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# Fighting For Our Post Offices

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## Fighting For Our Post Offices

***By Jo Ann Emerson***

The U.S. Postal Service is a fundamental part of life in America – and especially in rural America. Unlike our counterparts in urban areas, Americans in rural places like Southern Missouri rely on the Postal Service to deliver prescription drugs, retail shipments, business mail and even bills to a greater extent than in the city. In fact, the newspaper you read regularly is probably delivered by the mail carrier.

It is very concerning, then, that the USPS is attempting to close thousands of Post Offices across the country, many of them in rural areas. Citing a financial shortfall of \$3.1 billion in the second quarter of the year, the USPS says closing rural Post Offices will save them money. But at a cost of hundreds of thousands of customers, the last thing the Postal Service should do to save money is reduce its services.

Organizational changes to the Postal Service are sorely needed at an organization which lost a staggering \$3.1 billion last quarter. For an historic part of American history and culture, the Postal Service is in dire straits. It is all the more striking, then, that the only solutions it is putting forward to save itself require sacrifices by either its customers or our taxpayers.

The Postal Service relies almost entirely on income from its business with customers. Only a tiny fraction of its funding comes from the federal government today. And, like every other business in America, the Postal Service must find ways to increase receipts by better serving its customers.

Reducing home delivery by one or more days strikes at the heart of the regularity and reliability the Postal Service once enjoyed as its undisputed image. Closing rural post offices hits customers in Southern Missouri with a double whammy: a letter carrier no longer comes to our door, and the box we must now buy if we want Saturday delivery is located at a Post Office in another town 30 miles from home. Alone, either of these options results in inconvenience and hardship for postal customers as well as lost business and foregone revenue for the Postal Service.

Greater efficiencies are possible, to be sure, in continuing to serve the public.

Recently, the Postal Service decided that mail at our rural post offices for local addresses can no longer be sorted, postmarked and routed there. Once upon a time, the postmaster in a small Southern Missouri town sees a birthday card from one resident to his neighbor next door, cancels the stamp and puts it in that neighbors' slot for delivery the next day. Under the Postal Service's new way of doing things, the postmaster sees the same birthday card, stuffs it into a sack with all the other outgoing mail collected that day, ships it to Kansas City or St. Louis where it is sorted, gets it back one or two days later, and puts it in the next day's delivery. Now let me ask you: if you were running the Postal Service, what would you do?

Here is the journey a letter must make under the Postal Service's proposed revisions to our system. Since there is no Post Office in your town anymore, you drive 30 miles to mail a first class letter to your niece on Wednesday, the package gets shipped to a sorting facility 140 miles away overnight, sorted and assigned and delivered to the next Post Office on Friday for Saturday delivery. But, wait, they've done away with Saturday delivery, so the delivery will have to wait until Monday, which is a federal holiday. Whoops. Your letter will be in your niece's mailbox on Tuesday, seven days from point to point and considerable trouble on your part.

This is no way for the Postal Service to do business, and many of their customers will turn to email or telephone calls. For deliveries with no electronic alternatives, like mail-order pharmacy, there will be anger and stress and more than a few missed deadlines.

Our Post Offices and our letter carriers are valuable, important parts of our communities. They are suffering from poor management and a lack of leadership by USPS officials who cannot grasp the mission of their business – or its bottom line. Saving the Postal Service must begin with them, and soon.

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*U.S. House of Representatives.*

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