

Did Adding Trump's Name Slow the Stimulus Checks?

By Eugene Steuerle Thu, May 21, 2020

Yes, says our guest columnist. 'it's demeaning to ask career professionals in places like IRS to devote their time and attention to promoting the president's reelection,' he writes.



Did the Treasury Department's decision to put President Trump's name on the coronavirus stimulus checks slow the mailing of those checks? Of course it did, despite Administration claims to the contrary.

The decision surrounding Trump's name triggered a series of time-consuming steps. The White House consulted with top Treasury officials who, in turn, talked to top IRS officials, who, after some delay because of the political sensitivity of the matter, communicated with the agency's staffers who had to carry out the operation.

These civil servants had to redesign the basic check, mock up the display of the president's name, and rejigger computer software needed to produce the checks. Then they had to have the redesign reviewed at the IRS, Treasury, and, likely, the White House to both insure against technical glitches and make sure the president was satisfied.

Did this take time? Of course, it did. Does it matter a lot? Well, that's a different question.

It certainly took attention from other, more important, matters. Senior Trump Administration officials, including the Treasury Secretary and the Commissioner of the IRS, were spending time on marketing the president rather than on, say, reviving the economy or preventing occurrences of tax fraud likely to accompany any rush to get the payments out.

Did it slow down the payment of checks to people? Here's how [a Treasury spokesperson](#) carefully answered that question:

"Economic Impact Payment checks are scheduled to go out on time and exactly as planned — there is absolutely no delay whatsoever...In fact, we expect the first checks to be in the mail early next week which is well in advance of when the first checks went out in 2008 and well in advance of initial estimates."

Nothing in that statement says that the additional process did not slow down the mailing of the checks relative to when they could have been mailed out. The comparison with 2008 is irrelevant.

Meanwhile, the [IRS released another statement](#), to wit:

Thanks to hard work and long hours by dedicated IRS employees, these payments are going out on schedule, as planned, without delay, to the nation."

Well, the same calculations take place in all aspects of life as well.

Consider the brag about checks going "out on time" or "on schedule." If I tell my wife I will be home by 7 PM and then take an extra walk around town but still get home by 7 PM, did my stroll delay my arrival? Of course, it did. In fact, it is likely that IRS expected to be ahead of the original "schedule" before it had to add the president's name to those checks.

Think of it this way: Suppose the IRS staff worked all night to add the president's name to the checks. That all-night session may have avoided delay relative to the prior schedule. But, if the staff didn't have to add his name, working that extra night could have been devoted to getting the checks out earlier.

Maybe figuring out the extent of any delay isn't at the heart of the issue. There are more important matters to worry about in these days of COVID-19. Even if somehow all this extra effort caused no delay, it's demeaning to ask career professionals in places like IRS to devote their time and attention to promoting the president's reelection.

This request has nothing to do with helping the taxpayers they pledge and, as the IRS release indicated, "work hard" to serve. Worse yet, this accommodation of the president's wishes reinstates a bad precedent for political interference in the operations of the IRS. These actions have real consequences, none of them good.

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