

The fate of our postal system

On the
Prairie Dog
Steve Haynes



The fate of the \$1.1 trillion-a-year mailing industry, estimated to make up 7 percent of the nation's economy, hangs in the balance as Congress reconvenes in Washington for the fabled "lame duck" session.

Right now, the U.S. Postal Service is the lame duck. The service, the oldest federal agency, just posted a \$15.9 billion loss for fiscal year 2012. The service has defaulted twice on advance pension payments it owes the federal government and has reached its \$15 billion borrowing limit.

Officials worry that the service will stumble over lower mail volumes next year after a rush of election-related mailing in the fall. Mailers, operating under the umbrella of the Coalition for a 21st Century Postal Service, say the service is being held back – some would say held under – "by an outdated operating structure and debilitating labor contracts." The system is ossified, but management attempts to shake it up make no sense.

The agency has been saddled with expensive overpayments into government retirement funds. It's the only federal unit, in fact, which is required to make advance payments.

Congress worked last week, then took a recess for Thanksgiving. There is talk of pushing another "reform" bill through when the members come back next week. Some action is needed to fix the mess left by the last bill and the sudden, unexpected plunge in First Class Mail which precipitated the crisis.

Some argue that we no longer need the Postal Service; that it's a 18th century technology ripe for retirement. But a business that produces \$1.1 trillion a year in economic activity can't be all that outmoded. And our economy has enough troubles without losing that big a chunk of production.

One problem Congress faces: everyone has a different idea about how to "save" the system. Postal unions, used to having their way, want to save jobs and pay rates. But in doing so, they could choke the goose. House Republicans want to slash away at the structure. The president wants to raise rates, kill Saturday delivery.

Management wants to slash service standards, cut the payroll and close many mail-sorting "plants" that it believes are no longer required.

That will change the delivery standard for First Class letters from overnight within 200 miles up to three days nationwide, to three days. Period. Letters will be trucked off to a distant city, sorted the next day, then trucked back overnight. A postcard to your neighbor will take two to three days to deliver.

Postal management says this will save money. But who would mail a three-day letter to their next-door neighbor, or the bank down the block?

Another management strategy is to eliminate Saturday delivery. That will slow the flow of bills and payments business depends on even further, driving more and more mail from the stream.

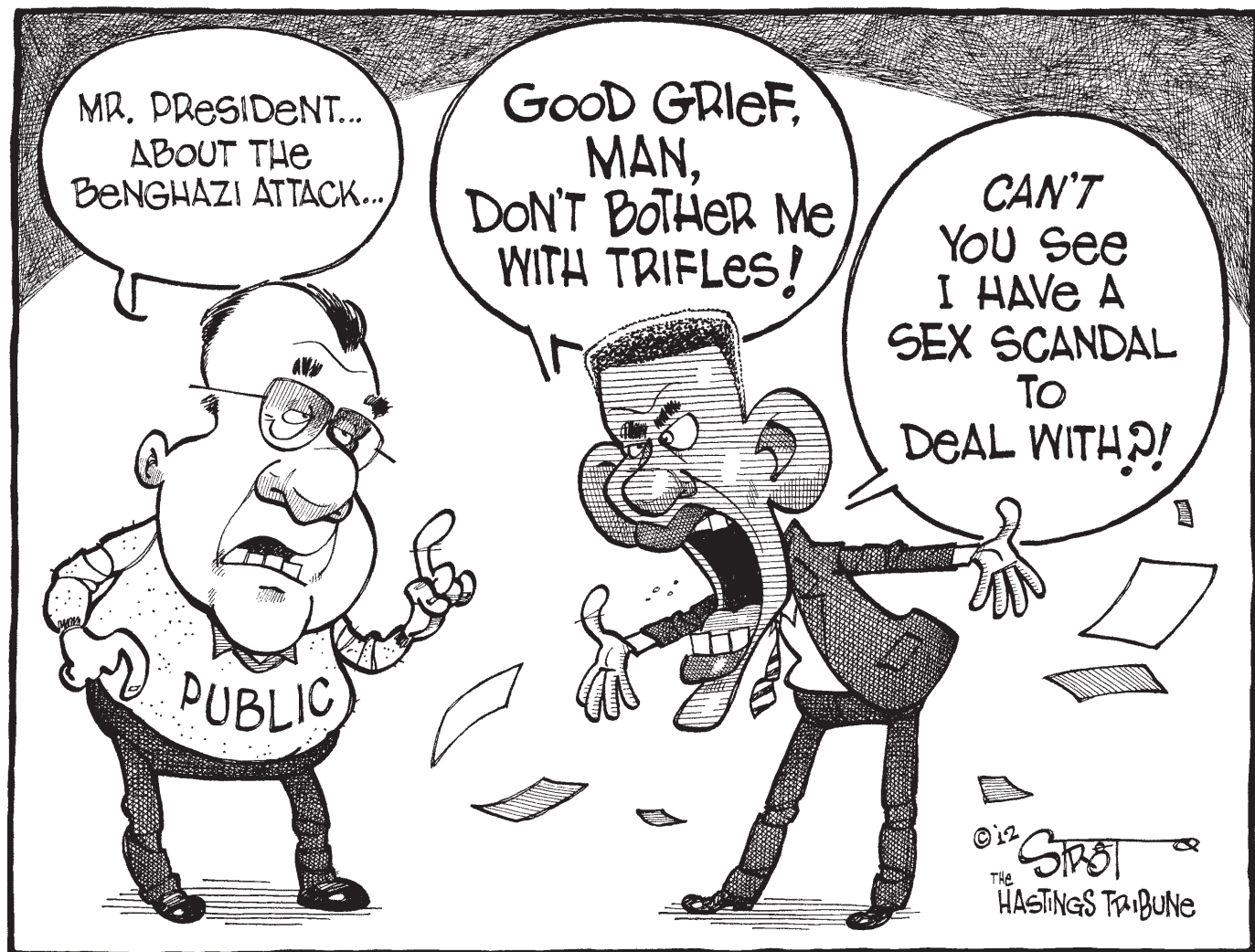
Soon, there will be no first-class business savings for Christmas cards.

One thing is for certain. The mailing industry – everyone from printers to magazines to greeting-card companies – wants to save the service because the business depends on it.

To accomplish that goal, though, everyone – mailers, unions, management, Congress – will have to agree on the common good, and that won't be easy.

The alternative is failure, bankruptcy for the Postal Service, loss of thousands of jobs and elimination of billions in business at a time when the economy needs all of the above. And that just can't happen.

– Steve Haynes



Loving the ones that we are with

Most men hate change, and my husband is one of them. He doesn't like it when I move the furniture around; even though he will eat whatever I set before him, he really doesn't like me to try new recipes; and he definitely doesn't like it when I change my hair.

Several years ago when I realized I could not wear my hair big, long and dark anymore I announced I was going to have it cut.

Jim almost sunk into depression at the thought. I think he loved my hair more than I did. I had tried to get him used to the idea for months, but when the day of my appointment finally came he was not ready. I recall a lot of begging and pleading.

Funny thing was: when I came home that night with my super-short pixie cut he said, "That's kinda cute. I like it." When all the bottled hair color washed out within the week and I was totally grey, he said he liked that too. Jim is the kind of man who does notice and doesn't hesitate to give compliments.

Sunday as we were heading to church Jim looked at me and said, "You did something different to your hair, didn't you?"

I answered, "I didn't curl it. I just

Out Back
Carolyn Plotts



blew it dry. Whaddaya think?"

He gave me this cock-eyed look and said, "I've heard some women pay big bucks to get that tossed, wind-blown look."

Translated that means, "You did something different and I'm not sure about it."

Maybe I should wait a few days to inform him I'm going to try out a new do.

–ob–

It's true. When God closes one door – he opens another.

Thanksgiving in Dallas with our kids has been a family tradition for years. One we all look forward to. Lots of cooking, eating, laughing, board games and time to talk. This year it's not going to work out. Too many different work and school schedules to accommodate five continuous days of down time. All

we could say was, "Maybe next year."

As disappointed as we are, we are still going to have a great Thanksgiving. We are friends of a couple of young mothers with kids who are away from their own families over the holidays and they will come share the day with us. I've already started cooking.

So, if we can't be with the ones we love, we'll love the ones we're with.

–ob–

We buried a good and godly man Monday. Not only was he the father of a dear friend, but he transcended age categories and was our friend, too. Jim credits Lyman with being the deciding factor in helping him decide where his church home should be.

I knew him first as a business man, second as my friend's father, and later as a friend. He loved his wife; he loved his family; but most importantly, he loved his God.

We are confident he will hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

–ob–

May you have all you need instead of all you want; it will help you appreciate all you have. Have a Happy and Blessed Thanksgiving.



Dear Editor,
In the recent election, the Democrats missed an opportunity to substantially reduce the cost of operating the government.

The Democrats should have elected Fidel Castro instead of Obama. They are both of the same political persuasion in that they both favor a police state and they both hate America and want to destroy it. However, Fidel would probably be satisfied with a much lower salary and a lot less travel expenses.

R.W. Yeager
Norton, Ks.

The whole scoop on why it is called "Turkey Day"

How did the turkey reserve its place on our traditional Thanksgiving table?

That bird is what the pilgrims feasted upon according to fact and fable.

You've all heard how our ancestors hunted this bird. But here is the real story – the turkey scoop.

Seems our forefathers remembered to take their muskets that day, but forgot to take their ammunition. As the men marched toward the woods, they took one addition, an Indian scout.

You guessed it. To take the scout along was tradition. Besides, the pilgrims needed someone who knew where the turkeys were.

As the story played out, the great white hunters spotted an elk. It was a fine animal for a Thanksgiving feast. It sported a trophy rack no doubt.

Several hunters took aim, pulled back their triggers and clicked. They soon discovered their muskets had no shot.

This realization made them sick to their stomachs.

What could they do?

What would they have for their Thanksgiving feast?

On what would they sup that night?

One wise, or unwise lad suggested stewing their shoes.

"I'll gobble them up," he said.

Well, the rest of the hunting party was in no mood for jokes. One of the hunters threw the lad's musket into the field just as an old Tom turkey – who

Insight
John Schlageck



had heard the gobble – popped up his head.

The critter's fate was sealed. What senses he had were knocked out that day. The turkey was plucked, stuffed and roasted.

In exchange for his silence, the scout was invited to eat while the hunters boasted and embellished the story about the day's hunt.

They truthfully said, "We didn't fire a shot."

Those early-day hunters had no need for ammunition. That's why today turkeys are raised on farms – to shoot them would break with tradition.

On a more historical note, Thanksgiving, or Thanksgiving Day, is a traditional North American holiday, which is a form of harvest festival. Although this feast is considered by many to be the very first Thanksgiving celebration, it was actually in keeping with a long tradition of celebrating the harvest and giving thanks for a successful bounty of crops.

The date and location of the first Thanksgiving celebration is a topic of discussion, though the earliest attested

Thanksgiving celebration was on Sept. 8, 1565 in what is now Saint Augustine, Florida. Despite research to the contrary, the traditional "first Thanksgiving" is venerated as having occurred at the site of Plymouth Plantation, in 1621.

Historians aren't completely certain about the full bounty, but it's safe to say the pilgrims weren't gobbling up pumpkin pie or playing with their mashed potatoes. It's a relatively safe bet the only two items on the menu for sure were venison and wild fowl.

Today, Thanksgiving is celebrated on the fourth Thursday of November in the United States. Thanksgiving is usually a gathering of friends and/or family. At this time you say all your thanks and wishes.

In our country, certain kinds of food are traditionally served at Thanksgiving meals. First and foremost, baked or roasted turkey is usually the featured item on any Thanksgiving feast table (so much so that Thanksgiving is sometimes referred to as "Turkey Day"). Stuffing, mashed potatoes with gravy, sweet potatoes, cranberry sauce, other fall vegetables, and pumpkin pie are commonly associated with Thanksgiving dinner.

All of these dishes are actually native to the Americas or were introduced as a new food source to the Europeans when they arrived.

Have a Happy Thanksgiving and don't forget to count your blessings.

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