



Free Press Viewpoint

Best intentions decimate mail

The management of the U.S. Postal Service may have the best of intentions, but we all know where that road leads. The venerable agency appears headed, if not for outright oblivion, at least to an obscure corner of the economy where it won't bother anybody much.

Except those of us who've always depended on it. The Post Office was not exactly the first of federal agencies; it came before. The founders thought it so important to bind the states together that the postal department predates the Constitution by about a year.

Since 1775, the Post Office and later the Postal Service have provided "universal service," the idea that you could send a letter anywhere in the country for the price of a stamp.

Today, however, that very bedrock idea is in danger. With first-class mail, and the profits it brought, fading fast, the service seems to believe it can restore financial health by cutting service and driving even more mail out of the system.

That's not much of a "business model," but it seems to be what management has left. First, the leadership decreed mail sorting could be done more inexpensively in larger cities.

Thus, across the country, mail "processing" was moved wholesale from smaller section centers such as Colby and Hays to the next-largest town, Salina in our case. The service estimated it would save \$139,000 a year by eliminating the equivalent of four jobs in the two smaller towns.

All that was part of a plan to save \$1 billion nationwide, out of a projected loss of around \$8 billion this year. Later, however, the service said it had hired 13 people in Salina to replace the four jobs eliminated by the change.

At the same time, headquarters decreed a plan to close mail processing plants in all but one or two cities in each state. So those new hires in Salina face a dim future as their work is moved to Wichita.

In Kansas, mail processing work would be moved from Liberal, Dodge City, Hutchinson, Colby, Hays, Topeka and Salina to Amarillo, Wichita, Kansas City and perhaps even Denver. The work will be moved to places where mail does not flow. A letter to your next-door neighbor will travel so much, it will take two to three days to deliver.

Is the service about to abandon rural America? Already, 3,700 post offices are scheduled to be closed, with another 7,000 to be put up for "study." That means closing nearly one-third of all post offices, including many in towns you have heard of.

The implication of this is staggering. It means the end of overnight delivery for first-class mail. Businesses, banks, cities and counties that count on the post office to promptly deliver checks and bills will have to send them some other way.

Newspapers won't be able to count on the Postal Service to deliver their product on time, and they'll have to bail out. "Service" will no longer be part of the agency's product.

Good jobs will leave smaller towns, moving work to big towns where the work ethic is poor and labor problems abound. What business is left will flee the mails, leaving only advertising fliers (what people call junk mail), Christmas cards and the less-profitable end of the package business. Saturday delivery will end, followed by a shift to every-other-day mail.

How the system will sustain itself on this meager cash flow, who knows. Once the idea of universal service has been abandoned, Congress will have little incentive to save what is left.

What the founders valued highly, it seems, could become just one more wreck on the Internet highway. We all will suffer the consequences. — Steve Haynes

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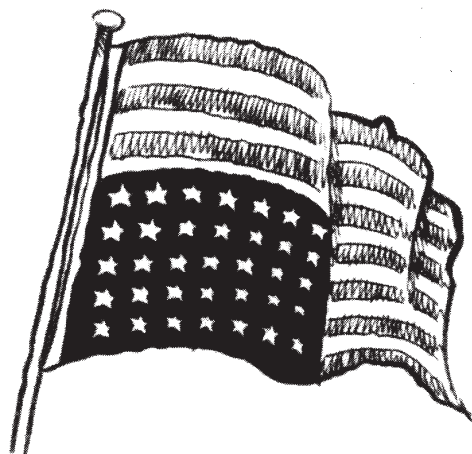
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Fall flowers nothing to sneeze at

I heard someone say that fall is the time that flowers give way to fruits and vegetables. Looking around me, I don't see that.

True, my spring flowers — irises, tulips, daffodils and lilacs — are gone, and my summer lilies are about bloomed out, but I still see lots of flowers around.

The mums I bought several years ago to decorate the front porch and later planted next to the sidewalk are starting to bloom, and the neighbors' morning glories are a riot of blue and purple every morning.

But the biggest, most impressive flower around is the sunflower. The fields of cultivated ones are mostly gone, but the wild ones are in their full glory.

I remember being amazed and comforted by the sunflowers when I moved to southern Colorado. I had never lived anywhere but Kansas and, while I had visited Colorado on a few summer vacations, it was mostly uncharted territory.

It was hard to quit a good job, sell our home in Kansas City and move to this new state, where mountains reared out of the prairie and



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

they raised potatoes instead of corn and milo.

But all along the roads, there they were — sunflowers, the welcoming symbol of my home state. They made me feel a whole lot better about this whole move-to-someplace-else-and-run-a-weekly-newspaper thing.

I don't have any sunflowers in my yard this year, but a couple of years ago, the birds planted some at each end of my garden.

It was kind of cool, and I don't know why I didn't pull them as weeds when they were tiny. For whatever reason, we left them to grow. And they grew, and grew and grew into giants that towered over me. Each was topped by a single enormous flower.

Then there is the flower box out in front of

my office. While the sweet potato vine has mostly taken over, the petunias as still hanging in there, blooming their fool heads off. And beside the planter are the two half barrels we put to hold the remnants of the last owner's rose moss. She's gone now, but her flowers still bloom every year, and every time I see them, I remember a wonderful woman.

Yep, my vegetables are doing well. The tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, cabbage, carrots and squash are spreading out all over the garden. My fall lettuce is making salads and I think I'll get some fall peas before the first frost.

But the flowers are definitely not gone, and even after the frost, when the tomatoes vines turn black and the squash is dead, the mums out front will be providing a welcome splash of color to my front lawn.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor'West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes@nwkansas.com

Of course Social Security's a Ponzi scheme

Governor Rich Perry is accused of referring to Social Security as a Ponzi scheme. To consider the authenticity of this claim we must return to the deceptive strategy of its origin.

Since Social Security was not on the list of the qualifiers of general welfare — Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution — government had no power to forcibly extract a portion of a man's wage and force his employer to match this fund — not even close. So they used the power to tax to justify this action. But Congress had no power to tax for powers that it did not have.

Nevertheless, the government took over the responsibility for everyone's retirement and the people lost the right to their own money — the portion that was forcibly extracted as a condition of employment. Moreover, since the federal government would now do this for them, they had no incentive to do it for themselves.

At the time the Supreme Court had ruled much of the New Deal legislation unconstitutional and Social Security probably would have met the same end had Franklin D. Roosevelt's new Court Packing bill not been threatening the independence of the Supreme Court. They let this one slide.

To do so they had to agree to place the new tax monies in the "Treasury like internal-revenue taxes generally, and ... not earmarked in any way" (301 U.S. 619, 1937). They should have gone to Article V, adding an amendment to the Constitution empowering the federal government to do so, but they were uncertain that it would pass so enacted an end run around the Constitution instead.

The money taken under the guise of taxes

Other Opinions

• Harold Pease
Liberty Under Fire

was not set aside for the giver's future at all, as most believed, but just added to the general fund and spent. If private firms did the same thing, the federal government would call it a Ponzi scheme and perpetrators would serve time. When taxpayers do retire, they will have to depend upon the resources of future generations to cover what was promised. The system could never end without injustice to the "old" people. Each generation rightfully came to believe in their entitlement, having allowed FDR to spend their contributions on the previous generation.

Payroll taxes and benefits payments began in 1937. Ida May Fuller, a legal secretary, paid a total of \$24.75 into the system between 1937-1939. Her first monthly check issued Jan. 1940, was \$2 short of this. "After her second check, Fuller already had received more than she contributed over the three-year period. She lived to be 100 and collected a total of \$22,888.92 (Research Note No. 3: Details of Ida May Fuller's Payroll Tax Contributions, Social Security Administration)." How can this not be a Ponzi scheme?

Those receiving social security in 1935, never having paid a cent into the program, were grateful, of course, for the generosity of

the nation and became beholden to the party in charge of the handouts. This insured the democrats' continuance in office for the next 17 years. Prosperity returned in the fifties and sixties, and a challenge to the now established and popular program was unthinkable. People saw Roosevelt as having saved the country. Only now, younger historians, not favorably conditioned to a worshipful response to Roosevelt, recognize and document that it was not the New Deal but World War II that pulled us out of the 21-year long Great Depression.

Over time more groups that paid nothing or very little into the fund have received benefits: spouses, widows, children and the disabled — even illegals. I have a friend who brought his mother to America and she received benefits until her death. Government figures estimated in 2010 that 54 million were receiving Social Security benefits. Without significant changes the program will crash by 2036 say the Social Security Board of Trustees in their 2011 Annual Report.

We agree that somebody does owe our elders the total of what they paid into the program, but it is not the new generation. They did nothing wrong. Why should they pick up the tab for commitments made before their birth? How can government take their money, spend it on others, look them in the eye, and tell them that this isn't a Ponzi scheme? They are its biggest victims.

Dr. Harold Pease has taught history and political science for over 25 years at Taft College. To read more of his weekly articles, please visit www.LibertyUnderFire.org.

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Mallard Fillmore

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