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Please add the following information to the appeal for keeping the Home Post Office in service. This re-inforces our argument to keep our Post Office open.

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POSTAL REGULATORY COMMISSION SECRETARY

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Thank you.

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Post offices shouldn't be pawn in politics

If anyone doubted Thomas Frank's thesis in his book "What's the Matter with Kansas?" he or she need look no further than the current drama playing out with the U.S. Post Office.

In the best-seller, Frank made the case that Kansans frequently vote for their politicians based on social issues, particularly abortion, and the leaders they elect, once in office, tend to vote against the economic interests of the very constituents they represent.

As most know by now, the U.S. Postal Service is in financial trouble. But the reasons for its problems are quite different from popular perception.

Yes, according to Regional Post Office spokesman Brian Sperry, based in Denver, postal volume has dropped 22 percent in the past five years, including a 26 percent drop in all-important First Class mail.

In response the Post Office has taken numerous measures including the streamlining of processing and closing of many facilities. A new round of closings is under consideration.

But there's a bigger boogeyman in the room. It's Congress.

In 2006 Congress passed the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act (PAEA). In this bill the Postal Service was given 10 years, or until 2016, to pre-fund 75 years worth of retiree health benefits. No other government agency or business is required to do this. According to Sperry, this payment amounts to about \$5.5 billion annually.

No business in the private sector could be reasonably expected to survive under such onerous requirements. Although no



Home City Post Office is among local offices on the list for possible closure. Others are Bremen, Oketo, Barnes, Summerfield and Hollenberg. Photo by JoAnn Shum

one appears willing to say so, there clearly was a political agenda behind the passage of PAEA. It would appear that many in Congress want to entirely privatize the Postal Service.

Many make the case that, given the burdensome regulations included in PAEA, the Postal Service has been one of the best-managed entities around in the past decade. Other federal requirements have resulted in overpayments of billions into the federal civil service pension funds, which have not been refunded.

Ralph Nader, for one, argued in a recent letter to Congressman Darrell Issa, R-Calif., and Sen. Joseph Lieberman, D-Conn., that without such federal regulation the Post Office would actually be in the black. He uses official government statistics to make a compelling case.

Clearly the Postal Service must change and adapt with the times. But it should be treated fairly by the feds and not be used as a pawn to serve a political agenda.

Legislation has been introduced in Congress, HR 1351, which will take steps to remove these onerous rules. Only one of Kansas' four congressional representatives, Lynn Jenkins, has signed on as a co-sponsor.

A large number of Kansas towns are on lists circulating for possible post office closures. Many of them are in the First Congressional District. We've seen too many western Kansas towns lose their livelihood in recent decades. Usually the process involves the loss of a school, grocery store and finally, a post office. Some of these are the result of natural economic forces. But what's happening to the post office is being pushed by other ideological forces.

Given the current, largely artificial crisis, one would think that Congressman Tim Huelskamp would be fighting to save jobs in his district. Yet he and his office are strangely silent.

Huelskamp has unquestioned credentials on conservative social issues. Some say he concerned himself with little else while in the Kansas Legislature. He also exhibits extreme political hostility toward most endeavors of the federal government. He is the type of ideologue who would jump at the chance to privatize anything whose function could be taken off the government's hands.

The matter of whether the measure is good for the constituents of his ever-expanding congressional district is trumped by ideology. He fits neatly into the thesis of Thomas Frank.

ALAN JILKA is vice president of Jilka Furniture and former mayor of Salina.

Senate committee adopts amendment on post office closures

A post office bill amendment authored by U.S. Sen. Jerry Moran, R-Kansas, to require the U.S. Postal Service to set minimum standards of service and consider alternatives to closure before closing any post office, was adopted recently by the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, according to Moran's office.

The amendment would stop the closure of any post office under consideration for closure, including those in Kansas, until the standards of service are finalized, a news release says. The bill, called the 21st Century Postal Service Act of 2011 now moves to the full Senate for consideration.

"Across Kansas and America, communities are asking, 'What do we have to do to save our post office?' But there is no answer. My amendment helps provide an answer by requiring the Postal Service to develop standards of service that must be considered as post office feasibility studies are conducted – while also preventing the closure of any post offices until those standards are in place and are considered in each case."

The Postal Service will have six months to set these standards, and the Postal Regulatory Commission must approve the final list, according to Moran. The amendment requires the Postal Service to include the following

criteria in their standards of service:

- Geography, including distance to other postal services and maximum time a customer should be expected to travel;
- Population, including density and age demographics; and
- A requirement to serve remote areas, as well as communities with transportation challenges such as inclement weather or natural geographic obstacles.

Additionally, Moran said the amendment requires the USPS to consider alternatives to closure before closing any post office, such as reducing the number of hours the post office is open or contracting to provide retail

postal services in an alternative establishment such as the local hardware or grocery store.

The amendment also strengthens a community's ability to appeal to the regulatory commission if the community is still marked for closure after the standards of service are in place and the community members believe the closure decision was reached in error. Finally, the amendment requires the postal service to ensure citizens within the service area of a post office that was closed in the year prior to enactment of the 21st Century Postal Service Act of 2011 can access retail postal services in an alternative establishment such as the local grocery store.

"I am committed to making certain rural America is not forgotten," Sen. Moran said. "Because of local post offices, many small businesses can still keep their doors open in rural Kansas. And, for many senior citizens who no longer have the ability to drive long distances, it is the local post office that gives them a personal and business connection to the rest of the world."

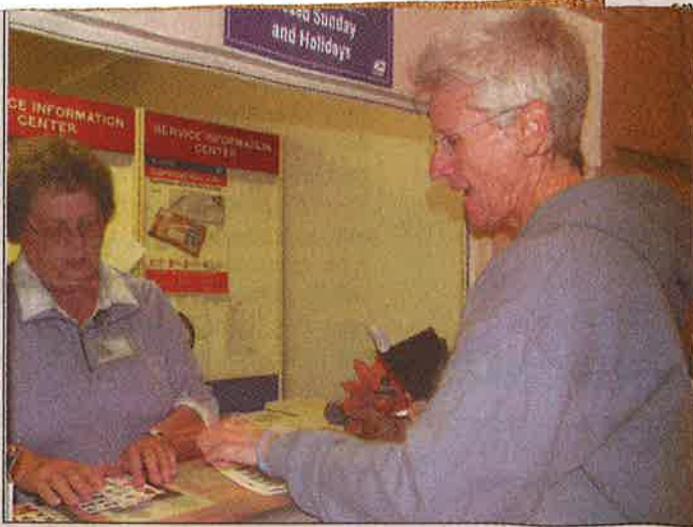
The Postal Regulatory Commission has found that maintaining rural post offices only amounts to 0.7 percent of the postal service's budget. Therefore, reducing service to rural communities and senior citizens will have little benefit to the postal service's bottom line.

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Marci Penner, right, director of the Kansas Sampler Foundation, buys stamps from Elaine Roeveer at the Home City Post Office Nov. 9. Penner traveled along Kansas Highway 99 visiting nearby post offices facing possible closure. Photo by JoAnn Shum

Trip highlights rural post offices

One day. Seven post offices. \$381.56 worth of stamps. 440 miles.

"There is nothing like experiencing an issue firsthand and looking in the eyes of the people who are living the issue," said Marci Penner after her post office journey on Nov. 9, which included stops in Summerfield and Home City.

"I had been getting e-mails and phone calls from people concerned about losing their post offices," Penner said. "At some point, you can't just have these conversations and not do

POST OFFICE BILL

A post office bill amendment written by Sen. Jerry Moran of Kansas would stop closure of post offices while the Postal Service determines standards of service.

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something about it."

Penner and WenDee LaPlant, both of the Kansas Sampler Foundation, decided to pick a road and visit all the

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towns on that highway that had post offices that are on the list for possible closing. They chose Kansas Highway 99 and several miles on either side because it had seven post offices on the list between the Oklahoma and Nebraska state lines.

The two women's plan was to visit with the postmaster and people coming in the post office and buy \$50 worth of stamps at each place, Penner wrote in a blog on the Sampler's website.

In addition to Home City and Summerfield, they visited Chautauqua and Peru in Chautauqua County, Elk Falls in Elk County, Hamilton in Greenwood County and Admire in Lyon County.

CHATAUQUA

The first stop was in Chatauqua (population 98) near the Oklahoma border.

After being greeted on the sidewalk by Rudy Taylor of the Montgomery County Chronicle, one cat and two dogs, they met Emma, the postmaster, who had just finished vacuuming and was ready to start the day. After a short visit, they learned the building was originally a feed store. They also met the mayor.

ONLY IN A SMALL TOWN

"We got to Peru (population 160), and I went in to visit with David, the postmaster," Penner said. "Little did I know that after I went inside, a truck pulled up beside us and called to Wendy. It was Emma's husband. He had tracked us down. We didn't know it but Emma had thought we asked for 50 stamps so that is what she had given us. When we left, she looked at our check and saw it was for \$50.40. She called her husband to come get the rest of the stamps and find us. Only in a small town."

"At every post office, the role of community gathering spot was obvious as people would come and go," Penner said. "We learned that more than one postmaster would watch for certain people and if they didn't come in to get their mail, they

would call them to make sure they were OK. Only in a small town."

ELK FALLS

Jennifer Brummel, Elk County Economic Development director and Youth Development coordinator, met them at the Elk Falls (population 104) post office.

"When asked if the post office was going to have an entry in next weekend's Outhouse Festival, postmaster Lecia's eyes lit up," Penner said. "She told us the extremely clever name for their entry but it can't be revealed yet. (The festival is Nov. 18-19). We bought our stamps, and Jennifer ordered some for her upcoming wedding thank you cards."

An elderly local woman, who was very distraught about losing the post office, came in.

"This is my place," said the woman. "I've been coming here since I was 9. I don't want to lose it."

Before Penner and LaPlante left town, they tracked down Steve and Jane Fry at their "secret garden" house.

"Talk about ingenious people," Penner said. "We got to see the new bunkhouse upstairs in the barn. As would be expected from Steve and Jane, they have created a cozy atmosphere with the most unique use of recycled materials, ceramics, and personal touch. The 1930s concrete elephants and sculptures in the 'garden' were standing proud and visible."

FAMILIAR FACES

At Admire, population 176, they received a warm welcome from friends Dee Reid, Ann Birney and Joyce Thierer, who gave them a tour of the community center which is in the school that closed at the end of the 2010 school year. The locals are also developing a museum in the school.

"It was great to meet, Mike, the postmaster, who also made our sandwiches-to-go at the Last Chance Café," Penner said. This post office was also a feed store at one time.

Penner said the drive through Wabaunsee County was

beautiful, and they admired the stone fences along the winding roads. The hardest part of the trip was driving through towns like Sedan, Howard, Madison, Olpe, Emporia, Eskridge, Alma, Westmoreland and others and not being able to stop and see things and say hi to folks, according to Penner.

THRIVEABILITY

At Hamilton (population 309), Katherine, the postmaster, knew they were coming. Word had traveled down the road.

"While visiting about Hamilton, a local business owner came in and talked about how they choose to do business through the post office to support it but they'll find other options when the post office closes," she said. "I had to wonder if the USPS knows how much loyalty locals have had for their post office but will choose different options if the local post office closes."

Hamilton still has its school and two restaurants, a classic soda fountain and lots of ranchers and oil and gas business in the area.

"People just driving through may not always see the behind-the-scenes thrive-ability in these towns, but it's there," Penner said.

In Wamego, they did a quick drive-by the city park to see the building for the mini-train. "Bunny and Gary McCloud responded to our 'Put your stamp on it' sponsorship notice so as we drove through Wamego," Penner said. "Bunny met us in the turn lane along side K-99 across from the Wamego Telecommunications building. She gave us her warm smile and handed us a \$100 bill to help with the stamp purchases and gas."

SUMMERFIELD BIZ

"On to Summerfield (population 199) in Marshall County," Penner said. "The streets were full of cars. It looks like the community-owned grocery store continues to do well, too. And, I'm anxious to come back to see the working blacksmith shop."

"We met the postmas-



Brenda Helmerichs is the Summerfield Post Office officer in charge. Photo by JoAnn Shum

ter and bought our stamps," she said. "A local business, allaroundthehouse.biz, does a great business and everything is sent out through the post office. I don't see how it will be possible for this entrepreneur to continue shipping through the post office if the physical post office closes. This is another chunk of revenue the USPS will likely lose."

HOME, SWEET HOME

"Our last stop of the day was at Home," Penner said. "How appropriate. Home is one of the top two thriving unincorporated cities in the state. Healy is the other. We first went over to the feed and grain store across from the post office. It's located in an old bank and is just brimming with character."

"Kansas pride oozes out of owners Jim and Pat, as does their affection for Home."

"They raved about the restaurant across the street. We had a great discussion about the post office and issues of small towns."

"We found Elaine and bought our stamps," Penner said. "It's so interesting to meet these very dedicated post office workers. Elaine also drives a school bus."

Others at the post office were JoAnn Shum from the Marysville Advocate and Emily Boeckmann from Blue Valley Tele-communications.

"This was a great prelude to our guidebook research journey that will take us to every town in the state in the next two years," Penner said. "From the Chautauqua springs to our last stop at Home, this was a day that reaffirms the fortitude and spirit of the Kansas people as well as the richness and multitude of explorer attractions in the state."