

## Newspapers battle with post office

They say there is no more dangerous animal than one that is wounded. It protects its life and territory through the pain with dangerous and unpredictable behavior. Reason and long-term self-interest no longer are in play. We are seeing such behavior today from a financially wounded U.S. Postal Service.

Through the first three quarters of its 2011-2012 operating year, the Postal Service has reported losses of \$11.6 billion that is more than double its losses of \$5.7 billion for the same period in 2010-2011.

During the third quarter it reported losses of nearly \$57 million a day! Now all those losses aren't attributed strictly to operations. Under a 2006 congressional mandate it is required to make \$5.5 billion in annual contributions to its employee retiree health benefits plan. The payments are geared to fund 75 years worth of benefits in just 10 years. For the first time, the Postal Service defaulted on the payment this past August, and that was for a payment that had been deferred from August 2011. Another \$5.6 billion payment is due at the end of this month.

The Postal Service also has to make more than \$1 billion in annual worker's compensation payments Sept. 30. The actual operating loss for the Postal Service during the first three quarters was more than \$1 billion.

There is a simple reason for the Postal Service's huge mounting losses. The Internet is replacing first class mail for everything from personal letters, to bills, to bill payments. First class mail has been its best net profit service.

Now, to stop a small fraction of financial bleeding, the Postal Service has come up with a scheme to make it a few extra dollars while at the same time hurting a long-time loyal customer.

It proposed offering a special postage discount deal to Valassis Inc. through something called a Negotiated Service Agreement. The sole purpose is to give Valassis deep discounts in its postage costs not offered to newspapers. It gives Valassis the ability to undercut newspapers, taking inserts away, or drive down the cost newspapers charge to the point where they are losing money to carry the inserts.

In exchange for the three-year deal, the Postal Service says it will earn an additional \$4.7 to \$15.3 million in net revenues. That is at most less than one-third of one day's losses at the Postal Service.

The commission begins with the presumption that having a federal enterprise competing directly with the newspaper industry is a good thing, but it does not explain how any business can be on a level playing field when competing with its own government.

The mailing contract with Valassis is an unfair deal in which the principal result is to drive down the advertiser's prices and not necessarily to bring any new mail volume to the Postal Service. Remember, to implement this new deal at a lower price it is taking away the delivery from newspapers which are currently paying a higher postage price.

The deal was approved by the Postal Regulatory Commission, which is under pressure to let the Postal Service do as it wishes to try to regain its financial footing. What the commission does not explain is why this goal is in the best interest of either newspapers or the Postal Service. Nor does it take seriously the arguments raised by many that this deal will force more newspapers out of the mail and create a net loss for the Postal Service after the deal kicks in.

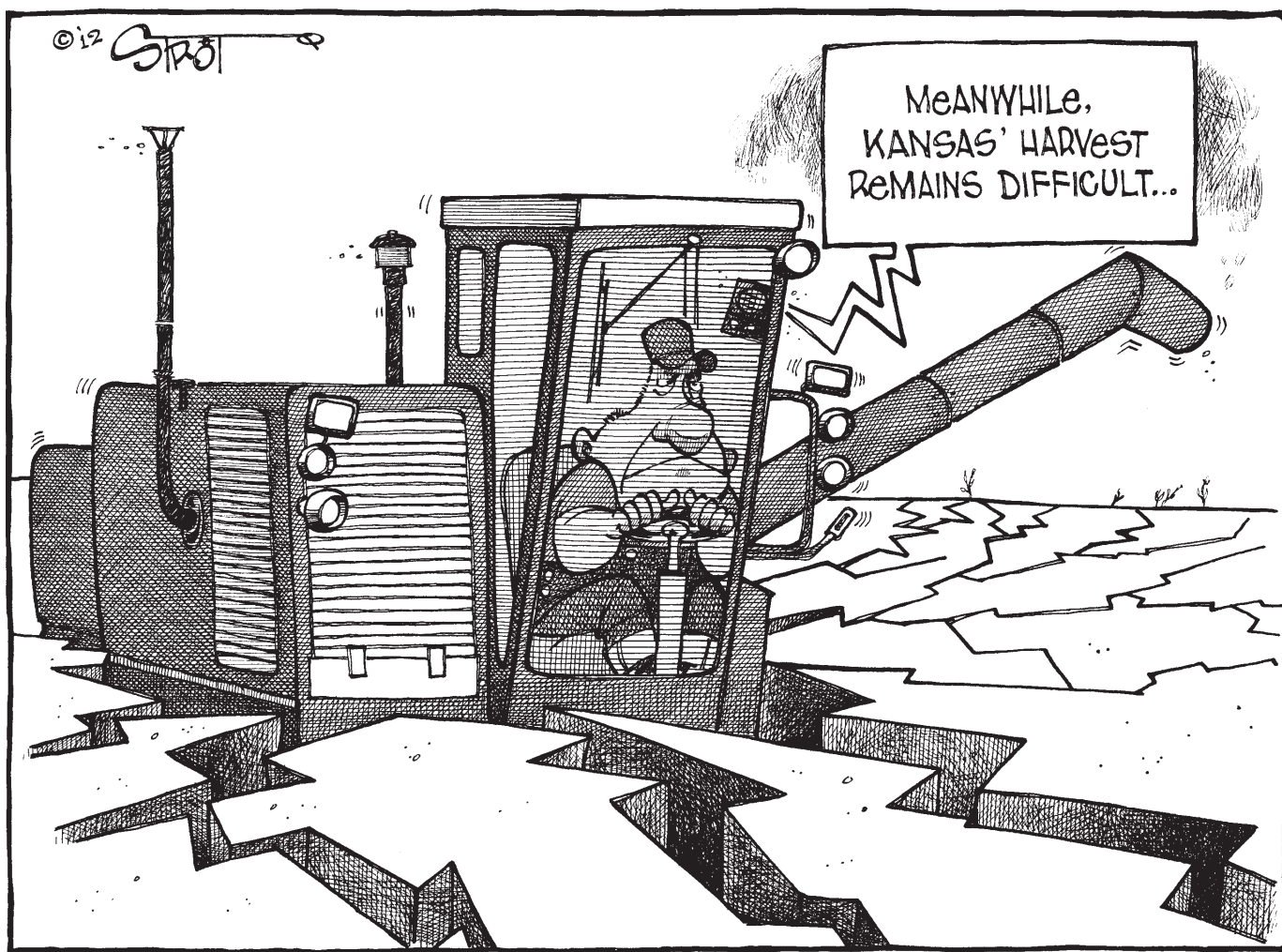
What the commission does clearly explain is that it does not think there is a problem with the Postal Service's draining revenues from newsgathering organizations.

We know that in thousands of communities around this nation that newspapers remain the most vigorous watchdog of government as well as the primary source of community news.

The Founding Fathers recognized that the Postal Service needed to work in a partnership with newspapers to provide citizens with the news fundamental to their ability to make informed decisions. Despite the Internet, TV and radio, newspapers still play this essential role. However, it appears the Postal Service is abandoning this founding principle to compete with rather than support newspapers.

If the Postal Service can get away with this deal, which both the National Newspaper Association and Newspaper Association of America are considering challenging in court, it will establish itself as a "business" which can pick and choose winners. We can guarantee you that this philosophy will eventually mean that service to rural communities, which aren't in its most profitable service territories, will see a steadily deteriorating delivery of the mail.

-Reed Anfinson, National Newspaper Association president



## No one is immune to depression

My first encounter with teen suicide took place in our neighborhood in Reno when my children were small. A policeman arrived at our door on a Sunday morning and asked if we had heard anything or seen anyone across the street. I told him we had been at church. I also realized we didn't know our neighbors or their friends. The 16 year old girl had placed a gun in her mouth and ended her life. After that I became much more aware of suicide in general and teen suicide in particular. I also have come to believe any parent who doesn't think suicide is as great a threat to their child as drugs or alcohol has their head buried in the sand.

Health and Human Services reports 16 percent of students in grades 9-12 have considered taking their lives with over 7 percent having attempted it. As adults we sometimes fail to realize how lasting some things feel to a child, the break-up with a boyfriend or not being chosen to be in some group. They may

### Phase II Mary Kay Woodyard



seem insignificant to us, but in the life of a teen they can be all encompassing.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has listed suicide as the 10th leading cause of death. For each suicide completed, over 30 are attempted. Suicide now takes twice as many lives as homicide does.

Military personnel have also seen a dramatic increase in suicides.

Secretary of the Army John McHugh said, "We are losing more of our soldiers to suicide than combat." One would automatically assume the trauma of battle is to blame, however 59 percent of those who have attempted suicide

have not served in battle so there is more to this than military action.

A third group which has seen steadily increasing suicide rates is the elderly. According to the National Institutes of Health, adults over 65 are at an increased risk of suicide. They comprise only 12 percent of the population but account for 16 percent of the suicide deaths. Non-Hispanic white men over 85 are at greatest risk. Several factors including depression contribute to the risk for the elderly.

The important thing for all of us to remember is no one is immune. Depression, fear, thoughts of suicide can all make their way into our minds. Life can seem overwhelming. Help is always just a phone call away; whether it is to a good friend, a counselor or a minister, someone is there. The National Suicide Hotline is staffed 24 hours a day at 1-800-273-TALK. Help is out there. Mail to: mkwoodyard@ruraltel.net

## The new school lunch guidelines are a joke

I appreciate the coverage of the school lunch issue last week.

It seems odd on the one hand there is a push to feed kids through expanded programs during the summer and on weekends. On the other, changes are made so that children are hungry even when they are fed.

Here are some statistics comparing consumption in pounds of various types of food in 1980 versus 2009: Red meat 126.4/ 105.7, Poultry 40/69, Fish 12.2/16, Dairy 543/ 607, fat 56.9/78.6, Salad and Cooking Oil 21.2/52, Flour and Cereal 144.9/194.5, Sugar 120/ 130.

A note about the dairy consumption; whole milk consumption has decreased from 16.5 gallons per person to 5.7, 2 percent is unchanged, and skim milk is up from 3.1 to 5.7 gallons. The amount of cheese consumed is up from 17 pounds to 37.

We decreased consumption of red meat and whole milk. We increased consumption of fish and poultry. We are consuming butter and margarine at steady levels. We might conclude these actions lead to weight gain because almost 70 percent of Americans are overweight. Depending on the study; this is double, or even triple the number in 1980.

Stephan Guyenet, one of the authors of a new study in the European Journal of Nutrition, says, "High-fat dairy consumption is not associated with

### This Too Shall Pass Nancy Hagman



obesity. In fact, 11 out of 16 studies found that higher dairy fat intake is associated with lower body fat and less fat gain over time. None identified an association between high-fat dairy consumption and fat gain, although some did find an association between low-fat dairy consumption and fat gain."

All this; yet the new school lunch guidelines keep us on the same path.

Recently I saw an informal poll someone had taken among friends: What was your favorite school lunch? Chili soup and cinnamon rolls were mentioned. That was my favorite. I also liked oven fried chicken, pizza, and dinner rolls.

I disliked stewed tomatoes, sauerkraut, vegetable soup, and ham and beans! Sauerkraut day announced itself all over the building and lingered on! But the cooks would give me a hot dog and hold the sauerkraut. Then I held my nose and ate!

Ham and beans were served with cornbread and honey. The cornbread soaked up honey like a sponge and was still barely palatable.

I still do not like stewed tomatoes, sauerkraut or ham and beans. I make ham and beans occasionally because my family loves them, I eat a salad!

Our cooks made fantastic peanut butter cereal bars. When we were learning fractions, our teacher got the recipe. We figured out how to cut the recipe down to family size. I know this wasn't 5th grade because my Mom was my teacher and she hated peanut butter. I never even got to try the recipe at home!

I liked the school's peanut butter sandwiches. The cooks added honey to the peanut butter. This seems to me a much better use of honey than using it to try to fix cornbread. My Mother did not approve. Michelle Obama probably does not either!

I don't remember seeing broccoli until I was in my 20's. If it is cooked I eat it plain but I prefer a little cheese. The problem with many vegetables is people like them better with dressing or cheese. I'm willing to bet that is why consumption of cheese and salad dressing is up.

Ah, for the sixties: fluffy white rolls and butter on the lunch tray, physical education (pushed by President Kennedy) as part of the curriculum.

Overall my memories of school lunches are happy. Yet, they will always be fodder for jokes.

Sadly, the new lunch guidelines are a joke that is not funny.

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