

# Top postal executive's visit to Vancouver draws protest

VANCOUVER, Wash.— Deputy Postmaster General (DPMG) Ron Stroman drew the ire of dozens of postal workers and community allies when he visited Vancouver, Wash., Aug. 21.

Carrying signs and chanting, the protesters massed at the entrance to the 2014 Mailers Conference at the Vancouver Convention Center Hilton.

“No closures, no cuts, no contracting-out” blared from a bullhorn heard inside by conference-goers, gathered to hear Stroman speak. A flier with “Nine Questions” for the DPMG was distributed to attendees.

Stroman is the second-highest ranking postal executive. He serves on the Postal Service Board of Governors. Ac-

ording to promotional materials, he “also has the lead role in working with Congress to ... adjust delivery frequency and gain greater flexibility in aligning the Postal Service processing, distribution and retail networks...”

In plain language, the Deputy PMG is pushing to eliminate Saturday and at-the-door delivery, as well as continue

the massive cuts and closures to mail processing plants and post offices across the nation. In addition, Stroman is a leader in the outsourcing of postal work to private corporations such as Staples, Pitney Bowes, Amazon, and Dill’s Star Route trucking.

Of immediate concern to the protesters is the projected closure of 82 mail processing facilities — including those in Bend, Pendleton, and Eugene, Oregon, and Tacoma and Wenatchee, Wash., beginning in January.

“Fifteen thousand family wage, union jobs will be lost and delivery standards will be relaxed to delay mail two to three days,” protesters said.

Stroman and postal management say the cuts and closures are necessary because the USPS is losing money. The protesters, organized by Portland Communities and Postal Workers United, say that a 2006 Congressional mandate, which forces the U.S. Postal Service to pre-fund retiree health benefits 75 years in advance, has created a phony financial crisis. Although the USPS has claimed a “loss” every year since 2006, due primarily to the pre-fund mandate, the postal service has not made an actual payment toward prefunding since 2011. The USPS has generated an operating profit for the last six quarters.

“It’s not the internet, not private competition, not labor costs, not the recession — postal management is killing the U.S. Postal Service,” said Jamie Par-

tridge, a retired Letter Carrier. The activists are calling on postal management to suspend cuts, closures and subcontracting and allow Congress to fix the finances by repealing the prefunding mandate and refunding the pension surplus.

The pension surplus involves some \$60 to \$85 billion overpaid into federal retirement accounts, according to the Office of the Inspector General and the Postal Regulatory Commission. Twin bills — HR 630, sponsored by U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-Oregon) and S 316, sponsored by Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vermont), would fix postal finances and prevent plant and office closures and service cuts.

## Charges dropped against 3 ‘postal protectors’

Federal charges against three “postal protectors” were dropped Aug. 1.

Rev. Schwiebert, Jamie Partridge and Jack Herbert were arrested during a demonstration on a postal loading dock last December, protesting the scheduled closure of the Springfield, Oregon mail processing plant. Prior to that, they were arrested in Portland in July for blocking a private truck contracted to transport the U.S. mail.

The three activists said they were singled out by postal authorities, pointing to a United States Postal Inspection Service report that said “these individuals have been involved in repeated protests, demonstrations and trespassing incidents.”

The three protesters accused postal officials of attempting to suppress their right to free speech and assembly.

“I suspect the authorities dropped the charges because their persecution just emboldened us to further spotlight waste, fraud, and abuse at the people’s postal service,” Schwiebert said.

In 2013, USPS shuttered 141 plants — half the mail processing facilities in the nation, including the Salem plant in June. The postmaster general announced that he will continue “consolidations,” with the closure of 82 more plants beginning in January 2015. Among the closures are facilities in Springfield, Bend and Pendleton. Once completed, 300 union-wage jobs will be lost in Oregon.

The new network will see all mail from the Willamette Valley — from the Snake River to the Pacific — processed in Portland. Mail delivery standards are being degraded to allow two- and three-day delays. This delay could compromise Oregon’s vote-by-mail system, union officials said.

“Postal management is tearing apart the infrastructure of the public postal service,” said Partridge, a retired letter carrier. Vowing further direct actions, Partridge declared that “we plan to escalate this fight to save our national treasure.”



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