

US postal service weakened by outside interests

by Barbara Hull Richardson

April 3, 2015

Jim Hightower's March issue of *The Hightower Lowdown* discusses the attempt to shut down and limit many of our local post offices.

FedEx CEO Fredrick Smith, a former board member of the Koch brother's CATO Institute, would like the USPS to fail. In 2006, Congress, under the Bush-Cheney government, and lobbyists forced the "Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act" into law. This made the postal service pre-fund all of its retiree benefits for the next 75 years — and pay for it within 10 years.

These benefits were to pay the health care costs of all current employees as well as those who would retire during the next 75 years. No other corporation or government agency has ever been required to pre-fund for one year, let alone seven-and-a-half decades.

This so-called "Retail Access Optimization Initiative" wants to shut down about half of the 487 mail processing centers throughout the country, which would slow down mail delivery; reduce the business hours for more than half of our post offices; cut nearly a third of postal jobs by next year; eliminate Saturday mail delivery; and turn over stamps and other mail products to Staples.

Hightower reports that "Ben Franklin, our first Postmaster General (appointed by The Continental Congress in 1775 — prior to the establishment of the USA itself) set up the mail system. He saw it as a tangible expression of the new nation's inventive, public-spirited democracy-expanding possibilities."

Banking services were provided by the United States Postal Services from 1911 to 1967. People could open small savings accounts, cash checks and obtain small loans. These services could provide affordable basic provisions for underserved families and individuals. Banks today are not interested in servicing low-income people who must rely on exorbitantly high-cost payday lenders and check-cashing chains.

A recent study by the USPS office of the Inspector General found that approximately 68 million Americans did not have access to bank accounts. Check cashing and high-interest rates by loan-sharking on small loans cost approximately \$2,400 for a household each year.

Other countries' post offices — including Japan, Germany, China and South Korea — provide banking services. It's time we in our country provided the same.

To rally support for a strong public postal service, you can sign the pledge at www.agroundalliance.org