



Free Press  
Viewpoint

Postal proposal  
has multiple flaws

If the U.S. Postal Service decides to ship our mail to Denver for sorting, sending it back a couple of days later, it'll be a huge mistake for several reasons, but most of all because the service has not taken into account either the weather or where our mail goes.

The service claims it will save a whopping \$14,000 by hauling mail from the Colby postal area to Denver, where it would be routed through massive machines, sorted down to delivery "walk sequence" and sent back out, ready for carriers to take on their routes.

The paltry amount is mostly because our mail is being sorted in Salina already, or most of it. Today, postal workers at each office are supposed to separate the "local" mail, for their town and for the 677 ZIP code area, before sending the rest off.

In-town and area mail is kept here and delivered overnight, according to postal custom. Under the new plan, though, the service wants to send every letter to Denver for sorting. That will cut out the cost of separating the mail, get carriers out of the office an hour or two earlier so they can deliver to more homes and end the traditions of next-day service for letter mail.

There's real money in eventually reducing the number of carriers, of course, but the real driver for this change is the chance for the service to use its expensive sorting machines up to 20 hours a day, rather than five or six.

Today, these machines must be run on the overnight shift, just six or seven hours a night. They start up as trucks bring mail in during the evening and must finish in time for trucks to go out and carriers to get their mail in early morning. If the service gives up the goal of overnight delivery, though, the machines can run day and night.

Whether that is a good idea is another thing. Most people who've heard this plan believe the service is shooting itself in the foot by lowering service standards. The loss of business could easily exceed the savings as banks and other businesses flee the mails for Internet billing and payment. The Postal Service seems to feel that business will be lost anyway.

Sending in-town mail out for sorting defies logic, though. It's mostly collected in separate bins, so the cost of sorting it shouldn't be much. Nor should the cost of sorting it out to routes. The price in lost goodwill could be much more.

In any event, northwest Kansas mail should not be sent to Denver. If it has to be sorted someplace, send it east to Wichita. It's nearly 50 miles farther, yes, but the weather is much better. Interstate 70 is closed several times each winter west of Goodland – sometimes for days – but rarely east of there.

Add to that the fact that most of us do a lot more business between here and Kansas City than in Denver, and it's easy to see sending the mail east would be more efficient.

We'd rather see the Postal Service re-evaluate this whole scheme, which is now on a six-month hold to give Congress time to help the service avoid bankruptcy. But if something has to be done, let's hope our letters will move east, not out into the howling blizzards of the plains west of here.

– Steve Haynes

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Tree's still up, but spring's on the way

They showed up on Dec. 27.

I'm sure they would have come on Dec. 26, but that was a holiday for the post office, so they had to wait a whole 24 hours before announcing that spring is just around the corner.

I'm still trying to figure out which corner spring is just around, since I still have my Christmas tree up and the ground is frozen solid.

Still, there they were – seed catalogs with their siren song of enormous vegetables, gorgeous flowers and tropical fruits you can grow in your own backyard. Of course, your backyard better be in Florida and the size of a football field.

Still, I can't help myself. It's like pornography. You gotta take a little peek. You may be dismayed, horrified, embarrassed and ashamed of yourself, but you gotta check it out.

Ohhhh, pecan trees. My grandmother had pecan trees. They had great foliage and provided wonderful shade. They also had great nuts. Grandma would spend all winter picking out her pecans and send us a couple of bags at Christmas time.



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

Grandma also lived in central Arkansas.

Wake up, Cynthia. You live in northwest Kansas. Pecan trees might grow here, but they aren't going to thrive like they do in Arkansas.

OK, asparagus grows here. My sister in Concordia has a great asparagus patch, and this catalog offers five varieties. One of them is even purple.

But wait. I had an asparagus patch. It was 10 years old. Last year, I got three spears. I think I killed it with kindness. My sister ignores hers, which is next to the alley, and it rewards her with enough spears to equip a fair-size army.

OK, maybe not asparagus. What else do they have in here?

Change not necessarily a good thing

To the Editor:

At this time of year, it is normal to look at what we are doing in our lives and make changes to improve our situation. New Year's resolutions, at their core, are good and intentions to improve our health, our relationships, and the like are usually a step in the right direction.

Change, however, is not always as good as it is intended to be. As president of Developmental Services of Northwest Kansas, I am compelled to comment on one: the proposed implementation of managed care for Kansas Medicaid programs. I support finding the most efficient ways of doing things, however, I believe including our locally managed long-term care services in the state's Managed Care Model will affect the lives of people with developmental disabilities.

The state's proposal to move our services for persons with developmental disabilities into an experimental managed care model called KanCare is planned to take effect next January, but the shift is already beginning. National insurance companies are in Kansas today working with the administration to bid for these contracts.

Under KanCare, the state will shift responsibilities and resources from state and community oversight to private health insurance companies. Roughly one third of the state's entire budget, under this plan, will be handed over to private health insurance companies to manage and oversee. That includes community services such as those offered by our agency. I am concerned by this. The core purpose of this new approach is to save money, but will it?

Not only do these national companies have little or no experience in serving the long-term needs of our clients, they also acknowledge there is little to no anticipated savings to be found by including community services under the managed-care model. Why? Because Kansas has been ahead of this issue for many years, and our current state-local management model is effective.

In the mid-'90s, Kansas passed the Developmental Disability Reform Act which incorporated many managed care principles into the



Free Press  
Letter Drop

• Our readers sound off

community service system (capitated rates, quality measurement, service access, eligibility determination and on and on). Under that system, local – mostly nonprofit organizations like Developmental Services – partnered with the state to administer long-term services for persons with disabilities. Under the current Kansas model, this community system has effectively managed program costs.

Here is an interesting perspective:

Nationally, the average cost per person for those in community services went up nearly 18 percent for the period 1993 to 2009. In sharp contrast, the average cost per person in Kansas went down nearly 18 percent since 1993. Our agency and its state and local partners have worked hard to be good stewards of the resources we have, and we oppose and will continue to oppose handing this program into the management of insurance companies with no experience in our field.

Our agency does support and will continue to support the use of those contractors to improve the outcomes for all persons who receive Medicaid medical services. We believe this lies within their area of expertise, and we will work with the administration to enable that to happen.

However, shifting oversight of long-term services for clients into an experimental program like KanCare in our opinion will place our most vulnerable population at risk, and is therefore not the right thing to do.

The right thing to do, for Kansans, would be to urge the administration to reconsider the direction it is planning, regarding the inclusion of these long-term-care services under KanCare, and avoid a misstep which could have adverse consequences for many years to come.

Jerry Michaud, Hays, president  
Developmental Services of Northwest  
Kansas

Thanks for help with event

To the Editor:

Living in a small town has many benefits, but the best is that our community supports many local causes.

On Dec. 6, the Women of K-State held a holiday fund raiser for Genesis-Thomas County and the Food4Kids backpack program.

Thank you everyone who helped us publicize the event: Donna Lamm, Colby Community College, the Colby Free Press, Farmers and Merchants Bank, First National Bank and Leroy's Printing.

The temperature was cold that night but hearts were warm. We had more than 50 guests and collected 340 pounds of food for Genesis, 312 pounds for Food4Kids and \$370 in donations.

The meaning of Christmas – giving to others – was in evidence that night. We are so proud to live in a town like Colby.

Thank you all for your support! Hope you had a Merry Christmas and a wonderful holiday season.

Vicki, Lori, Jeanne, Libby, Sandy, Sara, Katie and Becky

Any descendants around?

To the Editor:

While going through old pictures that belonged to my mother, I found a picture of Hester and Maurice Wheeler. The note on the back of the picture indicated they were my mother's Sunday School teachers in Colby, circa 1926.

My mother's name was Margaret Doniphant. I would gladly send this picture to any of her relatives who still reside in the area.

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