



## Postal Service in need of revenue and reform

The sound you hear would be the U.S. Postal Service shooting itself in the foot – again.

Wracked by deficits and loss of its most profitable business, the service acts like it just wants to get things over with. The postal Board of Governors has filed for an "exigent," or emergency, rate increase that would bump the price of a First Class stamp up by 3 cents to 49 cents per Christmas card. That's around 6.5 percent, more than four times the rate of inflation.

Christmas cards are about all the agency will have left in the First-Class bin the way things are going. The service has lost more than 30 percent of its First Class business in the last five years, and the increase seems calculated to drive off much of what's left.

Businesses are pushing electronic billing and payment, and the cost increase is bound to accelerate that trend. Even the federal government, which created and supposedly supports the Postal Service, is bailing out, trying to force Social Security and other recipients to take electronic payments. E-mail and instant messaging have replaced the post office for most personal and business communication.

What happened? It's been less than a decade, after all, since the Postal Service was a growing, profitable enterprise.

The Great Recession accelerated every trend, depriving the service of the growth it needed to keep the ball rolling. That, in turn, exposed flaws in the service's business and the federal law that governs it.

When it passed "comprehensive postal reform" legislation in 2006, it turns out, Congress saddled the service with a requirement to prepay the medical benefits of future retirees, something no other agency in the federal system must do. That \$5.5 billion payment hangs around the postmaster general's neck like an albatross today.

The same law limits postal rate increases to no more than the rate of inflation – currently about 1.5 percent – barring an emergency. With the service headed for a \$5 billion loss for the year

ending Sept. 30, despite billions in cost cutting, and its cash nearly gone, postal officials say that time is here.

The service believes it will generate \$2 billion from its proposed rate hike, which must be approved by the Postal Regulator Commission, drawing heavy opposition. It's likely, however, that the end result of a big jump in mail costs will simply be to drive more mail from the system, and not just letter mail, but periodicals and even the advertising mail the service now sees as its salvation.

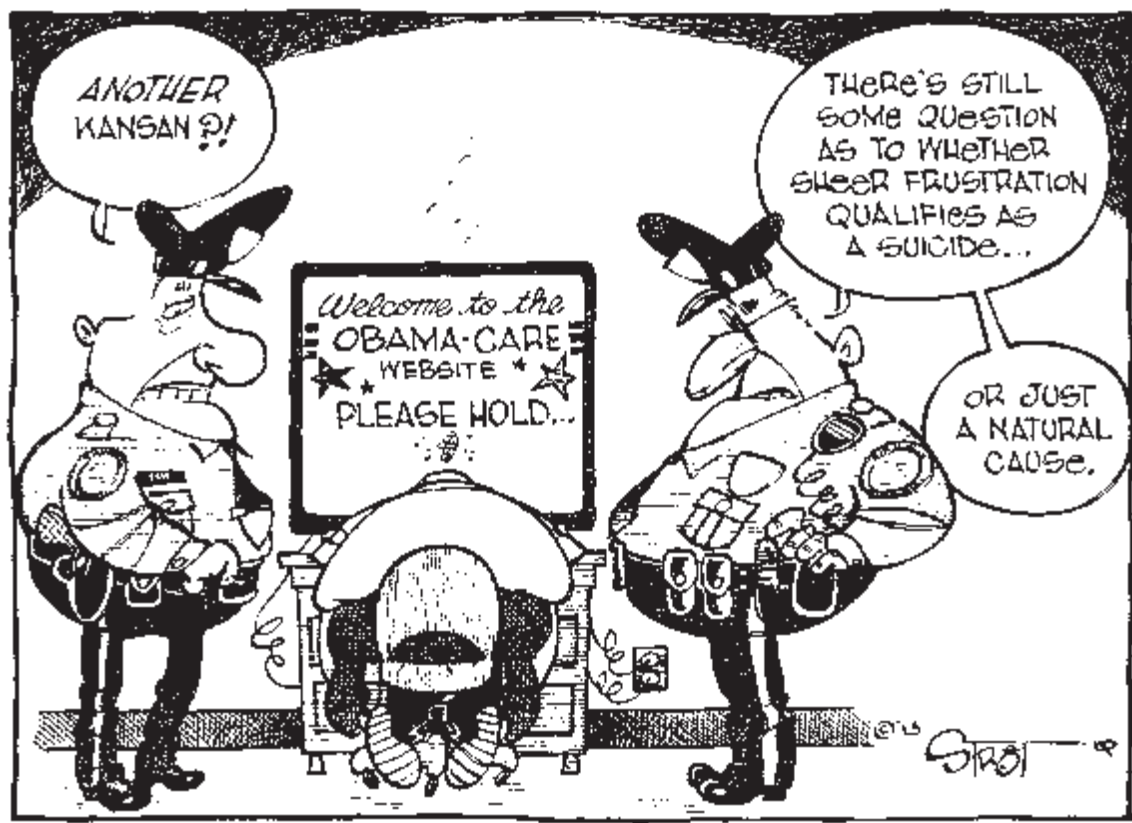
The agency has been scrambling to cut costs, closing 104 postal sorting "plants," slashing hours, eliminating more than 1,100 carrier routes and cutting expenses by nearly \$4 billion so far this year. It's also three years delinquent on the annual payment for retirees – and still paying both into the federal system and into Medicare for many postal workers.

Officials say many of the service's problems would go away if Congress could just pass a new "comprehensive postal reform" law and let it change its business plan to meet market challenges. But the two houses have quite different bills, and there's been little movement on a compromise. The effort could be stuck behind the farm bill and immigration reform, waiting for the postal situation to come to a real crisis.

That might happen any day, since the service was due to make a \$1.4 billion payment to the Labor Department to cover worker compensation claims this month.

And while the agency might get some relief from its prepayment woes, it's still tied up in politics, a tradition of granting unions pretty much whatever they want and management that does not see the danger of slashing service to cut costs.

Congress, which has known for at least five years that it needs to do something, has not acted, and probably won't until the agency flat runs out of cash. It's one more case of gridlock in Washington, something the American people should be tired of. – Steve Haynes



## Casey's Comments

Pieces of History

By Casey McCormick



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What seems obvious to one generation can lay hidden to the next.

During a recent visit with some Bird City friends, Charles and Val Coleman, I mentioned my wife's collection of Depression Glass table settings. Charles asked, "Did ya save the oatmeal boxes too?"

To my bewilderment he and Val explained that pieces of the sets were often given away with grocery store items which had a picture on the packaging of which glass was inside.

All along I thought that these colorful plates, dishes and glasses must have come from the wedding gifts of one of Leslie's relatives and were purchased at a high-end store. Boy, was I wrong!

Depression Glass was mass produced by over 70 American manu-

facturers such as Anchor Hawking, Federal Glass and the U.S. Glass Company. Machine produced, many pieces had flaws, such as bubbles, straw marks, rough edges and irregular shapes and colors. Speaking of colors, they were bright and noticeable. The primary shades being pink, pale blue, green and amber, but the coloring differed about as much as the designs.

Production began in the 1920s and lasted into the 1940s. But their association to the 1929 Crash and following Great Depression has stuck. These were functional household items that everyone could afford at a time that luxuries were at a minimum. Also, the distinct colors and names like "Colonial Fluted," "Georgian Lovebirds" and "Peacock" and "Wild Rose"

reminded folks of better times.

Not only were they given along with cereal, flour and soap, many were used as incentives to visit a local business. Movie theaters would offer a free plate while the corner gas station might give a punch bowl and glasses for an oil change. Not to mention they were featured items at the "Five & Dime" stores.

So, from now on, when I look in our china hutch at Leslie's pretty, pink, May Fair-style stacks of glassware, it will be in wonder of how something that was considered cheap and disposable has become a lasting collector's dream.

Thanks Charles and Val for the history lesson.

## Student Essays

The Trophy Buck

Have you ever been deer hunting or experienced the awesome feeling of seeing that trophy buck? It was a week before deer season started and I found the buck we were going to hunt. The deer was a six by six and was really heavy. He was all by himself, which would

make it easier to hunt him.

Finally it was the night before the season started and I missed school the next day to go hunting. That night before deer season it snowed a foot. This helped us because the deer would probably be in the creek lying down.

When my dad, grandpa, and I got up, we went to eat breakfast and then headed out to where the deer was. It took us thirty minutes to get out there and sure enough, the buck was in the creek. We could get to him without being seen. When we got to the place where we were going to start, it stopped snowing and the deer started moving.

Finally when the big buck stepped out, we noticed two things we hadn't seen before. He had two drop tines and his antlers were white, which is really rare for deer. Then he stopped, and I was able to get to a place where I could get a shot at the huge deer. I got out on the edge of the cliff and shot. The deer dropped. We went to see the deer. He was huge! Finally we went home and cleaned it. Next my dad said we could mount it. Have you ever shot a trophy deer?

Tate Busse  
St. Francis eighth grader

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## The Gardener

Prepare your garden for winter

By Kay Melia



The seasonal change is at hand. Those of us who love to grow things are becoming less amiable as the tomato vines turn black, the buffalo grass turns brown, and the leaves drop off the trees. Mother Nature reminds us in so many ways that we all need to pay attention to the changing of the seasons. There is much work to be done now as we perform the duties that will make the next growing season as delightful as the one just concluded.

So, as I head for the garden this weekend, I must go there with thoughts of renovation, rejuvenation, and preparation. After all these years of gardening, I still approach the autumn change of season with a sense of inspiration to do what I can now to make next year's garden better.

It all begins with the garden soil... nothing more, nothing less. For 40 years now, my garden plot has served me well, but only because I have added the nutrients it must have to produce the things I want. It has done its job for years. It's time for me to continue to do mine!

Here's my schedule. First, I will clear the garden of dead vines and old plant life. I will pull the tomato and pepper vines and put them in a separate pile. I will either burn them or haul them to the landfill when they are dry. All the other dry debris will be raked into small piles

and thoroughly shredded with the push mower.

Then comes the fun! By hook or by crook, I will obtain two or three pickup loads of good clean trash free leaves, and spread them about two inches deep over the entire garden. Any kind of dry barnyard manure would be nice, too, or rotten silage or old hay or straw. My plot is larger than most, so I'll have to do some scrounging, and I will. Most homeowners will be delighted to haul you their leaves, maybe for the promise of a couple of cantaloupe or a small bag of green beans next summer. Just be sure the leaves do not contain locust beans or small tree limbs or other undesirable foreign matter.

Just as soon as the leaves are down, it's time to plow. With my rototiller, or someone else's, I will plow in those leaves and other residue as deeply as I possibly can.

That's it. After I have planted my garlic and other essential bulbs or roots, I will go back in the house and stay there for the winter. I won't go back out there until about March 3. I will take my shovel with me and I will turn over a shovelful of rejuvenated garden soil and be joyfully amazed at what a delightful bed Mother Nature and I have created for the new planting season.

The above procedure, or some similar effort right now, is not only desirable...it is absolutely necessary, and I cannot emphasize enough the great value it gives to my garden!

And with that, and with thoughts of thankfulness to you all, this space becomes void of further gardener thoughts. Please have an astonishingly happy and healthful winter!!

**GOD SAYS**  
Be not thou afraid when one is made rich, when the glory of his house is increased; For when he dieth he shall carry nothing away: his glory shall not descent after him.  
Psalms 49:16, 17

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