

Fate of postal system hangs in the balance

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Coalition for a 21st Century Postal Service, say the service is being held back — some would say held under — "by an outdated operating structure and debilitating labor contracts."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.

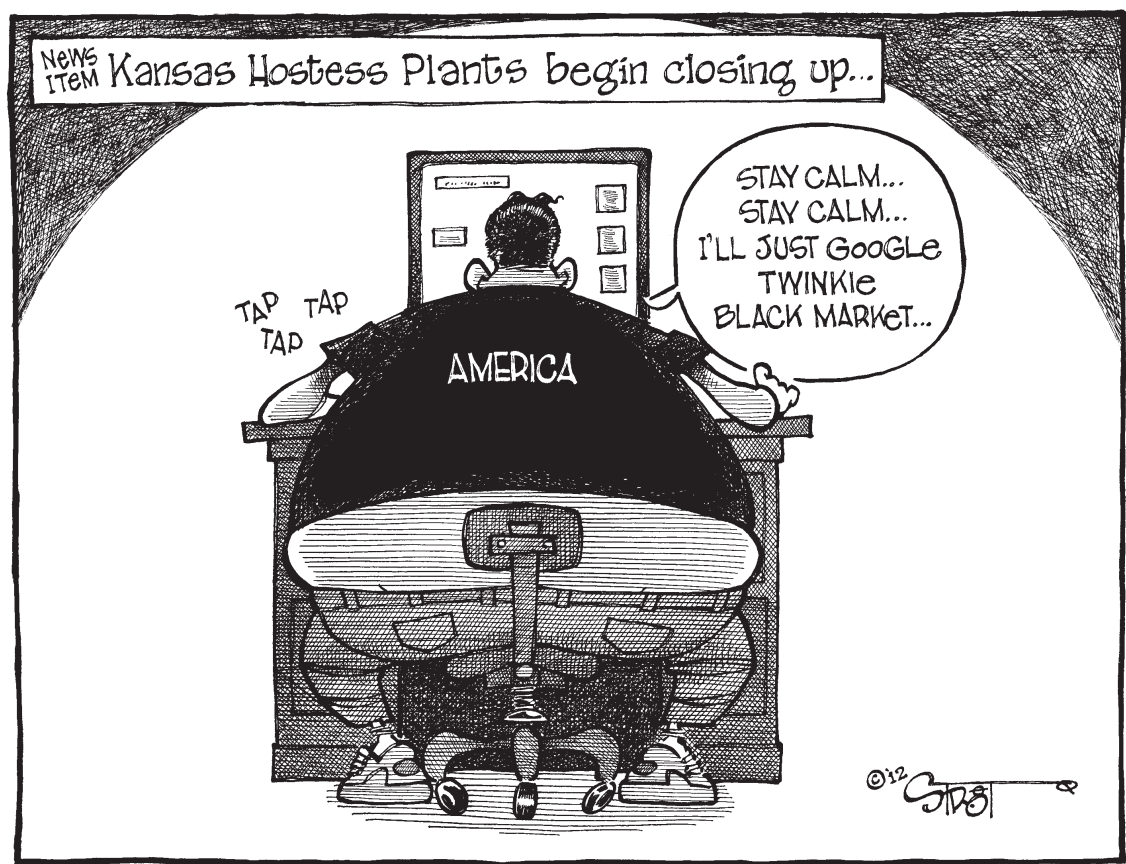
Soon, there will be no first-class business save for Christmas cards.

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



Casey's Comments

By Casey McCormick



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Although these are strange days there is still so much to be thankful for.

Concerning the political and economic state of the union, it is easy to say that we are a nation divided on which direction our country should be going.

Many families and individuals are struggling to make ends meet and it seems that things will get worse before they get better.

Locally we wait for needed moisture for the farm and ranch lands.

In the Middle East frightening developments continue with more

blood shed each day.

Then to top it off the beloved Twinkie has gone to the wayside of life.

Not to make light of tough times, things are bad, but then there is a lot of good in our lives too.

As I count my blessings many come from living in a small town where people still care about those around them. The communities in Cheyenne County are the best around.

Also, I see this country's individuals in uniform and know that we are safe from any outside force that wishes us harm.

I have the opportunity to work and provide for my loved ones. That's a pretty big plus.

I see my family and friends who are for the most part healthy and happy...what more is there to want?

I guess most of all I'm grateful that my life is the way that it is. For all this I thank God.

Happy Thanksgiving to you and yours!

Open Season

Better sleep, better memory

By Cynthia Haynes



I sounded like a good idea for a seminar, and besides I'd get six hours of continuing education credit and get to have a night out with my sister.

Each year, Marie and I get together in either Kearney, Neb., or Wichita for for one of these seminars. A couple of companies that put them on, attracting a wide range of health professionals, from doctors to physical therapists.

Marie is a psychiatric nurse and I'm a registered pharmacist, so this course was good for both of us.

She lives in Concordia, so we met in Kearney, had supper and shared a room at the hotel. We got some sleep after gabbing half the night, then figured we were ready to learn how to sleep better and have sharper memories. (Not staying up half the night talking would probably be a good start, we figured.)

It was an interesting course and neither of us went to sleep during the discussion. Among other things, we learned that a young man in California stayed awake for 11 days for a science-fair project. He had some hallucinations but came out of the experience without any lasting problems.

While sleep loss causes decreases in concentration, motivation, perception and thinking capacity, the experts say, if the person gets his or her normal amount of sleep, they seem to recover within a day or two.

Some tips for travelers include:

- When switching just one or two time zones, don't shift out of your regular sleep cycle. Just go to bed a little earlier or later to keep your body on its normal schedule.

- Delay routines on trips spanning many time zones. Don't go to bed until its bedtime in the new time zone and spend a lot of time outdoors in the sun the first two days. (I did this when I traveled to China, and it works great but it's sure hard to stay up for almost 24 hours waiting for "bedtime.")

- Drink lots of fluids but no alcohol or caffeine. (Notice how these people always take all the fun out of that drink lots of liquids bit?)

There are, we were told, five stages of sleep, and we spend six years of our lives dreaming. But we forget half of a dream's content within five minutes of waking up and 90 percent after 10 minutes.

While this might seem to be a waste of six years, they did suggest how to train your brain to solve

problems while you are sleeping and dreaming.

- Write down your problem. Place it with a pen, paper and flashlight next to your bed.

- Review the problem and then visualize it as a concrete image as soon as you go to bed.

- Tell yourself you want to dream about the problem as you drift off.

- On awaking, stay in bed and try to recall any dreams and write them down.

I'm not sure this works, because whenever I've tried it, I haven't been able to go to sleep because I kept worrying about my problem.

Our instructor did say this was a good way for students to study. They should read their material just before going to bed and studies have shown that they will retain more of it than by just studying at a desk.

So I guess when someone tells you to "sleep on it," that might actually be a good idea.

GOD SAYS
And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.
Romans 8:28

The Saint Francis Herald

(USPS 475-960)

A Century of Service to Cheyenne County

P.O. Box 1050, St. Francis, Kan. 67756-1050

Published each Thursday by Haynes Publishing Co., 310 W. Washington, St. Francis, Kan. 67756-1050. Entered as periodicals matter at the post office at St. Francis, Kan. 67756-1050, and at additional offices.

Official newspaper of Cheyenne County. Member of the Kansas Press Association, National Newspaper Association, Colorado Press Association and Inland Press Association.

Subscriptions: One year \$38 (tax included) in Cheyenne and adjacent counties; \$42 (tax included) elsewhere in Kansas; \$48 elsewhere in the U.S. Foreign subscriptions, \$28 extra per year (except APO/FPO). POSTMASTER: Send change of address to Box 1050, St. Francis, Kan. 67756-1050



Nor'West Newspapers

8:30 a.m. - noon - 1:00-5:00 p.m.

Monday - Friday

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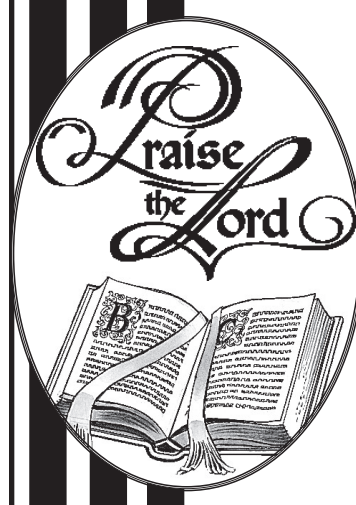
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