



Postal Service meets with public

Closure decisions delayed until May 15

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Just one day after a public meeting in Colby, the U.S. Postal Service announced it will not be closing any more processing plants or post offices until May.

The meeting in the Colby Community College student union Monday was to discuss moving Colby's mail processing from Salina to Denver. Roy Reynolds, senior plant manager in Omaha, Neb., said all local mail - incoming and outgoing - would have to go to Denver and back.

The service has been losing \$9 billion a year, partially from the decline in first class mail.

"2006 was the heaviest year," Reynolds said. "We've lost 40 billion pieces of mail since then. We've seen ups and downs over the years. We don't expect to come back up this time."

To combat this, Reynolds said the current plan is to have fewer than 200 processing centers by 2013, after which the service would no longer be able to have overnight mail. First class mail would go to a two- to three-day delivery standard. Reynolds said the remaining centers would be those that are already big hubs: located centrally and with good access to transportation routes and airports. The plan would save \$3 billion and reduce postal service jobs by 35,000.

However, Tuesday's announce-

ment could signal a change in that plan. The service said it will delay any closures until May 15 to allow Congress time to work on a plan for the service's future.

"The Postal Service hopes this period will help facilitate the enactment of comprehensive postal legislation," it said in a statement.

Congress has been considering the 21st Century Postal Service Act, which would reduce operating costs and return \$11 billion in pension overpayments along with numerous cuts and ways to raise revenue, such as allowing the service to ship beer and wine.

The service said in the meantime it would continue to conduct studies on moving around mail processing, such as the one for Colby.

Currently, Reynolds said, incoming mail to Colby comes into Wichita first, is sorted into delivery order and then sent to Salina and then on to Colby. Once it arrives, carriers can take it right off the trucks and go deliver. The service is studying moving that operation, along with outgoing mail, which is sorted in Salina, to Denver.

Trucks will go out in the evening, but processing in Denver won't get started until 8 a.m. the next day. Reynolds said the service would have a 20-hour processing window.

However, he said, the mail set to come back to Colby that day will be ready when the truck gets

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Roy Reynolds, senior plant manager for Omaha, Neb., explained the U.S. Postal Service's plan to close more than half of its processing facilities by 2013. The current plan includes moving almost all of Colby's mail sorting to Denver. The changes would slow delivery speed to a two- to three-day standard instead of overnight.

Area citizens speak up against Postal Service's longer delivery time proposal

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One citizen summed up the mood of the crowd at the U.S. Postal Service meeting Monday when he remarked that "Nobody wants two- to three-day service."

"It doesn't seem like cutting back service is a way to attract business," he continued.

After Omaha, Neb., Plant Manager Roy Reynolds gave his presentation on the processing center study and the proposed move to a two- to three-day mail delivery standard, he moderated a contentious and sometimes heated question and comment session with the public.

Reynolds was asked point blank why it is necessary for in-town mail to go to Denver and back. He responded that Colby won't have the employees to look at every piece of mail by hand, and the automated sorting machines are already gone.

Vera Sloan of Colby asked if the outcome of the study was a foregone conclusion.

"Is the postal service's mind already made up?" Sloan asked, to which Reynolds said no.



Ken Poland of Gem was one of about 50 people to attend the Postal Service meeting Monday at Colby Community College. Poland spoke out against the proposed change in mail service.

Ken Poland of Gem said moving Colby's mail processing out of Kansas doesn't make sense. "Now we're going to send everything

to Denver, which has been a black hole," he said.

Poland also objected to the two- to three-day delivery, saying that, in his experience, two days would be optimistic and the mail to rural areas would likely take three days or more. Poland said he does business with grain brokers, who do not take money over the Internet, so any checks sent to them would take days to get there, even if they were in the same county.

Reynolds replied that Poland could use express mail, which will not go to Denver first. That service, which costs \$15 to \$18, has been offered for years, he said.

Sloan asked why the service spends so much money on advertising. Reynolds said it's because many people don't know about all the services the post offices have to offer. Sloan went on to say that the post office should not be concerned with being profitable when it receives some taxpayer money.

Sloan said she is also concerned about people not getting absentee ballots back in time to be counted. She said people here support their local post office and do not want a change in service.

"We are efficient here," she said to general applause. "We have good employees.

We care about each other. Please keep our post office intact."

Quinter Postmaster Darrel Evans said his post office is the farthest east in the 677 area. Trucks take a route from Hoxie to Grainfield to Quinter and then to Grinnell, he said, and sometimes letters going to Hoxie from Quinter have taken up to six days.

Evans said he had been told by many people that they would no longer use the post office if the service goes to a two- to three-day standard.

"677 is just a drop in the bucket," he said. "I stand to lose more than that \$14,000 in my office alone. We're shooting ourselves in the foot for \$14,000."

Many in the crowd agreed that if processing has to move, it should go to Wichita, saying that the weather is better heading east. Many times during the winter I-70 is closed at Colby heading west, but remains open going east. In addition, Saturday mail from Colby has been processed in Wichita for some time without problems.

One contractor whose company hauls mail throughout Kansas said he was concerned over whether his routes would be

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Kansas reservoirs losing storage capacity

TOPEKA (AP) - Two federal reservoirs in Kansas have been losing significant amounts of water storage capacity because of sedimentation, according to a study that the U.S. Geological Survey says also shows the reservoirs can't be expected to last indefinitely.

At least 95 percent of the sediment that flowed into Kanopolis Lake and Tuttle Creek reservoirs stayed in those reservoirs from October 2008 through September 2010, according to the study conducted by the survey and the Kansas Water Office.

Water storage at Kanopolis, which is located outside Salina, dropped 34 percent by the end of the study. Tuttle Creek reservoir, located near Manhattan in northeast Kansas, saw storage drop 43 percent.

The study said the sediment came from the banks of upstream waterways, surface soil erosion and erosion along the banks of the reservoirs.

Governor details school funding proposal

By John Hanna
The Associated Press

TOPEKA - Gov. Sam Brownback on Wednesday proposed an overhaul to how Kansas finances its public schools, a plan designed to give local school boards greater spending flexibility and unfettered power to raise property taxes.

The measure, which would take effect in July 2013, would scrap a two-decade-old practice of linking some of districts' spending authority specifically to the number of students at risk of failing or the number who don't speak English well. Brownback's administration promised that none of the state's 283 school districts will see its overall state aid decline.

Brownback is dropping a proposal his administration had outlined earlier to allow counties to increase their sales taxes to help support schools. Landon Fulmer, the governor's policy director, said the idea received a poor reception as he gave briefings to educators and legislators in recent weeks.

The Republican governor said in a statement

that the changes will make the state's school finance formula more transparent, give districts more flexibility, focus more dollars in classrooms and end a "cycle of litigation" over how more than \$3 billion in education funds are distributed. He described the current formula, which was enacted in 1992 and revised in 2005 and 2006, as broken.

Fulmer told reporters during a briefing before the plan's release that Brownback also believes the plan will help meet goals he set out in his 2010 campaign's "Road Map for Kansas" to improve fourth-graders' scores on standardized reading tests and ensure that more high school graduates are ready for college or work.

"We're trying to find that sweet spot, where we can stabilize funding for education, get the money we need to into the classroom and go with the governor's Road Map goals," Fulmer said.

Fulmer said the administration expects schools' base state aid to increase a little less than 2 percent for the 2013-14 school year, or by almost \$39 million. That contrasts with a

nearly 6 percent decrease approved by legislators this year at Brownback's urging to help balance the state budget.

Educators have been wary, even though Brownback's administration has promised that no district would lose funding. Mark Tallman, a lobbyist for the Kansas Association of School Board, said the plan will have some appeal because it appears to offer relatively stable total funding.

But Tallman said the plan also appears to have disadvantages. He said the current formula adjusts a district's funding if, for example, its overall student population doesn't grow but an increasing percentage of those students are at risk of failing or don't speak English well.

"You're basically locked in place," Tallman said of Brownback's plan. "If your at-risk

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