

Occupation of NW Portland's main post office thwarted

Several dozen protesters rallied against postal privatization and attempted to occupy Portland's main post office at 713 NW Hoyt St., July 26 — the 238th birthday of the Post Office.

The action was thwarted by a heavy presence of Department of Homeland Security police, postal inspectors, and a half dozen postal managers standing inside the post office lobby. Senior plant manager Lisa Shear, herself a target of the protest, came out to warn activists that she would have them arrested if they stepped foot inside the lobby.

So, protesters marched and chanted

with a bullhorn outside, sang happy birthday, and enjoyed birthday cake.

The Post Service was created by the Continental Congress on July 26, 1775. Benjamin Franklin was the first postmaster general. Today, some members of Congress are threatening its future by trying to privatize the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) and bust its unions.

USPS is an independent agency that gets no tax dollars for its day-to-day operations. It is, however, subject to congressional control.

The postmaster general already has closed 30 percent of mail processing

plants, reduced hours by 25 to 75 percent in half of post offices, put 10 percent of post offices up for sale, subcontracted trucking and mail handling to nonunion companies, eliminated tens of thousands of family-wage, postal jobs, and delayed mail delivery.

USPS management says the closures and sub-contracting are necessary to save labor costs in a "financial emergency." Protesters maintain that the financial emergency is being manufactured in an attempt to transfer the agency's wealth to for-profit, private corporations. The USPS is a \$65 billion annual business with over \$100 billion surplus in its pension and retiree health benefit funds, over 30,000 post offices (much of it in prime downtown locations), and 200,000 vehicles.

Since 2006 the USPS has been forced by Congress to spend nearly 10 percent of its budget pre-funding retiree health benefits 75 years in advance. No other U.S. agency or private business faces such a crushing financial burden. The USPS has also over-paid tens of billions into two pension funds.

Protest organizer Portland Communities and Postal Workers United (PCPWU) has been fighting the cuts and closures with civil disobedience.

Five protesters were arrested July 3 in an occupation of a private air cargo facility slated to process U.S. mail un-



Portlanders rally July 26 at main post office in Northwest Portland.

der a subcontract with USPS. Last April, five protesters went to jail for a civil disobedience action at the Salem mail processing plant, which has since been dismantled and moved to Portland. And in May 2012, 10 activists were arrested occupying Portland's University Station post office, which also has been shuttered.

"We intend to disrupt this attack on our communities," said Jamie Par-

tridge, a retired letter carrier with PCPWU.

The demand to end the subcontracting was echoed by leaders of Portland area postal unions: Joe Cogan, vice president of American Postal Workers Local 128; David Jarvis, president of the National Postal Mail Handlers Union Local 315, and Jim Cook, president of the National Association of Letter Carriers Branch 82.

10 fun facts on Postal Service's 238th birthday

On July 26, 1775, the Continental Congress created the post office, naming Benjamin Franklin as the first postmaster general. Here's a look at 10 fun facts about a unique American institution posted by the National Constitution Center:

1. The Founding Fathers were all for a postal system, especially Franklin. It was Franklin who modified and improved the postal delivery system as joint postmaster general for the Crown, greatly expanding its services in the Colonies. He was fired by the British in 1774 for sympathizing with rebellious forces. When the new nation needed a postmaster, it turned to Franklin in 1775 and Congress paid him a salary of \$1,000 a year.

2. The post office was in the Articles of Confederation, too. Article IX said that the government "shall also have the sole and exclusive right and power of ... establishing or regulating post offices from one state to another, throughout all the United States, and exacting such postage on the papers passing through the same as may be requisite to defray the expenses of the said office."

3. The Constitution gave the post office (and Congress) even more power. The Constitution gives Congress the ability "To establish post offices and post roads" in Article I, Section 8. That means not only does Congress have the power to create a postal system, it had the ability to acquire and control the land for the "post roads" to carry the mail and the buildings needed to maintain the system. In 1789, that meant 75 post offices and about 2,400 miles of post roads.

4. Today, the Postal Service is slightly larger. It has more than 31,000 Postal Service-managed offices and 511,000 employees. Carriers and drivers travel more than 1.3 billion miles (yes, that is billion) a year transporting and delivering the mail.

5. Abraham Lincoln was a local postmaster. As a postmaster in New Salem, Illinois from 1833 until 1836, Lincoln would occasionally deliver the mail by stashing it inside his hat.

6. According to the Postal Service's website, here are some other famous people who delivered the mail or worked as clerks, or postmasters: Bing Crosby, Walt Disney, William Faulkner, Charles Lindbergh, Richard Wright and Adlai Stevenson.

7. The Postal Service as high-tech innovators. The quest to deliver the mail faster and more consistently led to the pioneering uses of steamboats, trains, boats, cars, planes and horses.

8. The Pony Express was a financial failure. Like all great technological innovations, the privately operated Pony Express than ran in 1860 and 1861 had a lot of risks. The use of relay horses cut mail-delivery times in half, but another technology, the telegraph, grounded a Pony Express that was deeply in debt.

9. The post office had a dog as a mascot, until ... yes, Owney the dog was befriended by workers in Albany in 1888 and soon became a sensation as he rode on the rail cars along with the mail to New York. For the next decade, he was an international postal ambassador until he committed a cardinal sin: Owney bit a mail worker. Although a postmaster put Owney down, his co-workers paid to have him stuffed and he's at the National Postal Museum today on display.

10. The price of stamps has gone up slightly in the past few years. Until 1968, it cost 5 cents to mail a one-ounce piece of mail, and it only cost 3 cents in the 1930s. Times have changed as has the cost structure of the mail business. The current cost of a first class stamp is 46 cents for the first ounce.



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