

Other Viewpoints

Post office offer small-town anchor

A school, a grocery store, a restaurant and a post office. The first three of those four brick-and-mortar markers of a self-sufficient small town took direct hits in Kansas from '60s school consolidation, multiple recessions and other stressors. Now, the last one is on its last legs, rattling rural communities and fueling questions about how small Kansas towns can sustain themselves.

It's one thing to hear that the U.S. Postal Service, a government agency that receives no tax revenue, is slashing infrastructure to try to offset what it said were \$5.7 billion in losses this year — part of a state of peril brought on by the economy, pension costs, and competition from delivery businesses and electronic bill paying and communications.

It's something else to learn that your hometown post office is among the nearly 3,700 "underused" offices, including more than 150 in Kansas, targeted for possible closure.

As Shannon Wendt, the city clerk of Geuda Springs, population 225, told the *Winfield Daily Courier*: "The post office is the one big thing that we still have, and I'm kind of fearful for what's going to happen to our community."

Cuts clearly are part of the remedy for the Postal Service's woes, but public opinion supports cutting Saturday delivery first — something that would require congressional action and save \$3.3 billion to \$5.1 billion a year. In a *Washington Post* poll last year, 71 percent of Americans favored ending Saturday delivery, while 64 percent disapproved of closing local branches including their own.

If they close, these rural post offices will be missed for their neighborly conversations and wealth of information. As a recent e-mail from the Inman-based Kansas Sampler Foundation noted, "in some cases the post office is the only business left in the town. It's where people meet each day. It's the place for news. It's the evidence that 'we are still a town.'"

The post office also has been a community's port to the world, especially for doing business.

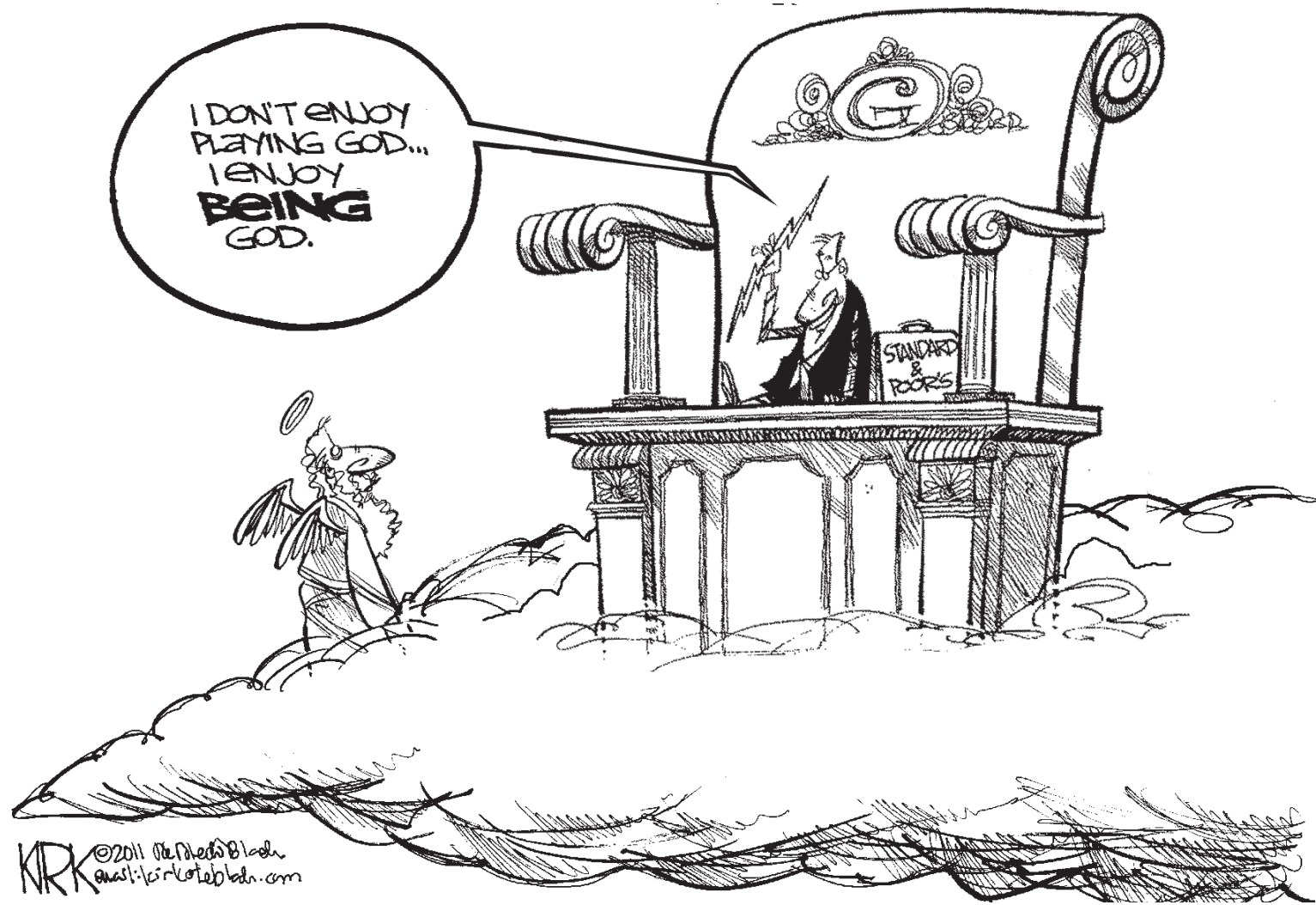
Rural carriers would remain on the job Monday through Saturday, offering what the Postal Service calls a "post office on wheels." The service also expects to contract with local stores, libraries and other government offices to sell stamps, money orders and shipping materials.

But will that meet every need? Will potential recruits under Gov. Sam Brownback's rural opportunity zone program be deterred by a "closed" sign on the local post office? The Kansas Sampler Foundation sees the loss of a community's post office leading to the loss of its zip code in favor of the "Closest Big Town's zip code," meaning the name of one's hometown would no longer appear on a letter. That would target a small town's very identity.

The potential impact in rural Kansas is compounded because the Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services and the Red Cross each plan to close nine offices across the state.

Where post office closures are proposed, residents should have 60 days to submit feedback and, if the closing goes forward, another 30 days to appeal. As the process proceeds, Kansans should speak up and make sure officials know how losing their post office would affect their lives and communities. As the Kansas Sampler Foundation put it: "Put up a fight."

— *The Wichita Eagle, via the Associated Press*



National election forecast: change

What's going to happen in the national elections next year?

Here's a preview from Charlie Cook, the Washington political analyst and insider who produces the Cook Report and other regular insights into national politics.

For the record, Cook is a Democrat who got his start as a Senate aide and pollster on the left side of the aisle. He spoke at the annual Government Affairs Conference of the National Newspaper Association in mid-July.

The first thing to remember, Mr. Cook says, is that the country is neither left wing nor right wing, but more or less evenly divided. Both major political parties claim about a third of the voters, with independents making up a quarter or more of the electorate.

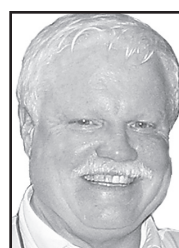
Since party members tend to vote for their candidate, independents control most decisions. Even a small shift in the independent vote can mean a big change in Washington.

And what do these voters base their decisions on? The economy, of course.

And that, Mr. Cook notes, does not bode well for the Democrats next fall. They should pick up seats in the House, but likely will lose control of the Senate and the White House.

Why? In a nutshell, the Republicans have more seats to lose in the House, the Democrats have more at risk in the Senate and — the biggie — no president in recent years has been re-elected with unemployment much over 8 percent.

With the economy stagnant and unemployment expected to remain above 9 percent well into next year, Mr. Cook said, the chances of a second term for President Obama do not look good — so long as the Republicans can come



Steve Haynes

• Along the Sappa

up with a decent candidate.

As he put it, a "placebo" candidate should be able to defeat the president if unemployment remains high and the economy is still in turmoil. It's up to the Republicans to nominate someone better than a placebo, he said, a candidate who does not drive away more votes than a bad economy should deliver.

This is not the time, he said, for a candidate out on the fringe, but for someone who will appeal to voters in the middle. Candidates like the president or like the conservative George W. Bush have a hard time holding onto the middle, he noted, leaving the editors to ponder the effect of putting, say, former Gov. Sarah Palin or Rep. Michele Bachmann of Minnesota at the head of the ticket.

"It's not about defections from the party," he said. "What it's about is independents who swing one way or another. It's these independent voters that make the difference."

"(Committed voters) have passion," he said, "but independent voters have lives. They don't care about Washington. All they care about is making the place work."

Only once in the post-World War II era, he noted, has the party in power picked up more than 24 seats in a midterm election. Last fall, the Republicans picked up 63 seats as the

president slogged through the worst recession since the war.

That means, he said, the Republicans likely will lose a few seats next fall, but not enough to lose control.

"Unless the Republicans self-destruct," he said, "they're gonna have a majority in the House."

The Senate, with its six-year terms, is different. In the Senate, the cards really were dealt five years ago, when the Democrats were on a roll. That means there are 23 Democratic seats up for election next year, but only 10 Republicans. He estimated that the D's have 10 seats "at risk," the R's only two.

That should give the Republicans the majority required to take over the Senate leadership.

"The words 'control' and 'U.S. Senate' should not be allowed in the same sentence," he added.

The GOP should wind up with 51 or 52 seats, he said, changing the equation to some extent. Compromise, difficult as that is, will still be required to get anything done.

The main question will be whether the Republicans can nominate someone who can appeal to a nation as divided as ever and suffering through a slow and painful recovery that's beginning to remind people of the 1930s.

Or as he put it, the party avoids nominating a "sub-placebo" candidate, someone so divisive he or she simply cannot be elected.

Steve Haynes is president of Nor'West Newspapers. When he has the time, he'd rather be reading a good book or casting a fly.

Repatriate, but end other tax breaks

The *Wall Street Journal* editorial in the Aug. 6-7 edition, titled "Repatriation Games," extolls the economic miracle that would abound if United States multi-national corporations were allowed to repatriate their foreign-earned capital to the United States at ridiculously low tax rates. They can use their savings (5.25 percent tax rate as opposed to what you are paying on income) to buy out their United States-based competition.

It's been awhile since you've heard from me. I've been too busy to put together a rational (if any of my contributions are rational) article. The above editorial prompted the following. It may be irrational, but the idea and opinion behind it needs your consideration.

Give 'em their cheap taxes on foreign profits. But, double their taxes on personal and business income that is earned here in the states. Put an import tax on the goods they are making overseas and bringing into the U.S.



Ken Poland

• Ken's World

If they don't like it, maybe they need to just move their citizenship and let the country they are doing business in protect their assets. Much of our foreign involvement is directed at protecting investments in those countries. Do you suppose they could get China or Taiwan to send troops over here to protect their retail outlets here? If they moved their citizenship to Saudi Arabia, I'm sure Saudi Arabia would rush in to protect their United States oil investments.

If they want to sell the production here, they

need to produce it here.

How's that for a no nonsense radical old Democrat's opinion?

The "rich boys" control our government and foreign policy and the "poor boys" pay the bills and furnish the "dough boys" to fight their wars.

Ken Poland describes himself as a semi-retired 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.



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Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley



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