

Oklahoma residents say reduce Saturday deliveries, keep post offices open

By Chris Casteel

WASHINGTON — Oklahomans are open to raising postage rates and reducing Saturday deliveries to alleviate financial pressure on the U.S. Postal Service, but most don't want to see post offices closed, according to a poll released Tuesday.

Only 29 percent of the Oklahomans surveyed about the Postal Service's problems supported the closure of most money-losing post offices. The most popular answer in Oklahoma, and nationally, was to limit the Postal Service to closing no more than 5 percent of unprofitable post offices a year.

The Postal Service last week reported a net loss of \$5.1 billion in the 2015 fiscal year.

Sen. Tom Carper, D-Del., who has been working on postal reform legislation for several years, said, "The only way to alleviate the Postal Service's financial challenges and take advantage of the opportunities it has to grow in the digital age is for Congress to come together and pass comprehensive postal reform legislation as soon as possible."

The survey about how to address the Postal Service's financial problems was conducted by the Program for Public Consultation at the University of Maryland. A "Citizen Cabinet" panel consisting of 2,256 registered voters included samples of the nation as a whole and Oklahoma, Maryland and Virginia. It was conducted from July 2 to Aug. 12.

Oklahoma findings

The Oklahoma responses mostly mirrored those of the nation. However, far more Oklahomans were willing to cut back Saturday deliveries to packages and priority mail than the nation as a whole (76 percent versus 67 percent nationally).

Somewhat fewer Oklahomans support postage rates rising faster than inflation (54 percent versus 59 percent nationally).

The Postal Service has long complained that its biggest problem is the mandate that benefits for its retirees be funded in advance.

According to the poll, 35 percent of the Oklahomans surveyed would end the requirement, and another 49 percent would reduce the requirement to 80 percent of future benefits.

And 87 percent of the Oklahomans polled would allow the Postal Service to offer new products and services, such as photocopying, Internet access, money transfers and a highly secure email system.

“Both Republicans and Democrats seem comfortable with the idea of their neighborhood post office being more like a Kinko's,” said Steven Kull, director of the Program for Public Consultation.