



Free Press Viewpoint

Efficiency at risk in Post Office plan

The U.S. Postal Service is studying a plan to move processing of some mail out of western Kansas to Salina, where supposedly it will be more efficient to sort this outbound mail, saving all of \$130,000 a year.

This is a bad plan, one which will likely hurt the service more than it will help. While the service may save a few thousand dollars on wages – only about 1 1/2 man years, including benefits – the damage to what's left of the business is hard to calculate.

Our guess is the service could lose as much as it saves, maybe more. Damage done to the goodwill and loyalty of its best customers here could be immense.

The service says it is actually offering better service with this plan, despite the fact that truck times at most towns will be moved up two to three hours to get the mail to Salina for sorting. But that's only true for mail leaving the area for other parts of Kansas or farther east.

Most businesses have a vast majority of their customers in the area around their front door: Their hometown, their county and the counties around them. The pattern looks a lot like the areas around our two "sectional center facility" post offices, in Colby and Hays.

Today, businesses have until nearly the end of the day to post business mail. If times are moved up two hours, in some northwest Kansas towns, the mail will be going out by 2 p.m., usually no later than 3 p.m.

That's a huge loss of the work day, and any mail that's not ready for the one daily truck is going to lose 24 hours if it's staying within the section.

For almost any business, whether it's a newspaper or a hardware store, the bulk of the out-of-town mail stays in the area. Not that many bills or advertising fliers or whatever will be going out of the area compared to what stays in.

We know the Postal Service can't afford to run two trucks a day from our towns. But if it persists in pushing back the pick-up times two to three hours, it can only give mailers one more reason to find other ways to send business information, bills and the like: either electronically or with some other carrier.

In the end, we're willing to bet, the result will be not a savings, but a net loss to the Postal Service. That would be a shame, because the service has many good, dedicated employees out here who have worked long and hard to build up the business. They deliver mail on time, to the right place, rain or shine, and they do it with a smile.

One bad decision from headquarters could wipe that all away.

There is an alternative. The service could compromise on the truck times, limiting the change to only an hour in any town. That would minimize the damage.

The real answer to the service's financial problems, however, will have to come from Congress, which is sitting on a request to relieve the service of legal requirements that it pay billions in extra pension costs every year.

No one believed that the service owes this money. It's been agreed for years that the Postal Service is overpaying its workers' pensions. But the money is being used to reduce the federal deficit, in effect taxing mailers to pay for federal programs.

Now that the service is nearly broke, however, this policy makes no sense. Congress must act before senseless cuts like this one ruin what's left of a great – and vitally needed – organization.

– Steve Haynes

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"WE FINALLY GOT BIN LADEN, DADDY..."

Balance compassion with wisdom

Mother Nature has a tendency to deliver radical and extreme weather patterns. This spring, she is doing her best to demonstrate her independence and indifference.

Violent tornadoes have swept through a wide area, and excessive rain has plagued some areas while others are suffering moderate to extreme drought. Volcanoes and earthquakes have created havoc around the globe.

The need is great! The economy is bad for a high percentage of our population. These storms are not selective, they hit the poor, the rich, the young, and the old.

Government plays a big role in dealing with disasters that cover large areas, but they quite often don't help isolated and small areas. Incompetence, graft, and inefficiency plague the administration of government programs.

But, it might be well to note that those problems are at the top of the program. Funding for fraudulent claims or unwarranted claims is most often dependent upon administrative failure, not on the program, itself. The austere attitude of many in the political arena is making it difficult to put government help into action.

Why have we had to depend upon government to provide welfare and compassion? Because individuals have not stepped in across all social, economic, religious and ethnic levels.

Sometimes it takes a little tap on the wrist to get the fingers to release their grip, when the collection plate passes. The Internal Revenue Service has a unique ability to do that tapping.



Ken Poland

Ken's World

The opportunity to voluntarily participate is wide open, regardless of your religious affiliation or even if you are agnostic or just plain anti-religious. Civilization is dependent upon man reaching out beyond his own little, selfish domain and meeting the needs of his neighbors. You don't have to have religion to do that.

Most service clubs have programs for local needs and many have national programs. Social clubs and organizations provide opportunity to contribute.

Most religious denominations or identities have their own funding systems. Some of these organizations have very little administrative expense taken out of designated, targeted donations.

Radio, television, and the Internet have spawned an unlimited number of organizations promising delivery to the needy and pleading for your contributions.

Stop! Ask for a statement of financial operations, payroll information and net worth. If they refuse or neglect to respond to your request, don't send any money.

We keep hearing from some folks that our Constitution does not require or even permit the government to exact taxes from citizens to provide welfare for the needy. Well – I don't think you can find any definitive language preventing the federal government from giving assistance to groups or individuals, so long as it doesn't discriminate on the basis of political persuasion, religion, ethnic origin, gender or sexual orientation.

Neither is there any indication that the need for assistance is dependent upon whether sin, by whoever's definition, is the primary cause of the need.

Unplanned or unwanted pregnancy can be a personal disaster for the woman or family. Divorce or death of a spouse creates varying degrees of disaster.

A segment of our society wants to blame individuals for these crisis situations. Where is the "church" on this issue?

Too often, we sit in pious judgment and demand repentance and retribution on our terms and conditions. If those are not met to our satisfaction, the sinner and those affected by the sin are left to fend for themselves. Without taking Bible verses out of context, can we find Jesus demonstrating judgment before he offered healing or assistance?

Ken Poland describes himself as a semiretired farmer living north of Gem, a Christian, affiliated with American Baptist Churches, and a radical believer in separation of church and state. Contact him at rcwinc@cheerful.com.

Consider the package when you buy

Food packaging today is really about marketing and making money – lots of it. Food producers care about competing for shelf space and selling their product. They're in the business of selling their packaged products to consumers. Can't blame them. It's the American way.

Environmental consequences, consumer satisfaction and selling a product at a fair and equitable price doesn't rank at the top of the list of priorities for food producers.

It's estimated the global food packaging industry is worth approximately \$115 billion a year and growing 10 to 15 percent each year. Anything between 10 percent and 50 percent of the price of food today can be attributed to packaging.

As the amount of packaging increases, so do waste and environmental costs, not to mention the added costs to consumers. The plastic bottle containing your favorite soda or the aluminum can that holds your favorite brew costs more than the cola or beer.

On average a beer can or bottle costs five, six, seven maybe 10 times the cost of the beverage. The same is true for sodas. It depends on the company and the product.

Don't get me wrong, I understand the need for packaging that provides a protective coating between the food product we may wish to eat and our environment thus keeping the contents safe and ensuring hygiene.

Some packaging prolongs the food-life while other packaging is necessary for safe and efficient transportation. And lastly, God bless their souls, other packaging is used to provide consumers with information and instructions for which there are some legal requirements. You know, like the small preservative pack in-



John Schlageck

Insights

Kansas Farm Bureau

side a bag of beef jerky with the instructions, "Do not eat."

However all of this convenience, marketing and profit comes with a price – additional waste for this nation's landfills and the rest of the globe. In this country and other wealthy nations, a decrease in the size of households has resulted in more people purchasing smaller portions of food and that means more packaging.

A higher living standard around the globe has also resulted in the desire for "exotic" foods from other lands. Transportation of such food and the ability to keep it fresh also costs more in packaging.

Another contributing factor is the desire for convenience food. You know – processed, tasteless food you can pop out of your freezer, microwave and eat in a jiffy. So how much waste has this galloping packaging industry produced?

It's difficult finding information like this in our country. Seems like our folks in the food, beverage and packaging companies would rather talk about their proposed plans to eliminate waste in the future, never mind the past.

According to figures by the Grocery Manufacturers Association, the food, beverage and packaging companies intend to eliminate an additional 2.5 billion pounds of packaging

waste in the United States by 2020. These companies already have avoided creating 1.5 billion pounds of packaging waste since 2005, the trade group says. All told, the expected 4 billion pound decrease from 2005 to 2020 "represents a 19 percent reduction of reporting companies' total average U.S. packaging weight," the association reports.

On the other side of the coin, the volume plastic product's waste and packaging amounts to approximately 75 billion pounds per year, according to the Butte Environmental Council, an education, advocacy and recycling organization in northern California. This report was released nearly eight years ago.

To achieve a change toward more sustainable packaging, it's not just the packaging that requires alterations but also our lifestyles and habits of consumption.

While it's only a start, as consumers we can buy more local product that is better tasting, has less of an impact on the environment through reduced transportation costs, and supports our local economies.

Support companies that use packaging most efficiently. Avoid buying disposable items, such as non-refillable razors, alkaline batteries, etc. Recycle. Buy in bulk. Reuse shopping bags and buy only recycled products.

Change comes with personal responsibility and the ability to look in the mirror and say, "It's up to me."

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified farm near Seguin, and his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

Mallard Fillmore

Bruce Tinsley

