

**Free Press  
Viewpoint**



## Postal Service slips to lame duck status

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Coalition for a 21st Century Postal Service, say the service is being held back — some would say held under — "by an outdated operating structure and debilitating labor contracts."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. There is talk of another "reform" bill when members return. Some action is needed to fix the mess left by the last bill and the plunge in First Class Mail which precipitated the crisis.

Some argue we no longer need the Postal Service; that it's an 18th century technology ripe for retirement. But a business that produces \$1.1 trillion a year in economic activity can't be all that outmoded. And our economy has enough troubles without losing that big a chunk of production.

One problem Congress faces: everyone has a different idea about how to "save" the system. Unions, used to having their way, want to save jobs and pay. But in doing so, they could choke the goose. House Republicans want to slash the structure. The president wants to raise rates, kill Saturday delivery. Management wants to slash service, cut the payroll and close many mail-sorting "plants" it believes are no longer required.

That will change the delivery standard for First Class letters from overnight within 200 miles up to three days nationwide, to three days. Period. Letters will be trucked off to a distant city, sorted the next day, then trucked back overnight. A postcard to your neighbor will take two to three days to deliver.

Postal management says this will save money. But who would mail a three-day letter to their next-door neighbor, or the bank down the block?

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 from the stream.

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, and that won't be easy.

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*

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## Better sleep starts with late-night gabfest

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 think-



**Cynthia Haynes**

• Open Season

ing capacity, the experts say, if the person gets his or her normal amount of sleep, 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.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor'West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Contact her at [c.haynes@nwkansas.com](mailto:c.haynes@nwkansas.com)

## Drought conditions intensify

If the dry conditions we experienced in Ellis County on the opening weekend of pheasant season are any indication of what's to come, we're in for a lot of trouble.

We walked several miles on Nov. 10 and 11 and drove across much of the county and into northern Ness County.

The winter wheat crop looked remarkably good. Fields sported a deep, rich green color. Stands were uniform and wheat heights varied from just peeking out of the rows to four or five inches.

The milo crop was a horse of a different color. While the fields were generally flush with stalks, the heads were buried and tiny heads, from three to five inches long. The berries were nearly nonexistent and about the size of a pinhead if it were round instead of flat — about the size of a 9 shot in a quail load.

When harvested, these micro heads floated through the combine and the machine couldn't do a good job of separating the berry from the chaff and dried milo leaves. Some of the heads went in the front end of the combine and left the back without any of the berries being separated out and augered up into the grain bin.

This wasn't just my observation, but that of Lance Russell, who was in the swing of milo harvest and also was host to our hunting party on his Ellis County land.

"What I'm cutting" now is producing less than 10 bushel per acre," Russell told me. "Not a good year."

Instead of filling the combine bin, it was taking nearly six trips up and back in his field to fill the bin.

Yes, this state's worst drought in decades wasn't making life easy for Russell and his farming neighbors. This drought, well into its third year, has intensified.

Last week's U.S. Drought Monitor update confirmed Kansas is in an "extreme" or "exceptional" drought — the two worst classifications. Much of our state rose roughly 6 percentage points to 83.8 percent. This compares



**John Schlageck**

• Insights  
Kansas Farm Bureau

with Oklahoma, where nearly 76 percent of the state to our south is mired in extreme or exceptional drought.

Sixty percent of our country in the lower 48 states is experiencing some degree of drought as of last week's update.

While every hunting trip is a wonderful experience, the number of birds was at least 50 percent less than an average year. On Saturday, Nov. 10, the wind blew at a steady clip of 45 mph out of the south, gusting close to 55.

By noon, the temperature was pushing 80 degrees and I believe I heard on the weather that evening Hays had set or tied the old record of 81 degrees for the high. Not ideal weather conditions for pheasant hunting or a growing wheat crop nearly half way through a dry November.

The forecast promised a chance of rain, and about 4 p.m. it sprinkled for maybe one minute, then these few drops of water zoomed to the north. No measurable precipitation in western Kansas, although some areas of eastern Kansas reported an inch of rain or better.

Sunday morning, our hunting party rose before the roosters and surrounded a giant plum thicket where we fired some of our first shots at the wily birds. We were lucky enough to bag three.

The temperature had dropped 55 degrees from the day before and the wind had shifted around to the northwest, but it had slowed to about 35 mph. The wind chill was cold and several of the hunters complained bitterly.

Still, we hunted well into midafternoon with little more success. Our party was only seven

strong and we didn't have enough blockers. The birds began flying out of the fields as soon as we stepped in.

Speaking of steps, did I tell you that with each step a plume of dust erupted from the powder-dry soil?

By the end of each day, our faces carried a thin layer of dust. While I showered both days and cleaned my ears with a wash cloth and Q-tips, it still took me three days to clean my ears.

My brother-in-law, Norbert, hunted in Sheridan County; he said their experience was even less productive than ours around Hays. He estimated the bird count totaled approximately 15 to 25 percent of an average year.

Norb has hunted in Sheridan County for more than 40 years. He should have a pretty good idea of pheasant numbers.

In spite of the less-than-ideal hunting conditions, our group enjoyed our time in the fields and draws of northwest Kansas. We appreciated the hospitality and the fine folks who allow us to hunt their land each season. We understand that hunting on private property is a real privilege and something not everyone has an opportunity to do.

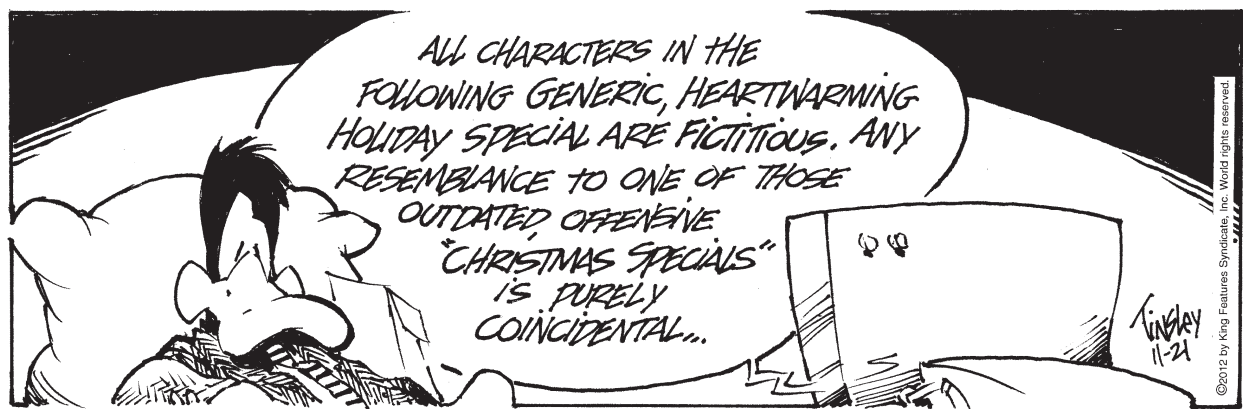
That said, we also witnessed firsthand the drought conditions facing our nation's crop and livestock producers. We know without the blessing of rain from above, 2013 could bring continued drought, lack of abundant crops and tightening economic conditions for farmers and ranchers.

This Thanksgiving and throughout the holiday season, think about the blessings you enjoy. Think about the farmers and ranchers who face continued troubled times with this lingering lack of moisture. Offer a prayer on their behalf.

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified farm near Seguin, and his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

**Mallard Fillmore**

• Bruce Tinsley



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