

***Part-Time Work is Not Real Work and Other Astounding Facts Courtesy of the Fact Checker!***  
**A Response by Congressman Gerald E. Connolly (VA-11)**

I was astounded to learn recently – courtesy of the Washington Post’s intrepid Fact Checker – that when a part-time postal worker, such as a rural letter carrier, suddenly loses his or her part-time postal job, that individual, in an amazing, reality-defying turn of events, does not “find themselves out of work.”

This will certainly be very reassuring news to the thousands of hardworking, blue-collar postal employees who stand to lose their part-time postal jobs, along with the income that comes with it, if the United States Postal Service (USPS) eliminates Saturday mail delivery, which comprises 97.7 percent of all Saturday postal deliveries.

These part-time postal workers may now rest easy with the knowledge of this astonishing ‘fact.’ In the event that these postal employees do lose their part-time postal jobs, when monthly bills come due, perhaps they can mail the June 16 Fact Checker column in lieu of payment to their respective student loan financiers, leasing companies, and mortgage holders. Surely these entities will share the Fact Checker’s conviction that it is a “fact” that losing a part-time job, and the associated income that comes with it, does not constitute being ‘out of work.’

The Fact Checker reveals a stunningly out of touch, even callous, disregard for the value of part-time work (fact check: many part-time postal workers need the income from a second job to support families and are not teenagers looking to simply earn some extra disposable income through casual “part-time gigs”).

I strongly object to the Fact Checker’s erroneous assignment of “Three Pinocchios” – which fails to comply with the Fact Checker’s own standards. To review, below is the passage from a Dear Colleague letter I sent to my congressional colleagues that the Fact Checker falsely claims contains either “significant factual error and/or obvious contradictions”:

*“The loss of jobs resulting from eliminating Saturday mail delivery would not be limited to the private sector, as approximately 80,000 full-time **and part-time middle-class postal workers, including rural letter carriers**, would find themselves out of work [Emphasis added]. Such a drastic loss of jobs would not only harm our economy, but also offset any deficit reduction, since the tens of thousands of newly unemployed middle-class families would suddenly find themselves in desperate need of financial assistance.”*

Knowing the facts one must categorically reject the claim that it contains “significant factual error” or “obvious contradictions.” Based on USPS’ own presentation to organizations representing full-time and part-time postal workers on the impact of eliminating Saturday mail and parcel delivery – which to this day remains the **only** detailed breakdown USPS has provided to either the postal unions or the public – eliminating Saturday mail delivery (which accounts for

approximately 97.7 percent of all deliveries on Saturday) and parcel delivery (which accounts for approximately 2.3 percent of all deliveries on Saturday) would result in the elimination of 25,846 city carrier technicians (all full-time employees, with 10,000 positions eliminated through attrition), 49,354 rural carrier associates (mostly part-time employees), 3,886 temporary rural carrier jobs, and the work of 2,700 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions in mail processing. USPS' projected estimates add up to the loss of 81,786 full-time *and part-time* postal jobs, including rural carrier positions, from eliminating 100 percent of Saturday deliveries.

The “new” hybrid plan that preserves Saturday parcel delivery still eliminates 97.7 percent of all deliveries on Saturday. Preserving a tiny percentage of parcel deliveries on Saturday does not undermine the relevance or accuracy of USPS' analysis projecting the elimination of 81,786 full-time and part-time postal positions. Thus, the estimate that, “approximately 80,000 full-time and *part-time middle-class postal workers, including rural letter carriers*, would find themselves out of work,” and strongly reject any suggestion that it contains either “significant factual error and/or obvious contradictions.” All of this conveniently ignored by a self-appointed “fact checker.”

For reasons unexplained, this same self-appointed Fact Checker simply accepts – no questions asked – USPS' baseless assertion that it can eliminate 97.7 percent of all deliveries on Saturday, achieve annual savings of approximately \$2 billion from this service reduction (the overwhelming majority of which are derived from cutting personnel costs), while only reducing its workforce by 25,000 FTE positions solely through voluntary attrition.

And, in case one still wondered about the objectivity and accuracy of the “fact checker,” the Fact Checker does this despite having full knowledge that just four years ago, USPS projected that eliminating the additional 2.3 percent of Saturday parcel deliveries, on top of the 97.7 percent of Saturday mail deliveries, would achieve annual savings of \$3.1 billion primarily by eliminating approximately 81,786 full-time and part-time postal jobs, with only 10,000 of the full-time city carrier eliminations occurring through attrition – their facts, not mine.

How to appropriately count employment statistics is an inherently complex issue. Honest disagreements often arise over real or perceived omissions, exaggerations, or legalistic language concerning the most accurate interpretation and presentation of labor facts.

The Fact Checker is certainly entitled to his opinion that one should simply accept at face value whatever statistic USPS is pushing on any given day, no questions asked – even in the face of two dramatically different USPS projections of the jobs impact (with curiously similar cost-savings claims) that would result from eliminating 97.7 percent of Saturday deliveries or 100 percent of Saturday deliveries.

However, the Fact Checker goes too far when his willingness to treat USPS claims as gospel evolves into accepting unsubstantiated assertions as fact. Now he treads into the treacherous field of opinion and strays far from the remotest territory of facts.

***On the face of it, 80,000 jobs seems high, especially considering that more than half of the USPS workforce are letter carriers. Could the plan really eliminate one-quarter of the letter carriers?***

- ***Fact Checker***

This statement discloses the Fact Checker's unfamiliarity with postal operations. Why does 80,000 jobs seem high? Especially when that "fact" was presented by USPS not by the unions or by this Member of Congress. And why should we accept this unjustified personal judgment as 'fact'?

As the so-called Fact Checker noted in the column, USPS reduced its workforce by 132,000 over approximately four years, "from about 623,000 in 2009 to less than 491,000 in 2013, particularly in the mail-processing functions." Further, in March 2014, it was reported by the Federal Times that the Postmaster General's "...ultimate goal is for the Postal Service to reduce its career workforce from about 485,000 to around 400,000, with about 65,000 full-time non-career workers. But the Postal Service can do that only with the added flexibility provided by legislation pending in Congress."

80,000 full-time and part-time postal jobs may seem high to the 'Fact Checker' – yet to those actually working in the trenches to strengthen the Postal Service, it is quite plausible that the Postmaster General would love nothing more than to reduce USPS' career postal workforce by more than 80,000 jobs courtesy of, "added flexibility provided by legislation pending in Congress," which includes the "flexibility" to eliminate Saturday mail delivery.

The Fact Checker's cavalier dismissal of the validity of the USPS' own statistics that underlie the projected estimate of approximately 80,000 full-time and part-time postal jobs being eliminated was justified by the fact that these statistics pertain to an "old" USPS plan, which proposed eliminating 100 percent of all Saturday deliveries (presumably in *very* stark contrast to the "new" USPS plan which proposes to eliminate approximately 97.7 percent of all Saturday deliveries).

Unfortunately, it appears that in his column space, the Fact Checker is not only entitled to his own opinions, but also his own facts and standards. For one of the key so-called "facts" the Fact Checker presented to his readers was cost-savings projections published by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) for the "old" plan (a detail curiously and conveniently omitted from the Fact Checker's column). Thus, the cost savings estimate that the Fact Checker approvingly cited was, just like the USPS slides that formed the basis of the 80,000 estimate, addressing the "old" plan to eliminate both Saturday mail delivery and parcel delivery.

If the CBO cost estimate of the "old plan" is valid enough for the Fact Checker to cite in justifying cost-savings associated with the "new" plan to eliminate 5 day mail delivery while preserving 6 day parcel delivery (potentially expanding to Sunday delivery as well); citing

USPS' estimates of the jobs losses stemming from the "old plan" is equally valid. It turns out that in cherry-picking statistics, and employing shifting standards, the Fact Checker is not only in possession of cake, but eating it too. But that is what happens when one begins with a prior bias and seeks "facts" to buttress it.

The Fact Checker also mistakenly inflates the importance of attrition. The reality that a portion of postal jobs would be eliminated through attrition is a well-known fact among the intended audience for my Dear Colleague letter, Members of Congress. If this had been a letter for the general public, maybe one would have deleted the word "approximately" and opted for, "71,786 full-time and part-time middle-class postal workers, including rural letter carriers, would find themselves out of work, and 10,000 full-time city carrier jobs would be eliminated through attrition," to enhance clarity for an audience that lacks familiarity with USPS.

Which brings us to another point. Context matters.

The 75 word passage that the Fact Checker checked was taken from a 1,262 word Dear Colleague letter written for, and delivered to, 434 colleagues in the House of Representatives – a cohort that on average is more familiar with USPS operations than the general public or the "fact checker" himself.

The Fact Checker made a qualitative, and incorrect, judgment that this was attempting to mislead the audience for the Dear Colleague, presuming that the reader would not be aware that USPS personnel include full-time and part-time postal workers, nor aware that rural letter carriers – which the Dear Colleague statement explicitly identified as "part-time" postal workers – were part-time postal workers. In making this patently false inference, the Fact Checker either willfully or inadvertently assumed that the Dear Colleague letter was intended for the general public (and even if it were, it still clearly notes that the "approximately 80,000" estimate refers to "full-time and part-time middle-class postal workers, including rural letter carriers").

I am confident that the Members of Congress to whom the Dear Colleague was addressed understood that the 80,000 estimate included part-time postal workers, including rural letter carriers, as it stated "The loss of jobs resulting from eliminating Saturday mail delivery would not be limited to the private sector, as approximately 80,000 full-time *and part-time middle-class postal workers, including rural letter carriers*, would find themselves out of work (Emphasis added)." This seems eminently clear to me.

Further, my colleagues likely understood that when the Dear Colleague stated that part-time postal workers "would find themselves out of work," the "work" being referred to was the part-time postal work being eliminated. Especially since the subsequent reference to postal families that would be unemployed and in need of financial assistance specifically referenced, "tens of thousands of newly unemployed middle-class families," and did not utilize the full 80,000 figure.

For the Fact Checker to claim that the statement, which not only explicitly lists, “full-time *and part-time middle-class postal workers,*” but also calls out the specific type of part-time postal worker that would be heavily impacted, “*including rural letter carriers,*” “becomes more misleading when the bulk of the jobs affected are part-time,” is unfounded and certainly does not contain “significant factual errors” or “obvious contradictions.” If anything that spurious finding reveals the “fact checker’s” clear preconceived and ill-informed opinion.

In addition, the Fact Checker is out of bounds in labeling as “really a stretch” the statement that, “Such a drastic loss of jobs would not only harm our economy, but also offset any deficit reduction, since the tens of thousands of newly unemployed middle-class families would suddenly find themselves in desperate need of financial assistance.”

Is the Fact Checker arguing that eliminating thousands of middle-class postal jobs would not harm our economy by hindering growth, while counteracting any deficit cutting impacts by increasing spending on formula-based assistance programs for families that lose a stream of income (whether from a full-time or part-time job)? The Fact Checker may personally believe that displacing thousands of full-time and part-time postal employees, while eliminating thousands of more future postal jobs, would not adversely impact the economy. However, it is a real stretch to characterize statements to the contrary as constituting “significant factual error” and/or “obvious contradictions.”

Equally peculiar is the Fact Checker’s view that since many of the job losses would be the loss of a second job for some (though not all) part-time postal workers, it is “a real stretch” to imply that these families would be newly unemployed and in desperate need of financial assistance.

Frankly, this view simply demonstrates the stunning disconnect of a beltway journalist from the daily grind of many blue collar workers – who yes, may work part-time jobs – but nonetheless value this as real work and would likely be surprised to learn that it’s “a real stretch” to think losing a “part-time job” would place a family in need of financial assistance.

The Fact Checker is entitled to dismiss the value and legitimacy of part-time work. Yet, in an era of stagnating wages and rising costs of education, energy, and housing, it is simply stunning that a supposed Fact Checker could be so dismissive of the financial burdens placed on a family that loses part-time work. When a self-appointed “fact” vigilante substitutes his opinions for facts and informed estimates he exposes himself to his own cartoonish ranking. Four Pinocchio’s to The Washington Post’s “Fact Checker.”