

from our viewpoint...

Postal Service asks to close 11 offices

The U.S. Postal Service hopes to eliminate 11 Kansas post offices among about 2,000 facing the ax across the nation.

Most are small towns where the postmaster has died, left or retired, leaving the job vacant. None is in the immediate area of northwest Kansas, though that doesn't mean we might not continue to lose post offices. Several have closed in recent years, and we have others that do not make money.

The Postal Service is desperate, facing an \$8 billion deficit this year. Mail volume is dropping, competition growing and the service is running out of cash. The mail service still makes a profit, oddly enough, but somewhere along the line actuaries misfigured its payment to the federal pension fund.

The fund is said to owe the Postal Service something like \$70 billion, and the overpayment continues at the rate of \$10 billion a year. This has been going on for years.

Faced with running out of cash, though, the service cannot wait for a sluggish Congress to do the right thing. It's throwing whatever it can find overboard.

So far, the service has proposed moving mail sorting from smaller centers across the country into bigger cities where the post offices supposedly are more efficient. (No one believes that, to start with!) Northwest Kansas is one victim of this scheme, with mail sorting to be moved from Colby and Hays to Salina.

Closing post offices where the job is vacant is another initiative. Closing offices where two facilities are close and one could serve the entire area is another. And the service has asked to end Saturday delivery of mail.

None of the cuts, not even the total, is enough to "save" the Postal Service. One estimate for the cuts is almost \$1 billion of the \$8 billion savings needed.

Congress will have to step in to save mail service, and that is being cast as "yet another federal bailout." In truth, the government has been dipping into the service's budget to reduce the deficit, and Congress is reluctant to act because it can spend this money elsewhere.

The Postal Service does not need a bailout. It needs fair treatment and common sense, but those are in short supply in Washington.

By fall, we should know if the mail is something Americans need, or if we can do without it. That is not a pleasant prospect, however.

Congress should act now to end the overpayments and to either refund past overages to the postal budget or allow the service a credit on pension payments. Before the service goes broke, not after. — Steve Haynes

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I'm loving the hot summer days

Warm, OK, hot summer days are here, and I'm lovin' it.

Of course, it helps that I have air conditioning in home, office and car.

In the mornings, it's usually cool enough to get out and do a little gardening, eat breakfast out on the back deck or read the morning paper under the shade of our pear tree.

In the afternoons, it's time to go inside and work or, on the weekends, take a nap on the sofa.

By nightfall, it's late enough that about the only thing left worth doing is counting the lightning bugs and taking a walk around town.

Ah, summertime — and the livin' is easy. Well, not really, but I sure like it better than winter, when the first task most mornings is shoveling the snow off the porch so that I can find the newspaper. The next task is to clean off the walks so the mailman can get to our door.

Nope, give me summer, when my garden is growing and my cats are spending the day lazing on the back porch.



cynthia
haynes

• open season

In fact, I tossed all four of them out on Saturday, even the reclusive Jezabel.

The first three were easy. As each went out the door, I grabbed it and gave it a good brushing. The hair flew everywhere, and the cats loved it.

But, then there was Jez, hiding somewhere upstairs, the hairiest cat of all.

I was lucky. She was reclining on the back of Steve's chair on a red-and-white throw that has gone gray with cat hair.

I whisked her outside and grabbed the wire cat brush. She yowled. She hissed. She tried to bite me. She loved every minute of it.

Jez is one weird cat.

Soon, I had to clean the brush, and again, and again and again. I got more hair off of

that cat than I had gotten off of the other three combined.

Jez is youngest daughter's cat. We inherited her when husband Brad, who is allergic to cats, came into the picture. But this isn't the first time we have provided board and back of chair of this fur ball.

Last time, Steve was petting her. As he petted, his hands came away with huge chunks of hair. He carefully put the hair in a pile, packaged it up and mailed it to youngest daughter with a note saying that he was sending her a complete cat, "some assembly required."

"You are soooo weird, Daddy," was her reply.

This time, I just threw the extra cat hair away. Brad isn't going anywhere and neither is the feisty Jez.

So last weekend, I was brushing cats, pulling weeds and counting lightning bugs.

It's summertime and the living is wonderful.

Protecting our independence

Edward P. Cross, president

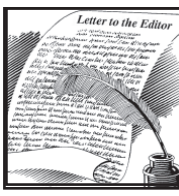
Kansas Independent Oil, Gas Association

July is a special month for many Americans. Most of us will eagerly take a break from our busy summer schedules to once again celebrate Independence Day. There will be much fanfare with fireworks, parades, picnics, and other patriotic events celebrating our country's independence from Great Britain in 1776. But when the festivities have ended, only a few will have reflected upon the true meaning of independence and the role it has played in shaping our nation's character.

Our founding fathers made it clear in the Declaration of Independence all men were entitled to certain unalienable rights. Among those rights are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It is easy to take for granted those rights and freedoms we share as Americans.

However, it is important we understand and appreciate the hard work and sacrifice our forefathers made in order for us to enjoy the luxury of freedom. Freedom and independence are cornerstones in the foundation of our country's heritage. The independent ideology of the American people is a fundamental element of our society and a key to our nation's prosperity. We must protect that independence at all cost.

One important freedom we must protect is our free enterprise system. American business, and certainly the oil and gas industry, was founded upon the ideology of independence and free-market principles. Those principles allow business to be governed by the laws of supply and demand without government interference and excessive regulation. The dynamic free market has led to innovation and wealth



from
other pens

• commentary

creation, and has established an economic environment where hard work is rewarded.

But now, amidst economic turmoil, it seems free-market capitalism and independence are under attack. Government's heavy-handed intervention into businesses and industries is unprecedented. It is alarmingly obvious the increased governmental control is dragging on the economy. Where will it stop?

The oil and gas industry is always in the crosshairs of government, and it is certain they will sharpen their aim as gasoline prices remain high. Even when our industry is on its knees in recession, we are constantly battling excessive environmental regulation, drilling restrictions, and crippling taxation to fund politically expedient, yet questionably viable, alternative energy programs.

Furthermore, the administration's proposal to repeal our most critical and longstanding tax provisions would have a devastating impact on small independent oil and gas producers. Even if those regulations and tax proposals became law, the revenues would not come close to satisfying the President's and Congress' appetite for bigger government.

In his 1946 Independence Day speech, John F. Kennedy said, "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty." Those words were never so true. Being mindful of the erosion of our independence and free-market system through excessive regulation and government interference cannot

be over emphasized. We must, now more than ever, remain steadfast in our resolve to protect and preserve the precious independence that has molded our nation's character.

Editor's note: Many of those who read this will stop and try to remember that JFK speech, and many will be sure the date has to be wrong. The date was July 4, 1946, and we have included some background we found about the actual words and the event.

"Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty. It was the price yesterday. It is the price today, and it will ever be the price." — John F. Kennedy

This Independence Day, we'd like to take you back in time to an America that some of you might be old enough to remember. Even if you're not yet a senior citizen, upon reading this you'll surely wish we had this kind of country — and these kinds of leaders — again today.

The time: July 4, 1946. The place: Boston's Faneuil Hall. The man: young John Fitzgerald Kennedy, barely 29 years old and already the frontrunner in a pitched battle for his first Congressional seat in the 11th District. The occasion: the annual Boston Independence Day oration on the one hundred and seventieth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence of these United States.

In 1946, Americans were observing the first peacetime Fourth of July in five years. Kennedy, himself a battered veteran of the war, seemed a perfect emerging leader of this young generation of fighting Americans. He understood what they faced; what our society and indeed our world would have to face as we moved from world war to cold war.

Of course, many of the oldtime Boston Irish politicians predicted he would be trounced in the election. But "that Kennedy kid" surprised 'em all in November, winning a seat in the House of Representatives he would keep for six more years. Then he decided to run for U.S. Senate, and of course all the wise old men said he'd never unseat Henry Cabot Lodge, who'd been in that seat since 1932. Although the margin of victory was narrow (3%), Kennedy did win that Senate seat, leaving a befuddled Lodge to mutter, "I felt rather like a man who has just been hit by a truck" on election day.

After eight years in the Senate, JFK set his sights on the White House in 1960. And of course, everybody said he could never beat Richard Nixon, the sitting Vice President. And once again, through the narrowest margin of victory the country had ever seen, Kennedy did just that, becoming the youngest president ever elected to the presidency.

where to write

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