

from our viewpoint...

Post Office plan bad for businesses

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 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. (In Goodland the mail will have to be at the post office by 1:15 p.m. to ensure it makes the 1:45 p.m. truck to Colby under this plan.)

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 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 be not 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.

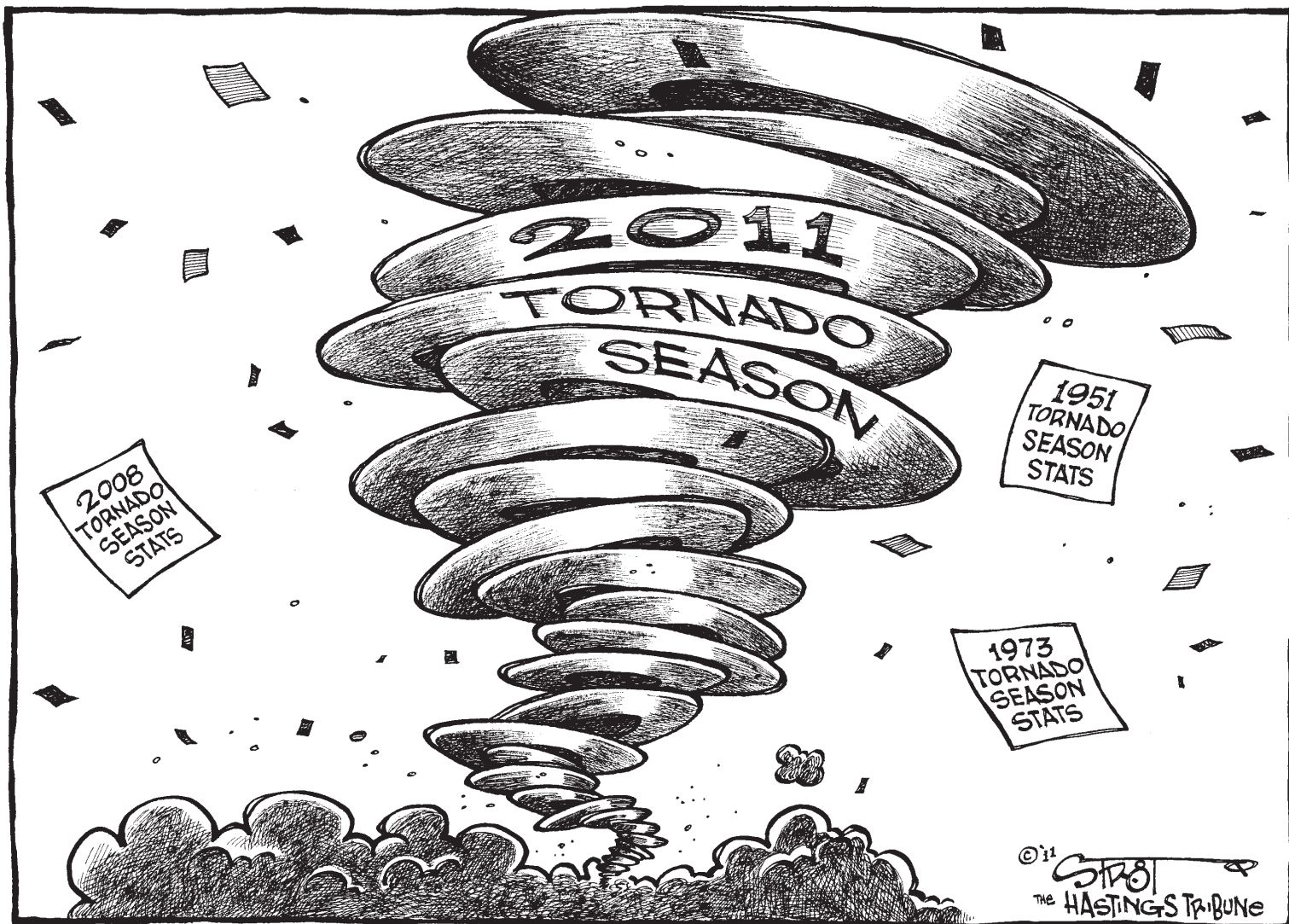
There is an alternative. The service could compromise on the truck times, limiting the change to only an hour in any town. That would minimize the damage.

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 the service owes this money. It's been agreed for years 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



By the way what is a furlong?

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 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 mea-



cynthia haynes

• open season

sured in hands. Stones is an old-fashioned weight measurement and fathoms is only used to measure 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 that 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.

Family planning – an essential part life

If you're an average woman, you want two children, according to various surveys. That means you'll spend about five years of your life trying to become pregnant, being pregnant or recovering from pregnancy, and 30 years trying to avoid it.

You can do that thanks to the June 1965 landmark Supreme Court decision Griswold v. Connecticut, which affirmed the right of married couples to use contraceptives – and more importantly, recognized an individual's right to privacy in family planning matters. Universal usage and acceptance of contraceptives followed, transforming the lives of millions of Americans.

The Griswold case was a catalyst for our national family planning program – Title X of the Public Health Service Act – the only dedicated source of federal funding for family planning services. Created in 1970, Title X provides access to family planning for all, without regard to economic circumstances.

Today, contraceptives are an important part of family life in America – so much so that 98 percent of us have used birth control at some point in our lives, and we mostly take it for granted.

We shouldn't. During the recent battle in Congress over funding the government, the House of Representatives voted to eliminate Title X. Opponents of family planning used a mixture of misinformation and innuendo to entangle family planning in their anti-abortion war, ignoring the fact Title X saves the government some \$3.4 billion every year by preventing unintended pregnancies, nearly half of which would likely have ended in abortion. The Senate saved the program, but another attempt to kill Title X is certain this year. When it comes, Americans must recognize access to basic primary and preventive care is being threatened.

Title X funds 4,500 nonprofit- and govern-



from other pens

• commentary

ment-run sites nationwide: most are county and local health departments. The rest are hospitals, family planning councils and other private nonprofit agencies. These agencies are required to provide preventive and primary health care services including pelvic exams and Pap tests; pregnancy testing; screening for high blood pressure, anemia, diabetes and cervical and breast cancer, and for sexually transmitted infections including HIV; basic infertility services; health education; and referrals for other health and social services – as well as contraceptives and counseling about them.

These are the facts of life: According to new Guttmacher Institute research, unintended pregnancy costs U.S. taxpayers approximately \$11 billion a year. Without publicly funded family planning services, these costs would be 60 percent higher. In 2008, services at Title X centers helped prevent 973,000 unintended pregnancies that would likely have resulted in 432,600 births and 406,200 abortions. The centers performed 2.2 million Pap tests, 5.9 million sexually transmitted infections tests and a million confidential HIV tests in 2009 alone.

Seventeen million people need some assistance in order to get this important care, but today, Title X is funded to cover just over five million of those in need. There are always more patients than subsidies. Seventy percent of the individuals seen at Title X-funded health centers have incomes at or below the federal poverty level – meaning they earn less than \$10,830 per year. Many of them are working young adults, living paycheck to paycheck.

They count down the days until they get paid and are just one unexpected problem from disaster – if the car engine light comes on; the childcare center raises its fees; or their hours are cut.

Six in 10 women who get care from Title X consider it their usual source of health care, and for many it is their only source. Patients under the federal poverty level receive services at no cost to them; those who make over \$10,830 a year are provided services on a sliding fee scale according to income.

Although no patient is turned away because of an inability to pay, Title X actually saves money for the government. Every dollar invested in publicly funded family planning averts nearly \$4 in Medicaid costs. Given its proven effectiveness, it only makes sense that the Obama administration should include contraceptives in the women's health preventive services benefit under the Affordable Care Act.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has cited family planning as one of the 10 great public health achievements of the 20th century, and Title X funding is essential to our effort to prevent unintended pregnancies and improve public health while saving taxpayers billions of dollars a year.

As the states struggle with growing budget shortfalls, continued funding for Title X should be recognized for what it is: an essential part of America's health care system.

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Thanks to those who came to talk

To the Editor:

Thanks to those citizens who participated in my recent town hall meeting in Goodland. I am truly grateful for the chance to visit about priorities for the Office of the Attorney General and appreciate the help in staying focused in the priorities most critical to Kansans – public safety, economic growth and personal



from our readers

• to the editor

liberty.

I'm looking forward to my next visit to Sherman County!

Derek Schmidt
Kansas Attorney General