to," he wanted to help. He wanted to be a tiny part of this project because he was interested in somebody who was interested in what they do.
- N. Rodgers: My sister said to me, "I love getting those because they're mail. They're real mail." What she gets is junk mail and bills. Then every few days she gets a postcard from me with three sentences on it, which I'm slowly probably driving her crazy because it's going to take me forever to write this short story but it also is there's something pleasurable about receiving something that someone took the time to stop and write and put a stamp on and go through that process that I think is different than texting.
- N. Rodgers: Texting is a very quick medium and sometimes when you just need to figure out what time you're meeting for dinner, a text solves that question but sometimes you need to have a more drawn out ... There's something to be said about a letter. There's something to be said about receiving a letter and I'm with Hillary, there's something cool about postal stamps. There's



something neat about picking out the ones you want and having it make a statement about you.

N. Rodgers: My mother always gets the birds and the flowers ones because those are her favorite things. I always get Muppets because I'm slightly ridiculous. I like to have, I know, I can see from your face more than slightly but I ...

J. Aughenbaugh: I see ...

N. Rodgers: You said nothing.

J. Aughenbaugh: I said nothing.

N. Rodgers: I know you said nothing. I saw your eyes but I think there's something in it for everyone. I mean, what's marvelous about that is that you, in part, it's a creative thing that you put on the front that says something about you. You're patriotic and so you picked the flag or you pick Lady Liberty.

J. Aughenbaugh: Even to your point about receiving snail-mail, my sister a few years ago when she got her cellphone forgot her first cell phone and she works for a hospital in a small town of Pennsylvania. I mean, they didn't really need a cellphone but when she got one, I was just like, "Hey, cool. I can just go ahead and send you text."

J. Aughenbaugh: That worked for like half a year and then all of a sudden just out of the blue, we we're talking on the phone and she goes, "You know what I really miss?" I thought she was going to go ahead and mentioned something of our childhood and I said, "No, what?" She said, "You mailing me a letter once a month." I was just like, "Huh?" She goes, "Yeah." She goes, "My PhD brother would stop and actually write me a letter once a month." She said, "I could go back and reread them." I said, "Well, you can reread my text." She goes, "Yeah, but ...."

N. Rodgers: It's not the same.

J. Aughenbaugh: She goes, "It's not the same." She goes, "It doesn't," she goes, "Your text have your infamous sarcasm but your letters have more." I said, "Really?" She goes, "Yeah." She goes, "You don't recognize it because you're the one who's writing it." She goes, "I'm the audience here." She goes, "I can actually go back decades of you writing me letters once a month." I said, "You've kept those?" She was just like, "Yes." She goes, "I can even tell what your mood's like because of," as you just mentioned, the stamps that I purchased and stuck on the envelope.

J. Aughenbaugh: I said, "Wow, I think you might be reading a little much into my moods." She goes, "No, I'm not thinking that," because she goes, "There were a few of the stamps where I'm like, "What's my older brother doing with X stamp?" She goes, "I wanted to see the reaction on your face when you were offered that as a choice."

N. Rodgers: There is. It's a creative endeavor. Mail is a creative endeavor in some ways.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, yeah.

N. Rodgers: I think we sometimes forget that and try to gauge ...

J. Aughenbaugh: Well, yeah, I mean, I have a choice, for instance, I get Sports Illustrated every week, right? I can get the digital version. I still insist on getting the hardcopy. Why? Because there's two hours out of every weekend where I basically just set aside and I don't do any work, I don't do any grading, I don't do anything other than I put on some music, I read my Sports Illustrated and drink a whole bunch of coffee.

N. Rodgers: You drink a whole bunch of coffee all the time, anyway.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, well, if I was going to go ahead and share that anecdote about my life and I didn't mention that, I was going to drink coffee, some people are going to wonder it wasn't you, right?

N. Rodgers: It wasn't you. I know like a lot of doppelgangers in there sitting there with Nia and Hillary.

J. Aughenbaugh: He was making that up.

N. Rodgers: I wonder who that guy is.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, right. The voice sounds the same but ...

N. Rodgers: Yeah, I love it when people send me cards and letters but it's pretty rare.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: I wish there was more of that. All right, I have one last question for you.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: One on postmaster general.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: I'm going to name all the post offices after myself.

J. Aughenbaugh: No, you're not.

N. Rodgers: I'm not. I'm not really because that would be silly and it would be really hard to figure out which one to go to. Go to the Nia Rodgers Post Office. Which one of the millions? They just named a post office in January after a musician, Marvin Gaye.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: Fantastic musician and it's in LA, which I guess is where he passed away.

J. Aughenbaugh: That's right.

N. Rodgers: It's where his family lives. How do you get a postal kit? Let's just say that I want to name a post office after Hillary because Hillary's fantastic. Hillary Miller, Scholarly Librarian Post Office.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: Which would be a really long name for that but anyway, how do I get one named for Hillary?

J. Aughenbaugh: Actually, there is a committee of the United States Postal Service Commission that has that responsibility.

N. Rodgers: Not the stamp committee?

N. Rodgers: No, that's a different one.

N. Rodgers: Okay.

J. Aughenbaugh: The person ...

N. Rodgers: She doesn't have to be dead for three years, right? She doesn't have to be dead for me to name a post office after her?

J. Aughenbaugh: No, they've actually named post offices after people who are still alive.

N. Rodgers: Okay, good.

J. Aughenbaugh: The general rule of thumb is ...

N. Rodgers: Good because I'm not willing to let Hillary go just to name a post office after her.

J. Aughenbaugh: That would be a little bit morbid.

N. Rodgers: Yeah.

J. Aughenbaugh: I love ...

N. Rodgers: Although, that would be a great way to insult somebody wouldn't it, if you just say, "Oh, I hope they name a post office after you soon." The implication there is pretty intense and then people would walk away going, "Thanks," and then they'll think about it and go, "Hey, wait a minute."

N. Rodgers: Sorry. That would just be, I mean, if you're going to think about it is to insult people without really doing it like if you're passive-aggressive insulter, that would be one way to go about it, but anyway.

J. Aughenbaugh: It sounds like you might have some experience as ...

N. Rodgers: As being suddenly passive-aggressive.

J. Aughenbaugh: ... Passive-aggressive insulter.

N. Rodgers: Oh yeah, no, no. Not me. [inaudible 00:51:55]. See earlier note about putt-putt.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, basically it's a committee that has rules and regulations just like the Commemorative Stamp Committee. The basic idea, I mean, the committee first arose in part when the country's population began to explode.

J. Aughenbaugh: The most recent round was post-World War II. I mean, we just had a huge explosion of the American population. You have migration of people, right? We're building new post offices. Are we going to name them? I mean, because in some small communities, they just have a number.

N. Rodgers: Right.

J. Aughenbaugh: They don't have a name, right?

N. Rodgers: The numbering system does not seem to be logical.

J. Aughenbaugh: No.

N. Rodgers: I think it's just in order of when they're built.

J. Aughenbaugh: That's right.

N. Rodgers: Because you can have two towns with post offices near each other and they have vastly different numbers.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: It's not like area codes ...

J. Aughenbaugh: No.

N. Rodgers: ... Where they go in certain chunks.

J. Aughenbaugh: Usually, what happens is a member of Congress either a House Representative or a Senator from a state makes a request to the committee. Can a committee reject their requests or reject their suggestion? Sure. Also remember, you got to be a little careful about that if you're the United States Postal Commission because your status ...

N. Rodgers: Everyone will put area codes around Independent Corporation.

J. Aughenbaugh: Independent Corporation, right?

N. Rodgers: I mean, you know.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, right?

N. Rodgers: You want to get along with Congress because ... Who should you get along with congress. I think we've discussed earlier with almost every agency ...

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, I mean ...

N. Rodgers: ... Which is better to get along than not get along.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, I mean, for various reasons. I mean, cooperation does make the government work.

N. Rodgers: Yes, mostly.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, I mean, when you have less of it, now you've given ...

N. Rodgers: It looks less.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, you give people in positions of authority to go ahead and say, "Yeah, I'm not going to help them out."

N. Rodgers: I don't like that person.

J. Aughenbaugh: We don't like that institution anymore.

N. Rodgers: They told me, they hoped I got a postage stamp soon.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: I don't like her.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, right?

N. Rodgers: Do I have to prove that Hillary's a good person? I mean, are they generally named after like somebody who's local to the spot who did an awesome thing or is it ...

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, usually it's named after either somebody from that community or somebody from that state. There's a small town in Pennsylvania that's got the Jimmy Stewart Post Office.

N. Rodgers: Oh, that's awesome.

J. Aughenbaugh: I think it's located near Indiana, Pennsylvania where Jimmy Stewart was born. Now, that's a no-brainer, right?

N. Rodgers: Well, yeah because it's Jimmy Stewart. No offense Hillary but you're not Jimmy Stewart.

J. Aughenbaugh: Okay.

N. Rodgers: She's smiling. That's good. She didn't take ...

Hillary M.: You've got to hear my Jimmy Stewart impression right now.

N. Rodgers: Yeah, you might want to skip the Jimmy Stewart impression.

Hillary M.: [inaudible 00:54:58]

N. Rodgers: I do like that you're smiling about that.

J. Aughenbaugh: By the way listeners, we've reserved an entire future episode where the three of us will just do our favorite best impersonations. You're not going to want to miss that episode.

N. Rodgers: Yeah. I can't think of one person I can impersonate besides myself. Anyway, I'll have to give that some thought.

J. Aughenbaugh: This is Aughie as a nice person.

N. Rodgers: Oh, if we're going to do that, "Hello. This is Nia as a non-ridiculous person. This is what the podcast sounds like when I'm being serious."

J. Aughenbaugh: Hey, maybe we could do a ...

N. Rodgers: I can't. That even sound serious. That just sound weird.

J. Aughenbaugh: Can we do an entire podcast like in British accents?

N. Rodgers: Oh my gosh. Can we do one while we do Silly Walks because that would be awesome if we could do a Silly Walks, the Ministry of Silly Walks from Monty Python.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes, I am familiar with it.

N. Rodgers: Okay, I was just making sure.

J. Aughenbaugh: I was just running that through my head.

N. Rodgers: Yeah, I don't know how we do that in an audio thing.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, but anyways.

N. Rodgers: If anybody can figure it, that would be John Cleese. We should invite him on. That'd be great. If he's listening to this, we'd love to have you on.

J. Aughenbaugh: You're going to toss Hillary and me aside for John Cleese?

N. Rodgers: Oh heck yeah, if he would come to the podcast, do you guys?

J. Aughenbaugh: I see where we stand here.

N. Rodgers: Just below John Cleese. He's the only one I talked to before.

J. Aughenbaugh: Anyways, it is ...

N. Rodgers: Madeleine Albright, [inaudible 00:56:27].

J. Aughenbaugh: Really?

N. Rodgers: Yeah, she's awesome.

J. Aughenbaugh: Oh good. All right.

N. Rodgers: I'd love to ask her all kinds of questions. I'd like to ask any Secretary of State all kinds of questions. I find that whole thing fascinating but that has nothing to do with naming a post office unless we're going to name one after Madeleine Albright, in which case I'm all in.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, we haven't had one named after her yet, okay?

N. Rodgers: We should.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: Because she's awesome.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. The naming process is much like the deliberative process in regards to commemorative stamps and that is we don't have the requirement that the person has to be dead.

N. Rodgers: Yay.

J. Aughenbaugh: Okay, but that's generally the norm. There's a fair amount of research that goes into it. The naming of post office is much like the selection of commemorative stamps has become much more diverse. You see people like Marvin Gaye. I mean, let's face it, as recently as the 1980s, you're not going to see a post office named after an African-American rhythm and blues singer because most of them are named after dead white dudes.



N. Rodgers: Yeah and a few dead white ladies.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: Generally speaking.

J. Aughenbaugh: Generally speaking.

N. Rodgers: Not persons of color.

J. Aughenbaugh: No.

N. Rodgers: Not particularly diverse, not a whole lot of women, not a whole lot of ...

J. Aughenbaugh: Also understand too that a lot of communities it's not much of an interest to name a post office after somebody.

N. Rodgers: Well, the nice thing is those seem to go through Congress pretty quickly.

J. Aughenbaugh: Oh yes they do.

N. Rodgers: Because nobody seems to object, "No, you can't name that after Hillary Miller. She's a terrible person. I mean, they don't ... First of all, I guess you wouldn't put somebody up who was a terrible person. Hillary's fabulous. I wouldn't have any trouble with that but you'd also have to be careful, I suppose, I mean, I assume that's why they get vetted.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: If there was some ... If it turns out that Hillary kicks puppies on the weekends or whatever, you don't do you?

Hillary M.: No, absolutely not.

N. Rodgers: Oh good. She's wonderful. Thank you. I'm glad to hear that you don't because that makes me happy but like if you ... They vet you to make sure ...

J. Aughenbaugh: Sure.

N. Rodgers: ... There is not something like that in your past but then they seem to go through pretty quickly. When I watch C-SPAN, which I can see Hillary on the corner of her eye judging me for saying watch C-SPAN, but ...

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, you got to be careful, Hillary, because both of us watch C-SPAN.

N. Rodgers: Yeah, it's a known thing in this room. We are C-SPAN watchers. They seem to go through pretty quickly. They'll stand up and they make the announcement and then they say something commemorative about the person.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: Then, they ta-da! There it is. I assume they go back to their district and they inaugurate the ...

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: ... The name.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah and if the person is already passed, they get family members to show up and I mean, this is the kind of thing that falls into the category of Pork Barrel Legislation. I'm bringing something home that's important to the community. Either I convinced the Postal Commission to build a post office here or I've convinced the Congress to not get rid of this post office and oh yeah by the way, I got the post office renamed for one of our famous sons or daughters. I mean, this is a win-win for everybody.

J. Aughenbaugh: A senator from California is not going to go in and say to a senator from Virginia, "I can't understand why you just went ahead and named a post office in Giles County for so-and-so." Nobody cares, right? They don't care in California, right?

N. Rodgers: It's not worth fighting about.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, I mean, this is the kind of thing but again it's important to the community because if the community can go ahead and say, "This is important. We want our senator to get this post office named for this person," it has the potential to bring a community closer together, yeah.

N. Rodgers: It's fun.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: It's a fun thing to ... I mean, it's a nice pleasant way ...

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: ... To have ownership from the community over the post office making something that seems very flat and not ...

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, I mean because ...

N. Rodgers: ... I mean, the post office is by nature a sort of a bland, right? The post office is supposed to be sort of tapioca pudding, right?

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: It's not supposed to startle you, be all sparkly shiny whatever.

J. Aughenbaugh: The Postal Commission does not spend a whole bunch of money on groundbreaking Avant-Garde architecture for post offices.

N. Rodgers: Not so much with that. Not so much with the ...

J. Aughenbaugh: It's kind of sort of like ...

N. Rodgers: ... The upside-down pyramid kind of [crosstalk 01:01:18].

J. Aughenbaugh: It's kind of sort of like what the Postal Commission is willing to pay for a copyright that will be the basis for a commemorative stamp. Here's the general amount we pay. We ain't going above it.

N. Rodgers: If you want more than that, then they're going somewhere else.

J. Aughenbaugh: Somewhere else. Yeah, we're going someplace else, exactly. Likewise, with the building of post offices, there's pretty much four or five standard designs. I actually looked this up because I was just like, "I've never been truly amazed by the architecture of any post office."

N. Rodgers: Yeah, they don't look like the Smithsonian or the Supreme Court or the Capital. They don't look like in any of those buildings.

J. Aughenbaugh: No, no, no. I mean, in many instances the post offices will find an existing government building that's already been built, that's already in the inventory for the general services either already owned by the federal government or owned by state local government who wants to get rid of the building and then they'll take it over. That's it. Yeah, again ...

N. Rodgers: Hey, we'll buy you a building for a buck, man.

J. Aughenbaugh: The United States Postal Service isn't going to go ahead and just awe us with the architecture of the buildings, right? Again, they don't have to because if you think about their purpose historically, they were designed to go ahead and bring people together through economic, commercial.

J. Aughenbaugh: It's like John Marshall said in *Gibbons versus Ogden*, "Commerce is a way of communicating with one another and the post office has always facilitated that," and we sometimes forget about how the United States Postal Service has done that throughout our country's history. They've allowed us, they've given us a structure or a system to communicate with one another and that's a pretty darn good thing as far as I'm concerned in a country that is as big as the United States is geographically but also in terms of population.

N. Rodgers: Yeah. It serves our diversity well.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: It's a fabulous thing and we come back to what we always come back to which is there will be links to some of the material that Hillary found about stamps and their copyright and there'll be links to a couple of the cases that Aughie mentioned in case you want to read up about what Postmaster Generals have been allowed to do and not allowed to do over the years because that's fascinating. We thank you for listening.

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