

Extra cash could mean everyone pays more

The post office has been overpaying its pension fund for more than 20 years, and it's cost everyone who buys stamps a bundle. When the U.S. Postal Service, as we know it today, was formed in 1970, its employees were covered by the federal civil service retirement system. Retirement benefits were paid with a mixture of government appropriations and employer-employee matching money.

In the 1980s the service switched to the more common 401(k) plan to cover pension benefits, which requires no extra federal money. Employees covered under the old system remained on it and the government kept putting money into the pot.

In 2002, an audit showed that the old retirement fund was paid up. More money would not be needed. In fact, additional payments required by law would overpay the retirement account by \$70 billion to \$100 billion over 10 years.

Pressure from groups that do a lot of mailing, like this newspaper and its national association, pushed Congress to stop the overpayments. The savings allowed a freeze on the price of stamps through 2006.

However, the government, always needing extra money, now wants to hold the money in escrow and the administration is requiring the postal service to pay a \$28 billion bill for military pensions. No other federal agency pays the military portion of its pensions; that is a Defense Department expense.

The Postal Service wants to use the money to pay for retiree health benefits, which went up 15 percent last year.

The budget bean counters want the money, which they can't spend, to make the \$500 billion federal deficit look better.

Why should any of us care about this?

You only need to care if you send Christmas cards, receive one or more newspapers or magazines through the mail, sent out church bulletins or receive club newsletters through the mail. Or if you get packages or send packages with the post office. Or use the mail in your business.

Way back in the dark ages, stamps were 3 cents. They were 3 cents for a long time. Then they were 5 cents, then 10, then up and up and up. It now costs 37 cents to mail a letter. That's a more than 1200 percent increase in 40 years.

True, everything has gone up. Still there is no reason to make us all pay more for stamps so that the federal government can look good.

The idea of the Postal Service as separate from the government was to prevent stuff like this.

Even if you don't send out a card, never pay a bill by mail and never send packages by U.S. mail, you will still have to pay more for the privilege of getting your newspapers, magazines and advertising flyers when you pay the subscription costs. Even if you are so wedded to the Internet that all your correspondence is done by e-mail, you will still find that you are paying more for your PC Today, MacWorld and Wall Street Journal subscriptions.

And for what?

No one wins this game. The post office employees don't get any benefit. The government can't spend the money because it is earmarked for benefits, and everyone who sends or receives mail will have to pay more for the service.

If Congress doesn't act this year, postal rates are expected to go up 5.4 percent. With other expenses, the jump could be 10 to 15 percent, or a stamp price of 41 to 44 cents. Publisher will add another \$1 or \$2 to the cost of their subscriptions. And guess who gets stuck with the bill — again.

"We're from the government," the man says. "We're here to help you."

— Cynthia Haynes

ELECTED OFFICIALS:

★ Governor Kathleen Sebelius, Topeka, Kan. 66612.

300 SW 10th Ave., Topeka, Kan. (785) 296-7399

66612. (785) 296-2332

★ State Rep. John Faber, 181

★ State Sen. Stan Clark, State W. Capitol Building, Topeka, Capitol Building, Room 449-N, Kan. 66612. (785) 296-7500

THE NORTON TELEGRAM

Office hours:

8 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Mon.-Fri.

Phone: (785) 877-3361

Fax: (785) 877-3732

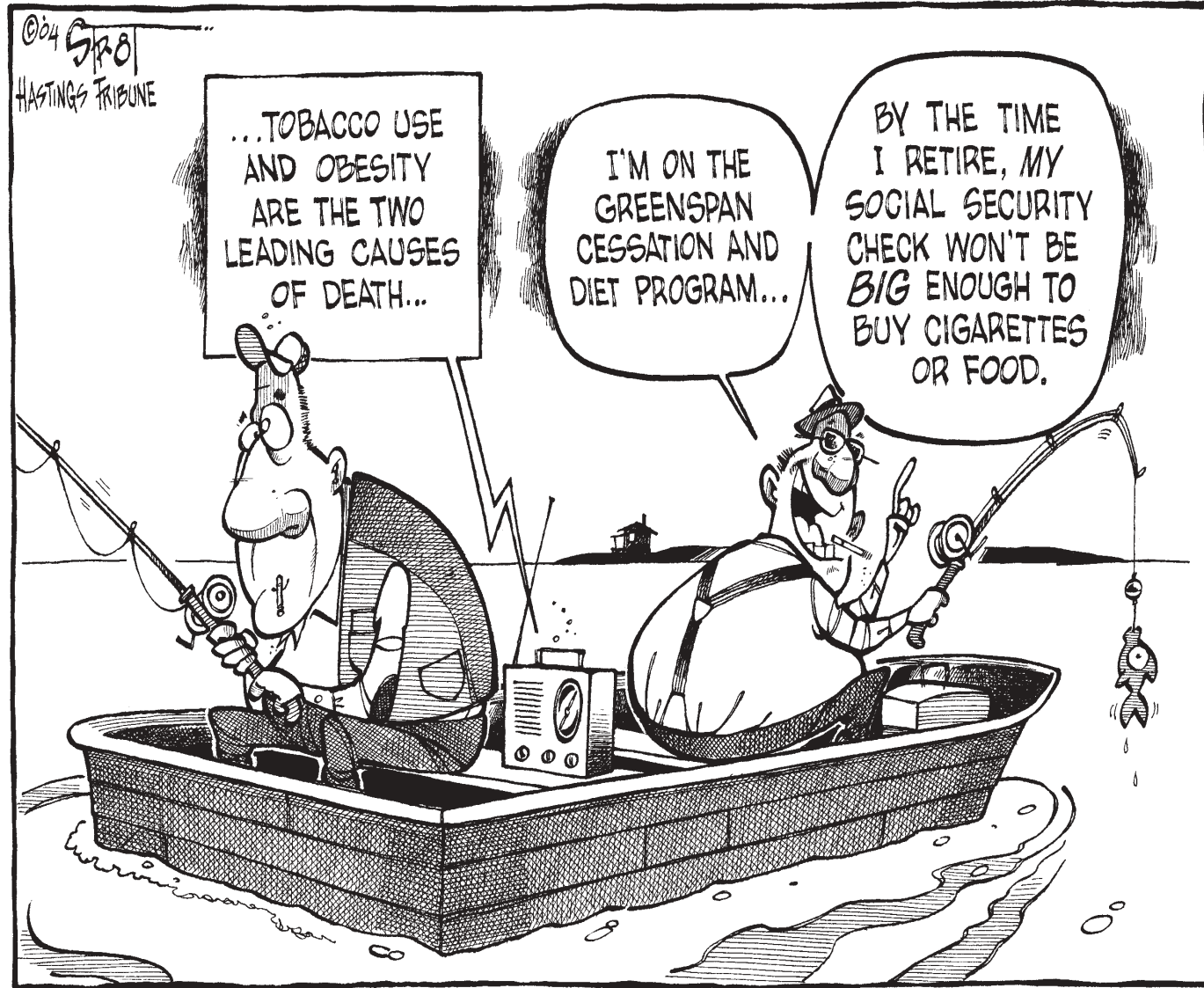
E-mail: telegram@nwkans.com

STAFF

Cynthia Haynes editor and publisher
Veronica Monier staff reporter
Dick Boyd Blue Jay sports
Carolyn Plotts society editor
Kristen Brands reporter
Carol Erlenbusch advertising rep.
Bill Eckhart advertising rep.
Vicki Henderson computer production
Susie Marble computer production
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Marion R. Krehbiel, editor



Farmers gamble on a living everyday

Recently a friend of mine who grew up here, (however her family didn't farm), said she didn't know why farmers insisted on remaining in the field, no pun intended, everyone knew their product wasn't necessary.

Being the daughter of a farmer, I was miffed.

Surely she couldn't believe that our corn, wheat and cattle, not to mention hogs, weren't important to our nation's food supply let alone our economy?

After I recovered I decided to do some research.

According to a 1997 U.S. Department of Agriculture report, Kansas ranks fifth in the nation in market value of agricultural products sold. We grow over 16 percent of the wheat grown in this country on just over 3 percent of the nation's farms.

Now this calculates out to me as rather

Phase II
Mary Kay
Woodyard



important. That sourdough bread they are eating in San Francisco may have had its roots in good ole' Kansas.

Couple this with the fact that almost 40 percent of sorghum grain is raised in this state and the steak on your plate takes on new meaning.

You hear many derisive terms about the mid-west, but the name, which lingers in my mind, is the "heartland".

The heart pumps life to all other parts

of the body and I would suggest this holds true for our country as well. Much of what allows a person on the coast the "good life" is possible because of products from the heartland.

Farming is risky business as any farmer can tell you. It takes skill, patience and lots of prayer, but it is an important calling. And that's what farmers are, they are called.

Throughout droughts, breakdowns and low market values, they hang on as long as they can because they are called to fill an important spot in our community and the nation's economy.

A prominent man in town once asked my dad if he'd like to go gamble in Las Vegas with a bunch of guys for the weekend.

My dad replied, "I don't have to. I gamble everyday, I'm a farmer."

Thank God, for gamblers.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR:

Article brings automobile memories cruising through the mind

At times it is interesting to learn about people and the way they relate to the automobile.

Some time ago a Mr. Rogers from Franklin, Ind., wrote and said he would like a story about a Whippet car. His article brought to my mind a memory from the past in the 1930s. Our family, like many others, lived on a farm near the Solomon River, about five miles south of Edmond, across the road from the Houston school house.

F.D.R. was president and money was in short supply. Men, of all ages, were riding the coal freight all over the country looking for work of any kind.

One day down on the farm my older brother Eldon, who was about 5 1/2, and myself, 4 years, overheard Dad and Mother talking about driving over to Granddad Perry's place about two miles away.

Dad told mother we didn't have much gas in the old sedan parked in the yard. One of us came up with the idea to get water out of the well and put in the gas tank. The tank was mounted under the space tire at the rear of the car as I remember. We told the folks the fuel problem was fixed. We had high hopes the trip to Granddad's was on.

We could almost taste the cream pie Grandma Edna often made. I do not recall how Dad handled that caper. Perhaps I don't want to remember.

Today when time permits I like to drive north out of Texas to that place near the bank of the Solomon River, where I dreamed and fished my youth away, where the fields grow green and the wind

blows free. Where the Indians once lived and sod houses used to be.

I turn off the engine, get out of the car and look for the sight of the 1930s, but they are few. The sound is still there and across the road from our old farm, if you look you can see what remains of the cement foundation of the one room Houston school house, mute testimony to a time gone by.

Yes, Mr. Rogers this is a story about a '28 or '29 Whippet and two small boys, one now gone.

Vandals make Norton man angry

To the Editor,

In your paper you have printed that you want or encourage letters. Well, I have my "druthers" meaning I would rather not; but here goes as I now feel there is nothing more to lose.

We have sustained vandals' damage now into the hundreds and over the thousands of dollars. The last act of vandalism was done to our Ford Taurus. Before this, it had been the tractors and a windshield in an '85 Chevy pickup.

According to estimates by several body shops the damage to our car was over \$1,900. Another thought that maybe a stiff-bristled broom might have caused the damage in removing snow off the car during our recent storm.

The insurance company's claim adjuster was here last week to examine the car and took pictures of it. He then said, "Your car has been "keyed" all over and ruined your car's paint job. I'll have to

I would like to dedicate this story to my brother and those who saw the great American depression of the 1930s from the plains of Kansas.

Dean Huffman

108 McAnear

Cleburne, Texas 76033

Editor's Note: The Norton Telegram welcomes reminiscences and will run as many as we can as space permits. Please include your name and address so we can run your letter.

total the car, considering the year and model."

The State Farm adjuster also related a story to me that the same thing had happened to him in regards to his own car being parked at a mall. He said he was only away from his car 20-30 minutes and when he returned to the car he found its paint job ruined in the same way.

Why? Have vandals stooped to an all-time low?

Who? Is it someone that is angry at my wife and me; or, are they just mad at the whole world in general and have nothing better to do?

Sincerely,

Elmer and Joyce Howell

Norton

Editor's Note: We don't know if someone is mad or not, but The Telegram's pickup also was "keyed" a few months ago.

WRITE:

The Norton Telegram encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of public interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise.

We do not publish form letters or letters about topics which do not pertain to our area. Thank-yous should be submitted to

the Want Ad desk.

Letters will not be censored, but will be read and edited for form and style, clarity, length and legality. We will not publish attacks on private individuals or businesses which do not pertain to a public issue.