

Automakers need help, but why punish dealers?

Financial advisors used to tell widows that, no matter what happens, they could depend on the “blue chips” in their stock portfolios: you know, solid companies like AT&T, Chrysler, General Motors.

Only now, AT&T is gone, having dwindled away until one of its “Baby Bell” offspring bought it up. Chrysler and GM, both in bankruptcy.

What is this world coming to?

The car business, for one, just isn't what is used to be. And when the administration gets done “saving” GM and Chrysler, it'll be even more different than it is today.

There's an agenda there, lots of them, in fact: Smaller cars, more gas mileage, no more big SUVs. Bond holders were treated, not as banks or people with money invested, but like speculators with no real interest in the companies, let alone money invested.

The administration clearly wants the companies to build the cars it thinks people should have, not the ones they might want.

One wag said, when people decide they want big pickups again, Ford (unburdened by bankruptcy and federal “aid”) should be in a good position to make them — and make a lot of money.

Right now, the industry is sitting on plenty of big vehicles, though. If you want a truck, you can expect a big discount.

Americans have shown that they will drive what they want, however, and they pay little heed to what they “should” drive or the price of fuel — for the good of the economy or the environment.

One of the strangest agendas is the idea that to make money, the big automakers need to get rid of thousands of their dealers.

Congress and the administration seem to buy into this plan, which supposedly would get rid of nearly a third of all the dealerships with each big firm. How that will help either

recover is uncertain.

All the “Big 3” automakers have been slimming their dealer list for years, refusing to replace those — especially those in small towns — that close or go broke. That was a process of slow attrition, though, because state laws and dealer franchise contracts made it tough to get rid of a dealer who wanted to stay.

Bankruptcy changes all the rules, however, and with the power of a federal judge to void contracts, the companies could call the shots.

Their choices seemed to make little sense, though. Small, barely profitable dealers got a pass in some cases while larger firms in bigger towns were told they'd have to close. No one could, or would, say why.

One pattern did emerge: many dealer contracts to be voided seemed to involve dealerships that sold more than one automaker's products under the same roof. That was the case with Colby's Taylor Motors, which while retained by Chrysler, faces loss of its GM territory next year.

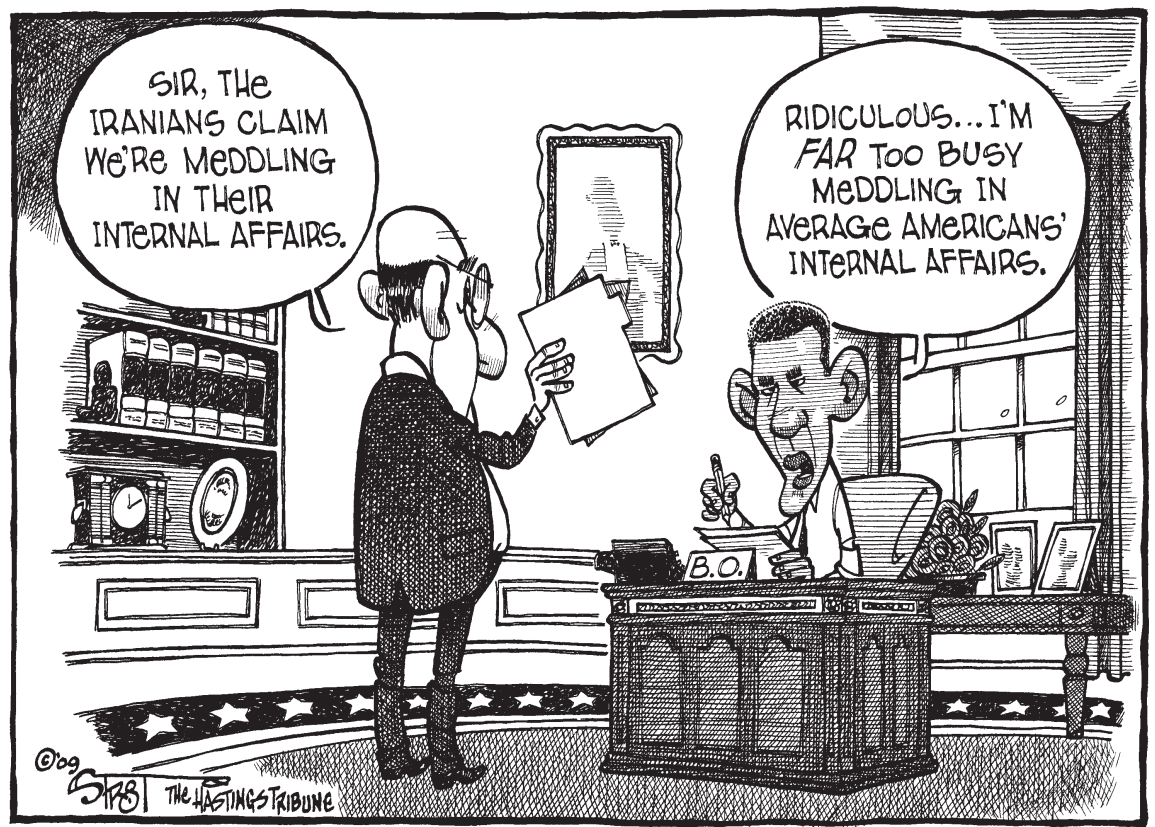
Are the automakers using bankruptcy to achieve ends that would be difficult, maybe even illegal, otherwise? Could be.

Why would they close profitable dealers, dealers who were moving cars for them?

Clearly, this is not something the government should be pushing. Why close dealerships that employ thousands when the country is trying to push recovery and create jobs?

Our congressman, Jerry Moran, has questioned this type of action. We all should be. Rural America, in particular, does not need to lose any more jobs. Dealers who can make the grade should be allowed to live.

Our communities and the dealers' employees depend on them. The administration and Congress should defend these dealers, not abandon them. — Steve Haynes



Press plant shines like new

We got to tour a brand-new printing plant in Colorado on Thursday, \$20 million worth of presses, equipment, paper-handling and plate-making equipment, rail spur and building.

Some said it may be the last of its kind built in this region, but maybe not. The real question is what might take its place.

The plant serves the Longmont and Loveland papers owned by Lehman Communication, which also owns smaller papers east of Boulder and the daily Cañon City Record.

We went because I am a past president of the Colorado Press Association and to represent the National Newspaper Association, since I am still on the board for a few more months, but mostly because the Lehman family have been good friends for more than 25 years.

The sparkling new plant is the capstone of a long and distinguished career for Ed Lehman, who bought the Longmont paper with his wife Ruth in 1957. Neat and new as it is — and a clean plant is a rarity in the newspaper business, where ink and paper usually mix into a permanent stain — a new newspaper plant is a rarity today.

It's no secret these are trying times for the industry, especially for daily papers in large markets, where declines of as much as 30 percent in income have been common. Some say it's a waste to spend money on presses when the Internet is taking over, but that belies the fact that smaller, local papers still make money.

Instead, daily publishers are returning to their roots — local news — and trying to figure out where the money will be in the business five



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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to 10 years out. Everyone thinks there will be a market for local news, and no one has identified a way to replace the newspaper as the essential gatherer.

But will we still be printing that news on paper with black ink?

The betting here is that we will. It's possible that someone, some day, will invent an way to deliver a newspaper by all-electronic means without losing any of the convenience that makes real newspapers so well-loved. It hasn't happened yet. Most attempts have met with abject failure, but the researchers keep trying.

Publishers are hedging their bets while they wait for electronic newsprint. In the last 30 years, we have replaced every part of the process — from the reporter's notebook right down to the making of individual printing plates — with computerized equipment. The new ways are, for the most part, vastly superior to the old.

Today, we can write, make and assemble news pages, send them to a printing plant in the next county or the next state, and never touch the product until it comes off the press. An electronic paper would be a logical extension of that, but so far, it's just not there.

The betting is we'll be using paper and ink and throwing papers for de-

cadecades, long enough for the Lehmans to depreciate their new German presses and think of them as veteran presses. Maybe longer.

Meantime, publishers have to get through the recession. That was the topic of a lot of the talk Friday.

Consolidation is one trend. After the closing of *The Rocky Mountain News*, *The Denver Post* has been adding other papers as customers at its nearly new Denver Newspaper Agency plant. Those papers, in turn, are selling their presses and laying off their crews.

One visitor was talking about the decision by *The Post* to stop delivery outside a 100-mile radius of Denver, vastly shrinking “The Voice of the Rocky Mountain Empire.”

Wouldn't that hurt the paper? he asked.

“Publishers are beyond that,” one newsman replied. “It's not about doing what hurts; it's about doing what you have to do. Sure, it'll hurt, but it had to be done.”

No one disagreed. Recessions are tough enough. To a business in turmoil, and the bigger dailies surely are, this one is that much tougher.

But out in Colorado, at least, new presses keep on rolling as publishers scramble to hang on for a better day.

Un-retirement tough in a.m.

I've been semi-retired for about a year, and have loved every minute of it. When asked if I miss working outside the home, I always reply, “I miss the people and being ‘in-the-know,’ but, I don't miss the daily grind.”

So, why did I agree to fill in for the society editor while she had surgery? Because I miss the people and being “in the know.” At the newspaper office where I used to work, my schedule was kind of “loosey-goosey.” When I asked what the hours were at the office where I would be filling in, I was told, “We like people to be here by 8.”

“Oh, Lordy!” I said. “I haven't been anywhere by 8 a.m. in years.”

I've been giving it my best shot and making it in by about 8:15. Thankfully, son James has been kind enough to help me with morning chores so I can get going.

—ob—

Jim's 92-year-old father is “Dad” to both of us, so we wanted to do something especially nice for him on Father's Day. However, there is absolutely nothing he “needs” and since his accident a year ago, his lifestyle has been limited to the long-term care facility where he



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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now lives.

What we could give him, though, was an experience. Through the generosity of a kind family that owns a handicapped-accessible van, we were able to take Dad on a Father's Day outing.

Where did we take him? The only place he wanted to go: his farm. We pulled into the yard and his faithful dog Lacy came to greet him. As we pushed his wheelchair through the grass, Lacy played by his side and howled on command when he asked her to “speak.”

Dad's cherry tree is loaded with almost-ripe fruit. He had to pick some of the ripest cherries and eat them. They're too tart for me, but he ate a handful before he said, “I better stop.” However, he made me promise to come pick all I want — on the condition that I bake him a pie. Done deal. That's a fair trade,

because his tree produces the best pie cherries.

Next on the agenda was a drive through the pasture to check the cattle. The cattle are a curious bunch and did not run from the vehicle. We opened the doors on the side of the van and let Dad look out while the cattle looked in. He thought the calves looked good.

The final stop was the wheat field. We unloaded Dad from the van, and with James pushing and Jim pulling, took Dad out into the field. He was able to check the heads like all good farmers do and “feel” the berries for ripeness. He's convinced it'll make 40 bushels — at least.

It was hot like Kansas in June, but the sky was beautiful like it often is in Kansas in June. It was a good day to be a farmer. One we hope Dad will remember for a long, long time.

Just who is this crazy gypsy?

Out there somewhere, I'm sure, is a crazy gypsy making people put their valuables in a big plastic trash bag and threatening them with a screwdriver.

OK, you don't like that scenario? How about this one?

Apost office somewhere between here and Augusta, Ga., has a dozen really nice trash bags, a screwdriver and a dozen colorful head scarves and doesn't really know what to do with them.

Now, I've never had any problems mailing packages before. Many times, I send things to the children using United Parcel Service. However, despite recent price increases, the good old American Postal Service is still the cheapest way to send most small stuff.

But, if it gets lost in the system — it's really lost.

My tale begins with youngest daughter. She found a craft project that uses scarves to make clothing. She immediately remembered the many colorful head scarves I had. My ears are sensitive to the wind, so when I walk, I frequently wear a scarf, just like the ones my mother wore back in 1950.

I made a trip to China in 2002 and brought back a bunch of scarves as presents, so Lindsay figured I might be able to supply her with some of



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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my extra scarves. Seems she was sentimentally hoping to be wearing the scarves she remembered from her youth.

“Oh, yes, and could you send me some Rotary trash bags, Mom?”

The Oberlin Rotary Club buys and resells wonderful, big tan trash bags. They are perfect for yard waste because they are both big and tough.

One year, Steve and I gave a case of trash bags to each of our brothers and sisters as Christmas presents. Maybe it wasn't the most romantic present in the world, but very practical.

At the same time, Steve had purchased a screw driver for Lindsay because she didn't have the kind he liked when we were down visiting last month and he was helping her with some home improvement projects.

So, I took what I thought was a pretty sturdy box, put two packages

of a dozen trash bags each in the bottom, added the screw driver in the middle and filled the top with head scarves — about a dozen or so.

I secured the box with tape and mailed it.

Better than a week later, daughter called to say that the box had arrived but somewhere in transit, it appeared, an elephant had sat on it, a truck had run over it and it contained one package of trash bags — no scarves, no screwdriver no second package of bags for her sister.

The loss isn't great in terms of money. None of that stuff was worth much, so you wouldn't figure anyone would steal it.

We all figure the box was damaged and the contents came out, but where in the world are those scarves, screwdriver and trash bags? And what is that gypsy doing with them?

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