

Letter Carriers Fight for Justice and Survival

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Since 2006, he said, no new letter carriers in the metro area have been hired full-time.

Instead, he said, the Postal Service has been hiring "temporary transitional employees," with few benefits compared to career employees.

According to Jamie Partridge of northeast Portland, who has been a mail carrier for 27 years within the city, the postal service has decreased the workforce by 20 percent in the past four years in part to pay an unrealistic and problematic 75 years worth of future retirement benefits.

"The main reason the Postal Service is bleeding money and losing \$8 billion a year for the last five years has been because of a law passed in 2006," said Partridge.

Cook agrees.

He said the monetary issues are traced back to five years ago, when Congress passed legislation which included a requirement to pay 75 years worth of future retiree health benefits in a 10 year period.

"This equates to approximately \$5.5 billion per year out of the Postal Service's operational budget," he said.

The requirement began at the same time as the worst economic recession since the Great Depression hit the country.

The economy inevitably affected mail volume, which creates revenue, but Cook explained even then, the Postal Service's finances would be doing fine if wasn't for the large sums of money required to pay to two separate retirement funds.

"It's not logical. No other business, public or private, has this requirement to pay 75-years of future retiree health benefits," he said. "Without the 'burdensome requirements' the Postal Service would not be in the financial crisis."

Partridge says the result is that the Postal Service is putting one tenth of its budget, about \$6 billion a year aside for people who not only "don't work for the Postal Service yet, but they aren't even born yet."

"The financial crisis facing the USPS is an accounting problem," he said.

In an effort to fix the perceived financial crisis, Post Master General Jack Potter in March 2010, announced a 10-year-plan aimed to eliminate Saturday delivery and close thousands of post offices with possible privatization.



PHOTO BY MINDY COOPER/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Jamie Partridge, a member of the local letter carrier's union and an employee of the U. S. Postal Service for 27 years, picks up the slack from a postal service hiring freeze by working on Saturday, his normal day off.

Come Sept. 30 the postal service has to make another \$5.5 billion payment, said Partridge.

"The Post Master says we are up against the dead limit, and we don't have the money to make the payment, so the Postal Service will go insolvent," he said. "That is not quite the same as bankrupt, but pretty close."

Both Cook and Partridge say the mandatory payments have not only been miscalculated, but are also unjust.

Although he wasn't scheduled to work

last Saturday, Partridge could be seen making the rounds and delivering mail on his route in northeast Portland. "This is my sixth day working 10 hour days this week," he said.

On Saturday, he said, people get their pharmaceuticals, newspapers, and for people who work during the week, this is the only time they interact with their mail carriers.

"I work Monday through Friday," said Griselda Gonzalez, a resident of northeast Portland who has known Partridge for at

least a couple of years. She said she likes having her mail delivered on Saturday, and was surprised to hear the delivery day is in jeopardy.

"Six day service is unique to the Postal Service," said Cook. "This plan would eliminate approximately 80,000 jobs and disrupt the flow of community and communication over the weekends."

Many people rely on the mail coming on Saturday, he said. "You would also get a bottleneck of mail following a long weekend, and reducing the delivery to five days a week saves only a small percentage of the operational budget."

"There is an \$80 billion surplus in the retirement fund, and about \$40 billion in the health benefit retirement fund," said Partridge. "So the Postal Service has a lot of money in reserve, but it can't use it for operating expenses because of this congressional mandate from 2006."

According to Partridge, the Republican chair of the House Government Oversight Committee is opposing the letter carriers, calling their plan a tax payer bailout, and tea party Republicans are organizing to oppose them.

"It's a big lie," he said.

According to Cook, the US postal service and letter carriers union hasn't used any taxpayer money for operations since 1982, yet people, including some new members of congress, still think the Post Office operates on government subsidies.

"We are not saying to take taxpayer dollars," he said. "We are simply asking for an accounting transfer to take the surplus funds from the retirement systems."

Partridge also blasts a proposal by the Post Master General to unilaterally change union contracts to reduce future health benefits and pensions.

The local letter carrier's union has been working to inform the public why eliminating one day of delivery per week is detrimental to both the quality of service and they are asking the public for help.

"We are going to stand up and fight back," Partridge said. Next month, he said, there will be a town hall meeting on the postal crisis.

"We are trying to build the support to get congress or the president to do the right thing," he said. "And transfer the funds to make the Postal Service whole."

African American Literature courses at Portland Community College

In an effort to increase diversity, PCC is offering African American Literature (Eng. 256 & 258) courses at both the Sylvania and Cascade campuses this fall. English 256 will be offered at Sylvania Monday and Wednesday from 1-2:50 p.m.

The course will be taught from an African American perspective. It covers the African American experience, as well as the international influence of Pan African writers. The course is unique amongst other classes covering U.S. history and will explore little known historical events; discover books that were purposely taken out of print; and books that have been lost for years or never written in English. Students also will explore topics based on their historical or literary interests.

This is an excellent course for students who plan to work in multicultural environments or plan to become teachers. It also meets the Oregon Transfer and Arts & Letters requirements.

King Memorial Opens

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rial caused her to reflect on the country's progress, noting that her granddaughter is about to begin her freshman year at Stanford University.

"Had he not done what he did, those doors would not be open for her and all of us," Watkins said.

Scott Lunt, 42, a freelance video producer, brought his 15-month-old son, Oliver, along for what he called a "momentous day."

"I hope that my son can grow up in a world where race is less impor-

tant than it is in my life," Lunt said.

The sculpture depicts King with a stern expression, wearing a jacket and tie, his arms folded and clutching papers in his left hand. Lei said through his son that "you can see the hope" in King's face, but that his serious demeanor also indicates that "he's thinking."

The statue depicts King emerging from a stone. The concept for the memorial was taken from a line in the "I Have a Dream" speech, which is carved into the stone: "Out of the mountain of despair, a stone of

hope." Visitors to the memorial pass through a sculpture of the mountain of despair and come upon the stone of hope.

The National Mall site will be surrounded with cherry trees that will blossom in pink and white in the spring.

Sunday's dedication ceremony will mark the 48th anniversary of the March on Washington and King's famous "I Have a Dream" speech. President Barack Obama is scheduled to speak at the dedication.

--The Associated Press