

Opinion Page

Postal Service plan could hurt rather than help

The U.S. Postal Service is studying a plan to move processing of some mail out of western Kansas to Salina, where supposedly it will be more efficient to sort this outbound mail, saving all of \$130,000 a year.

This is a bad plan, one which likely will hurt the service more than it will help. While the service may save a few thousand dollars on wages — only about 1 1/2 man years, including benefits — the damage to what’s left of the business is hard to calculate.

Our guess is the service could lose as much as it saves, maybe more. Damage done to the goodwill and loyalty of its best customers here could be immense.

The service says it actually is offering better service with this plan, despite the fact that truck times at most towns will be moved up two to three hours to get the mail to Salina for sorting. But that’s only true for mail leaving the area for other parts of Kansas or farther east.

Most businesses have a vast majority of their customers in the area around their front door: Their hometown, their county and the counties around them. The pattern looks a lot like the areas around our two “sectional center facility” post offices, in Colby and Hays.

Today, businesses have until nearly the end of the day to post business mail. If times are moved up two hours, in some northwest Kansas towns, the mail will be going out by 2 p.m., usually no later than 3 p.m.

That’s a huge loss of the work day, and any mail that’s not ready for the one daily truck is going to lose 24 hours if it’s staying within the section.

For almost any business, whether it’s a newspaper or a hardware store, the bulk of the out-of-town mail stays in the area. Not

that many bills or advertising fliers or whatever will be going out of the area compared to what stays in.

We know the Postal Service can’t afford to run two trucks a day from our towns. But if it persists in pushing back the pickup times two to three hours, it can only give mailers one more reason to find other ways to send business information, bills and the like: either electronically, or with some other carrier.

In the end, we’re willing to bet, the result will not be a savings, but a net loss to the Postal Service. That would be a shame, because the service has many good, dedicated employees out here who have worked long and hard to build up the business. They deliver mail on time, to the right place, rain or shine, and they do it with a smile.

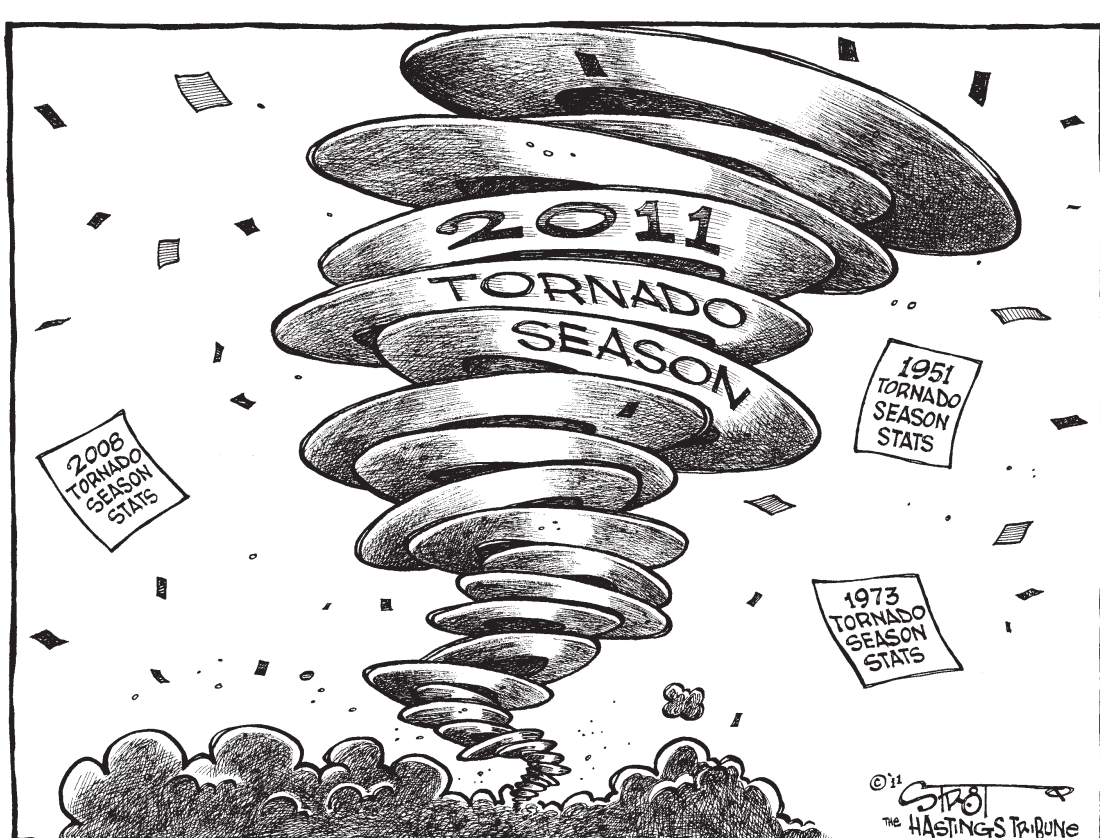
One bad decision from headquarters could wipe that all away.

There is an alternative. The service could compromise on the truck times, limiting the change to only an hour in any town. That would minimize the damage.

The real answer to the service’s financial problems, however, will have to come from Congress, which is sitting on a request to relieve the service of legal requirements that it pay billions in extra pension costs every year.

No one believed that the service owes this money. It’s been agreed for years that the Postal Service is overpaying its workers’ pensions. But the money is being used to reduce the federal deficit, in effect taxing mailers to pay for federal programs.

Now that the service is nearly broke, however, this policy makes no sense. Congress must act before senseless cuts like this one ruin what’s left of a great — and vitally needed — organization. — *Steve Haynes*



Measuring her knowledge

We were out walking in a half-finished subdivision near an old race track the other day.

Steve was pointing out how you could still see the starting area, the turns and the finish line, even though the track has been gone for about 50 years and there are houses built on parts of it.

I have to admit it looked like long rows of dirt to me, but I know there had been horse racing there in the past because I’ve seen pictures of the track.

Just before the beginning of the big oval track there was a long straight stretch.

Steve was wondering why they needed that stretch and then decided that if they were running a longer race it might add a furlong or two to the course.

“By the way,” I asked, “what’s a furlong?”

Steve admitted he had no idea. It’s just a unit of measure used in horse racing. We had no idea how long it is.

That brought up other obscure units such as hands, stones and fathoms.

“I can’t fathom fathoms,” Steve said. I tried to hit him.

Again we both knew that horses are measured in hands. Stones is an old-fashioned weight measurement and fathoms is only used to measure



Open Season

By *Cynthia Haynes*
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the depth of water.

But, again we had no idea how these compared to the units we normally use.

So I decided to look them up.

No children, I did not go to Wikipedia. I went to Merriam Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary, tenth edition, which proudly announces on its red front the it is “The Voice of Authority.”

So how long is a furlong?
According to Webster’s it’s, “A unit of distance equal to 220 yards (about 201 meters.)”

Steve Googled the answer and got 1/8 of a mile plus the information that Merriam Webster says it’s 220 yards.

Next up, how high is a hand?

That took a little while because everything from humans to bananas have hands, but finally I found it: “A unit of measure equal to four inches (10.2 centimeters) used especially for the height of horses.”

So on to stone. If Steve weighs 20

stone, does he need to go on a diet?

Webster’s says that a stone is, “any of several units of weight; esp. an official British unit equal to 14 pounds (6.3 kilograms.)”

So by my math, that would make a 20-stone man weigh 280 pounds and he certainly should go on a diet unless he’s really tall or plays professional football.

Our last question: how deep is a fathom.

Our friend Webster’s says that this is “A unit of length equal to six feet (1.83 meters) used esp. for measuring the depth of water.”

So there you have it, more esoteric measurement knowledge than you ever wanted.

However, Webster’s could not answer that age-old question, “How much wood could a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood.”

For that, we’ll just have to check Wikipedia, or maybe Steve could Google it for us.

Weekend no time for family

If I were vying for the Martha Stewart “Hostess of The Year” award, I would place dead-last.

My brother, Bob, came out for Alumni Banquet/Memorial Day weekend and I didn’t see him more than an hour or two. It’s a good deal he doesn’t need much to entertain himself. Give him a book, a bright light; the remote control and he’s good.

I warned him we wouldn’t be home when he arrived Friday evening and said, “Go on in and make yourself at home.” Which he did. However, we didn’t get home until about 10 p.m. and, by then, it was time to go to bed knowing what a big day Saturday would be with Jim’s 50th high school reunion on tap. We were out the door before Bob got up; he had already left for the banquet before we got home to change our clothes for the evening; and he was asleep before we got home after the banquet. I was on the radio Sunday morning so I didn’t see anyone before I left. After the show I headed straight for the little country cemetery where Memorial Day services were planned with a potluck dinner following. That’s where I actually had a chance to visit with Bob a little. But, then, it was over and he needed to head home.



Out Back

By *Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts*
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So, ‘til next time....

-ob- Our little town is about to “bust its buttons” with pride over one of our own. Brand new West Point graduate, Aaron Helm, spoke at two local Memorial Day services. He reminded us of how much we have to be proud of as Americans. He leaves for active duty soon and we salute him.

-ob- Jim’s class had a great reunion. And, I knew enough of them to have a great time, too. They started early Saturday morning with breakfast; took a short break before they gathered again for lunch; talked late into the afternoon; broke up with only enough time to change clothes before dinner; and then met later at a classmate’s home for more talking.

if we weren’t talking we were eating so you know we had a good time. When I was a new graduate I

thought those 50-year classes were old people and wondered why they acted so silly. Now, “I are one” and I think we look pretty good. As for the silly part, I say, “just wait”.

-ob- The pin, holding Jim’s thumb immobile, was removed last week and his recovery is picking up speed. He can move his thumb, albeit stiffly, and he has feeling. The swelling is going down and the incision is barely visible. He starts occupational therapy this week and I know that will help, too.

Right now, he’s just thrilled that he can play the guitar again.

-ob- Perhaps it’s just because they live far away now and will read anything from “back home” but, I was surprised by the number of people who took time to tell me they enjoy reading this column. To them I say, “Thank you.”

Many lines divide country

This column is about lines that divide the country.

Not the Mason-Dixon line, which divides North from South back east. It’s kinda irrelevant out here, except that in an accident of history, it also serves as (approximately) the border between Kansas and Nebraska. It runs just 13 miles from my house.

That’s because Kansas was to have come into the Union as a slave state, part of a long-time compromise that kept an uneasy balance in the U.S. Senate for the first half of the 19th century.

Abolitionists from the North colonized and eventually controlled Kansas, however, leading to a decade of border warfare and eventually, 150 years ago, the Civil War. After Kansas was admitted as a free state, you see, the South could see the handwriting on the wall.

But that is dry, historical stuff. Today, we’re going to talk about the Sweet Tea Line and the Green Chili Line. And if there’s time, maybe the Firefly Line.

In Yankee states, even the more northern border states such as Missouri or Kentucky, you can go into a restaurant and order iced tea and it will come unsweetened, maybe with some of those little sacks of sugar or sugar substitute.

In the South, diabetics fear ordering tea with lunch. In the South, they just assume you want sugar. My son-in-law, who lives in Georgia, likes “unsweet” tea, and he always



Along the Sappa

By *Steve Haynes*
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orders it that way. He gets sweet tea half the time anyway.

The Sweet Tea Line, best I can figure out, is somewhere around the border between Tennessee and Kentucky, give or take a county or two. By the time you get to Texas and the Gulf States, best taste your tea first.

Then there is the green chili line. It’s been blurred a little in recent years, but generally it runs north and south through the High Plains. In New Mexico, Colorado, southern Wyoming, Arizona and west, no self-respecting Mexican restaurant would think of not serving green chili, that wonderful concoction of fresh chopped chilis, onion, garlic and (usually) pork, with (sometimes) potatoes or tomatoes thrown in.

Drive east from Colorado, and you’ll have a hard time finding anything but red chili, made with ripe, dried chilis, beef or pork, with or without tomatoes, and (shudder) maybe even beans.

Out west, by the way, traditionally, in the Southwest, you get a choice. The server will ask, “red or

green.” Or you can order “Christmas,” by which they mean one color on half the plate and the other on the other. Yum.

Growing up in Kansas, I was innocent of green chili until we moved to southern Colorado some 31 years ago. I grew to love the green, which can be mild or hot, with varied ingredients as noted. But nearly always good.

In New Mexico, it’s pretty much the state food.

And the Firefly Line?

In most of Kansas, kids wait for warm summer nights when they can chase and capture those fascinating little glowing creatures. Not in Denver, or most of the mountain West.

The Firefly Line runs somewhere between Atwood and St. Francis, it seems. West of there, they are rare or wholly absent. Oberlin and Hoxie seem to have plenty, while Colby and Atwood have a few.

’Tis a pity children of the West are deprived of this simple pleasure, but they seem to find other things to do.

Like eat green chili and drink unsweet tea.

THE OBERLIN HERALD

Serving Oberlin and Decatur County since 1879
USPS 401-600 Office hours: 8:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. Mon.-Fri.
170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749-2243

Published each Wednesday by Haynes Publishing Co., 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749. Periodicals postage paid at Oberlin, Kan. 67749.

Steve and Cynthia Haynes, publishers
Kimberly Davis, assistant publisher

Official newspaper of Oberlin, Jennings, Norcat, Dresden and Decatur County. Member of the Kansas Press Association, National Newspaper Association, Colorado Press Association, Nebraska Press Association and Inland Press Association.

Subscriptions: One year, \$38 (tax included) in Decatur, Norton, Rawlins, Sheridan, Thomas and Red Willow counties; \$42 (tax included) elsewhere in Kansas; \$48 elsewhere in the U.S. Foreign subscriptions, \$50-\$250 (in U.S. dollars only) extra per year (except APO/FPO). POSTMASTER: Send change of address to 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749-2243.

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She wants to help tornado victims

To the Editor:
I am sending this e-mail to see if it is possible to set up some sort of donation drive for the people of Joplin, Mo., and Reading, Kan.

I lived in Joplin for several years and have quite a few family and friends living there. For the most

Letter to the Editor

part, everyone is donated for except for three of my friends in Joplin. My husband Shane and I are heading down to Wichita on Friday, as we have training to attend, but will be going to Fredonia, Cherryvale and Joplin on Saturday as we have friends and family that live in these towns as well and are collecting donations.

I just didn’t know how we could get this arranged and was hoping that the paper could help us out. We could do a donation drive for like two weeks and then Shane and

I could drive the donations out to these places. On top of this, we are working on getting the kids placed with us to help with clean-up efforts in Reading sometime next week.

Please let me know what you think. I’ve been in two tornadoes before, and I know what it’s like to have to pick up the pieces afterwards.

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From the Bible

What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee. In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust I will not fear what flesh can do unto me. Psalms 56:3 & 4