

Congress needs to save the U.S. Postal Service

The fate of the \$1.1 trillion-a-year mailing industry, estimated to make up 7 percent of the nation's economy, hangs in the balance as Congress reconvenes in Washington for the fabled "lame duck" session.

Right now, the U.S. Postal Service is the lame duck. The service, the oldest federal agency, just posted a \$15.9 billion loss for fiscal year 2012. The service has defaulted twice on advance pension payments it owes the federal government and has reached its \$15 billion borrowing limit.

Officials worry that the service will stumble over lower mail volumes next year after a rush of election-related mailing in the fall. Mailers, operating under the umbrella of the Coalition for a 21st Century Postal Service, say the service is being held back — some would say held under — "by an outdated operating structure and debilitating labor contracts." The system is ossified, but management attempts to shake it up make no sense.

The agency has been saddled with expensive overpayments into government retirement funds. It's the only federal unit, in fact, which is required to make advance payments.

Congress worked last week, then took a recess for Thanksgiving. There is talk of pushing another "reform" bill through when the members come back next week. Some action is needed to fix the mess left by the last bill and the sudden, unexpected plunge in First Class Mail which precipitated the crisis.

Some argue that we no longer need the Postal Service; that it's an 18th century tech-

nology ripe for retirement. But a business that produces \$1.1 trillion a year in economic activity can't be all that outmoded.

One problem Congress faces: everyone has a different idea about how to "save" the system. Postal unions, used to having their way, want to save jobs and pay rates. But in doing so, they could choke the goose.

House Republicans want to slash away at the structure. The president wants to raise rates, kill Saturday delivery.

Management wants to slash service standards, cut the payroll and close many mail-sorting "plants." Letters will be trucked off to a distant city, sorted the next day, then trucked back. A postcard to your neighbor might take two

Another management strategy is to eliminate Saturday delivery. That will slow the flow of bills and payments business depends on even further, driving more mail away.

Soon, there will be no first-class business save for Christmas cards.

One thing is for certain. The mailing industry — everyone from printers to magazines to greeting-card companies — wants to save the service because the business depends on it.

To accomplish that goal, though, everyone — mailers, unions, management, Congress — will have to agree on the common good. The alternative is failure, bankruptcy for the Postal Service, loss of thousands of jobs and elimination of billions in business at a time when the economy needs all of the above. And that just can't happen. — *Steve Haynes*

Husband has fit over new do

Most men hate change, and my husband is one of them. He doesn't like it when I move the furniture around; even though he will eat whatever I set before him, he really doesn't like me to try new recipes; and he definitely doesn't like it when I change my hair.

Several years ago when I realized I could not wear my hair big, long and dark anymore I announced I was going to have it cut.

Jim almost sunk into depression at the thought. I think he loved my hair more than I did. I had tried to get him used to the idea for months, but when the day of my appointment finally came he was not ready. I recall a lot of begging and pleading.

Funny thing was: when I came home that night with my super-short pixie cut he said, "That's kinda cute. I like it." When all the bottled hair color washed out within the week and I was totally gray, he said he liked that too. Jim is the kind of man who does notice and doesn't hesitate to give compliments.

Sunday as we were heading to church Jim looked at me and said, "You did something different to your hair, didn't you?"

I answered, "I didn't curl it. I just blew it dry. Whaddaya think?" He gave me this cock-eyed look and said, "I've heard some women pay big bucks to get that tousled, wind-blown look."

Translated that means, "You did something different and I'm not sure about it."

Maybe I should wait a few days to inform him I'm going to try out



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
cplotts65@gmail.com

a new do.

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It's true. When God closes one door — he opens another.

Thanksgiving in Dallas with our kids has been a family tradition for years. One we all look forward to. Lots of cooking, eating, laughing, board games and time to talk. This year it's not going to work out. Too many different work and school schedules to accommodate five continuous days of down time. All we could say was, "Maybe next year."

As disappointed as we are, we are still going to have a great Thanksgiving. We are friends of a couple of young mothers with kids who are away from their own families over the holidays and they will come share the day with us. I've already started cooking.

So, if we can't be with the ones we love, we'll love the ones we're with.

-ob-

We buried a good and godly man Monday. Not only was he the father of a dear friend, but he transcended age categories and was our friend, too. Jim credits Lyman with being the deciding factor in helping him

decide where his church home should be.

I knew him first as a business man, second as my friend's father, and later as a friend. He loved his wife; he loved his family; but most importantly, he loved his God.

We are confident he will hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

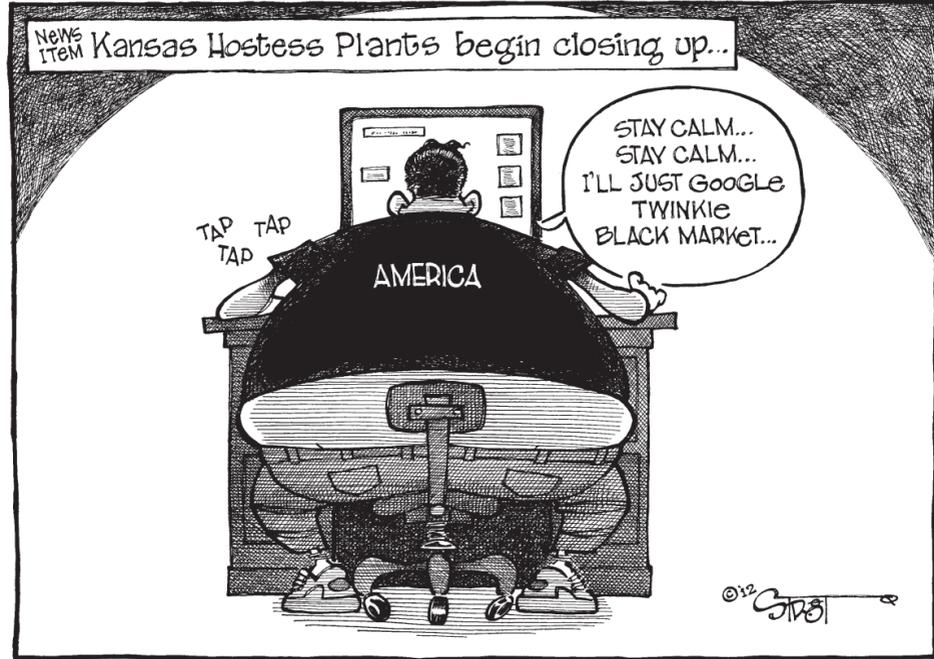
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May you have all you need instead of all you want; it will help you appreciate all you have. Have a Happy and Blessed Thanksgiving.

From the Bible

Behold he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, amen. "I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending," saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.

— Revelation 1: 7-8



Let's just sleep on this course

Better sleep, better memory. It sounded like a good idea for a seminar, and besides I'd get six hours of continuing education credit and get to have a night out with my sister.

Each year, Marie and I get together in either Kearney, Neb., or Wichita for one of these seminars. A couple of companies put them on, attracting a wide range of health professionals, from doctors to physical therapists.

Marie is a psychiatric nurse and I'm a registered pharmacist, so this course was good for both of us.

She lives in Concordia, so we met in Kearney, had supper and shared a room at the hotel. We got some sleep after gabbing half the night, then figured we were ready to learn how to sleep better and have sharper memories. (Not staying up half the night talking would probably be a good start, we figured.)

It was an interesting course and neither of us went to sleep during the discussion. Among other things, we learned that a young man in California stayed awake for 11 days for a science-fair project. He had some hallucinations but came out of the experience without any lasting problems.

While sleep loss causes decreases in concentration, motivation, perception and thinking capacity, the experts say, if the person gets his or her normal amount of sleep,



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
c.haynes@nwkansas.com

they seem to recover within a day or two.

Some tips for travelers include:
• When switching just one or two time zones, don't shift out of your regular sleep cycle. Just go to bed a little earlier or later to keep your body on its normal schedule.

• Delay routines on trips spanning many time zones. Don't go to bed until it's bedtime in the new time zone and spend a lot of time outdoors in the sun the first two days. (I did this when I traveled to China, and it works great but it's sure hard to stay up for almost 24 hours waiting for "bedtime.")

• Drink lots of fluids but no alcohol or caffeine. (Notice how these people always take all the fun out of that drink lots of liquids bit?)

There are, we were told, five stages of sleep, and we spend six years of our lives dreaming. But we forget half of a dream's content within five minutes of waking up and 90 percent after 10 minutes.

While this might seem to be a

waste of six years, they did suggest how to train your brain to solve problems while you are sleeping and dreaming.

• Write down your problem. Place it with a pen, paper and flashlight next to your bed.

• Review the problem and then visualize it as a concrete image as soon as you go to bed.

• Tell yourself you want to dream about the problem as you drift off.

• On awaking, stay in bed and try to recall any dreams and write them down.

I'm not sure this works, because whenever I've tried it, I haven't been able to go to sleep because I keep worrying about my problem.

Our instructor did say this was a good way for students to study. They should read their material just before going to bed and studies have shown that they will retain more of it than by just studying at a desk.

So I guess when someone tells you to "sleep on it," that might actually be a good idea.

Division normal in politics

Two myths we hear a lot about: Myth 1, that the partisan division we see in Washington (or Topeka) is a phenomenon of the 21st century.

It's not. In our history, it's more the norm than the exception.

Bitter partisanship goes back to the Founding Fathers. Only George Washington enjoyed nearly universal respect and support, and he fell into the partisan trap after retiring.

In the bitter campaign of 1800, Thomas Jefferson finally defeated John Adams after a tie in the Electoral College and a stalemate in the House of Representatives. It's said that Adams left the White House in the night so he would not have to greet his one-time friend.

The two, both revered today among the Founding Fathers, had become bitter opponents through two long campaigns said to be filled with lies and slander. The only difference, it seems, is that today, lies and slander travel faster. Today, we have television and the Internet; then, they had the post office — on horseback.

American history is replete with tale after tale of partisanship, deadlock and woe. Finding times when the two major parties could work together may, in fact, be more difficult than finding times when they could not.

Myth 2, we would be better off if the parties got together and did something.

We would? Problem is that they have done way too much.

Most of the time, we're better



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
s.haynes@nwkansas.com

served when Congress does nothing. Not today, though.

Having gotten us into the mess we are in, Congress needs to lead us out. That will require statesmanship, that most rare commodity. Not partisanship, the norm. And it will require long-term solutions, not the usual short-term patch.

The nation is about to be crushed under a mountain of debt. We cannot spend our way out of this crisis; that is the road to Greece.

We cannot tax our way out of it, either. That could lead to renewed recession, more unemployment, lower revenue and more deficits.

The federal government needs to learn to live within its means. Since it is borrowing right now roughly 40 cents of each dollar it spends, that's not going to be easy.

The budget needs to be cut until the government gets back to a sustainable level. Can't do that all at once, and it will require some judicious tax increases (Listening, Republicans?) as well.

Cuts will have to be noticeable, though, and should include, where possible, whole programs. The

government needs to stop trying to do everything and start focusing on its core mission. That includes Social Security, Medicare and other "entitlements. (Listening, Democrats? Senator Reid?)

While nearly everyone agrees that "something has to be done," nearly every voter benefits from one or more federal programs, tax breaks or entitlements.

Forty percent deficits are not sustainable, though. This house of cards is going to collapse some day. If we don't do something now, the crash will make 1929 look puny.

Can Congress and the president pull together to do something?

Only if BOTH SIDES are willing to compromise and put together a package that will work. So far, both say they are willing to work on it, but the president has been quoted as saying the voters chose his way.

A narrow victory is not a mandate, however, and he has to deal with those Republicans the votes left in control of the House and still substantial in the Senate.

Still, you have to believe — and pray — that miracles are possible.

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E-mail: oberlin.herald@nwkansas.com

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