



Other Viewpoints

Postal Service pain means risk to others

They say there is no more dangerous animal than one that's wounded. It protects its life and territory with dangerous and unpredictable behavior. Reason and long-term self-interest are no longer in play. We are seeing such behavior today from a financially wounded U.S. Postal Service.

Through the first three quarters of its 2011-2012 operating year, the Postal Service has reported losses of \$11.6 billion – more than double its losses of \$5.7 billion for the same period a year ago.

In the third quarter, it reported losses of nearly \$57 million a day! All those losses aren't attributed strictly to operations. Under a 2006 congressional mandate, the service is required to pay \$5.5 billion a year in contributions to employee and retiree health benefits, geared to fund 75 years worth of benefits in just 10 years. For the first time, the Postal Service defaulted on the payment this past August, for a payment that had been deferred from August 2011. Another \$5.6 billion payment is due at the end of this month.

The service also has to make more than \$1 billion in annual worker's compensation payments Sept. 30.

Still, the actual operating loss during the first three quarters was more than \$1 billion.

There is a simple reason for the Postal Service's huge losses: the Internet is replacing First Class mail, source of much of the agency's profit, for everything from personal letters to bills to bill payments.

Now, to stop a small fraction of its financial bleeding, the Postal Service has a scheme to make a few dollars while hurting a loyal customer – hometown newspapers.

It proposed offering a special discount deal to Valassis Inc. through a Negotiated Service Agreement. The idea is to give Valassis, a firm which consolidates store fliers into a single mailing, deep discounts in postage costs not offered to newspapers. It gives Valassis the ability to undercut newspapers, taking fliers away from them, or drive down the cost newspapers charge to where they are losing money.

In exchange for a three-year deal, the Postal Service says it will earn an additional \$4.7 to \$15.3 million in net revenues. That is less than one-third of one day's losses, spread over three years.

The independent Postal Regulator Commission has approved this deal. Its opinion begins with the presumption that having a federal enterprise competing directly with the newspaper industry is a good thing, but it does not explain how any business can be on a level playing field when competing with the government.

The mailing contract with Valassis is an unfair deal in which the principal result is to drive down the advertiser's prices and not to bring new mail volume to the Postal Service. Remember, to implement this deal, it is taking away the delivery from newspapers.

The deal was approved by the commission under pressure to let the Postal Service do as it wants to regain its financial footing. What the commission does not explain is why this goal is in the best interest of postal customers, newspapers or the Postal Service. Nor does it take seriously the arguments that this deal will force more newspapers out of the mail and create a net loss for the Postal Service.

The commission does say it does not think there is a problem with the service's draining revenues from newsgathering organizations.

We know that in thousands of communities newspapers remain the watchdog of government as well as the source of community news.

The Founding Fathers recognized that the Postal Service needed to work in a partnership with newspapers to provide citizens with the news needed to make informed decisions. Today, despite the Internet, television and radio, newspapers still play this essential role. However, it appears the Postal Service is abandoning this founding principle to compete with rather than support newspapers.

If the Postal Service can get away with this deal, which both the National Newspaper Association and Newspaper Association of America are challenging in court, it will establish itself as a "business" which can pick and choose winners.

We can guarantee you that this philosophy will eventually mean that service to rural areas, which aren't the service's most profitable service territories, will get even worse than it is today.

— Reed Anfinson, president, National Newspaper Association

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Look ahead, not back to little farms

Proponents of organic, labor-intensive farming contend we should go back to the days when every family owned 40 acres, farmed with hay burners (horses) and applied no chemicals.

You remember the good ol' days when people were self-sufficient, owned a couple milk cows, tilled a garden and butchered 40 or 50 fryers each spring?

Some of these zealots propose that each nation should strive for self sufficiency. No imports. No exports.

Should this ever come about, you may want to prepare yourself for milking each morning instead of that piping hot mug of coffee. Forget about sliced bananas on your bowl of corn flakes. These goodies we import into our country, and a lot more, won't be on the kitchen table any more. Count on it.

God forbid we adopt these policies. If we cave in to those who spread hysteria about unsafe food and giant farms, be prepared to do without the services of all the nonagricultural types: carpenters, painters, nurses, doctors, teachers, writers and musicians.

In case you haven't heard, labor-intensive farming doesn't permit time for many other pursuits. Neither does today's production agriculture, for that matter.

Farmers run nonstop, from early morning to late at night, planting and harvesting crops, tilling the soil, feeding and caring for live-



John Schlageck

• Insights

Kansas Farm Bureau

stock. Their work seldom ends.

It's foolish to assume everyone would want to leave his or her job in the city to move to the farm – even if they could. It ain't all "Green Acres" out there, folks.

And who's to say all these people from other professions would become productive farmers? A lot of them might go broke.

A friend of mine who lives in Denver remarked when we were visiting last weekend that he does not want to be a farmer. He says he couldn't feed himself, much less the rest of the country or world.

"I'd starve to death, and so would the rest of us," he told me. "If you want to till the soil, go for it. But that doesn't mean the rest of us want to, thank you."

If we return to a system where everyone farms, brace yourself for even more uncertain economic times. Manual labor and animal power could spell the return of food shortages and famine.

A nation of farmers translates to a nation even more vulnerable to depressions and hunger. A drought, or a plague of insects or disease, could trigger such tragedies because we'd have no chemicals to fight them with.

Today's mechanized farmer provides us with the safest, most abundant food in the world. He works with crop consultants when applying herbicides, insecticides and fertilizers. He has cut his uses significantly in recent years – up to 50 percent in some cases.

Farmers work years to leave a legacy of beneficial soil practices. Most of the farmers I know would give up farming rather than ruin their land. They are proud of the crops they grow and the land they work.

Farmers continue to work to conserve water, plug abandoned wells, watch their grassland grazing and continue to adopt sound techniques that will ensure preservation of the land.

There's an old saying that rings true today: "You can never go home." And we can never return to the good ol' days. Besides, were they really all that good?

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.

Whose islands are these anyway?

Other Opinions

• **David Keeling**
Geographical Society

two centuries reverted to its 19th century status? Quite a ludicrous proposition, of course, but many territorial claims have their roots in the late 18th or early 19th centuries.

Argentina's claim to the Malvinas/Falkland Islands is one that has been in the news recently, in part because of the 30th anniversary of the brief 1982 war between Britain and Argentina over the islands, and in part because of heightened political rhetoric by the leaders of both countries over the righteousness of their respective positions.

In Argentina and elsewhere, President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner has ratcheted up the public rhetoric over her country's claim to the islands. Yet a more nuanced analysis of her government's claims beyond the surface media and political speechifying suggests some serious weaknesses in her analysis and speaks volumes about political opportunism and institutional memory.

Not a peep has been heard from President Kirchner and her supporters about the illegality of the military's invasion of the islands in 1982. Does she support those ill-fated decisions made then in the name of flag and country? What is her position on the government's declaration of war on a few thousand innocent civilians and slightly more sheep?

Her government has presented no plan or guarantees for maintaining the cultural integrity of the Falklanders in the event that political control should pass to Argentina. Would

their right to self determination be protected and respected? How long would it take for the Falkland Islanders to be "removed" or re-aculturated by Argentina in the name of solidifying the island's Argentinidad? None of these questions has been put on the table for open debate by either party.

Argentina's claim to the Malvinas/Falklands may have some theoretical or historical legal validity, yet to paraphrase a classic line from the film "Quigley Down Under," "Madam President, this isn't Dodge City and you're not Bill Hickock!"

Shooting from the proverbial hip with political posturing and empty rhetoric will not resolve the core underlying questions about the disputed islands. The right to self determination by the islanders must be recognized and protected a priori to any political territorial settlement.

In the meantime, Argentina's government might find a more profitable road in addressing rampant inflation, growing unemployment and declining quality of life for its own people.

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Mallard Fillmore

• **Bruce Tinsley**

