

from our viewpoint...

## Mail problems have not gone away

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Coalition for a 21st Century Postal Service, say the service is being held back — some would say held under — "by an outdated operating structure and debilitating labor contracts."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

Some argue that we no longer need the Postal Service; that it's a 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. Postal unions, used to having their way, want to save jobs and pay rates. But in doing so, they could choke the goose. House Republicans want to slash away at the structure. The president wants to raise rates, kill Saturday delivery.

Management wants to slash service standards, cut the payroll and close many mail-sorting "plants" that 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?

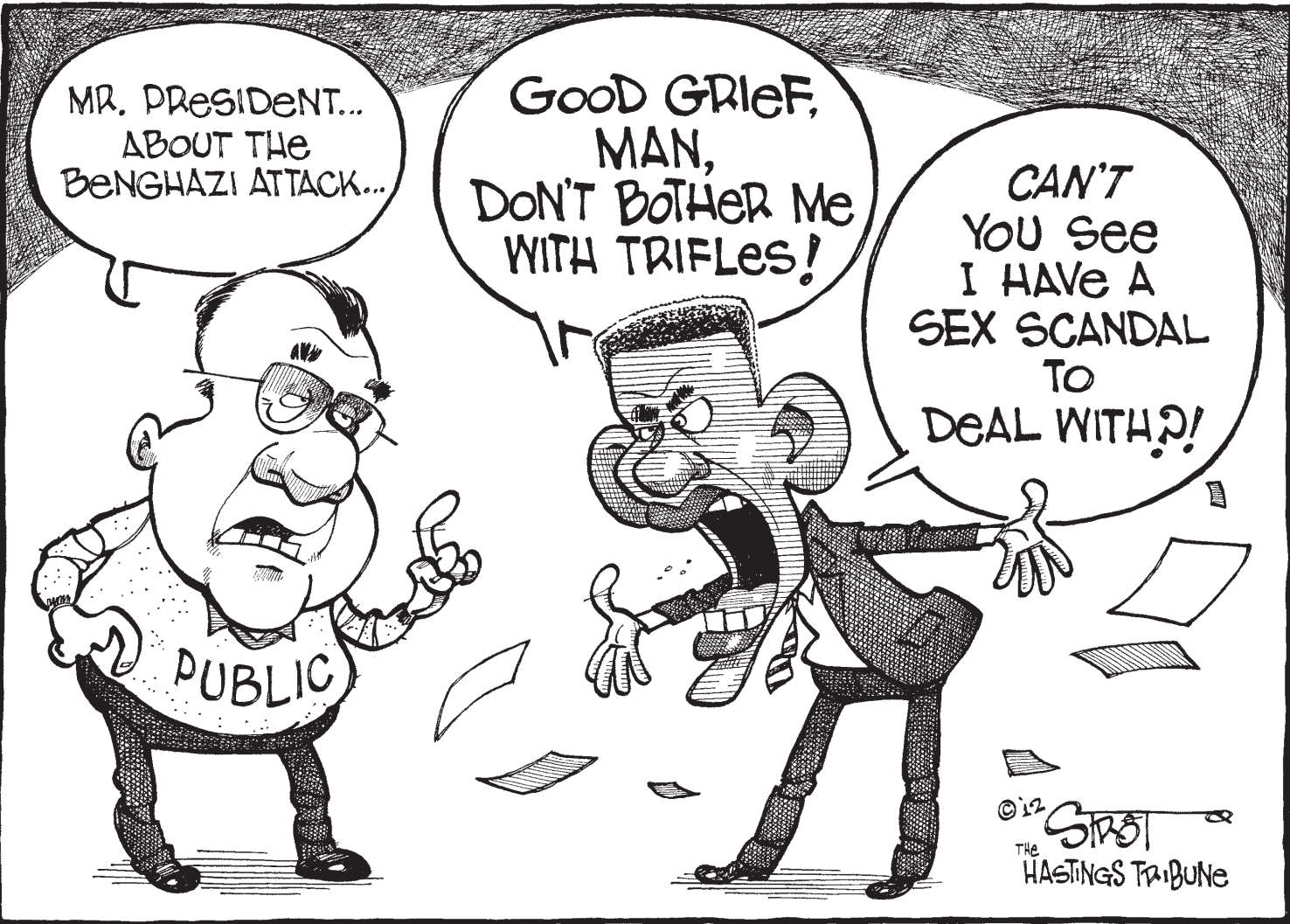
Another management strategy is to eliminate Saturday delivery. That will slow the flow of bills and payments business depends on even further, driving more and more mail from the stream.

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, lost 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



## Why it's called 'Turkey Day

How did the turkey reserve its place on our traditional Thanksgiving table?

That bird is what the pilgrims feasted upon, according to fact and fable.

You've all heard how our ancestors hunted this bird. But here is the real story — the turkey scoop.

Seems our forefathers remembered to take their muskets that day, but forgot to take their ammunition. As the men marched toward the woods, they took one addition, an Indian scout.

You guessed it. To take the scout along was tradition. Besides, the pilgrims needed someone who knew where the turkeys were.

As the story played out, the great white hunters spotted an elk. It was a fine animal for a Thanksgiving feast. It sported a trophy rack, no doubt.

Several hunters took aim, pulled back their triggers and clicked. They soon discovered their muskets had no shot.

This realization made them sick to their stomachs.

What could they do?

What would they have for their Thanksgiving feast?

On what would they sup that night?

One wise, or unwise, lad suggested stewing their shoes.

"I'll gobble them up," he said.

Well, the rest of the hunting party was in no mood for jokes. One of the hunters threw the



### Insight this week

• john schlageck

lad's musket into the field just as an old Tom turkey — who had heard the gobble — popped up his head.

The critter's fate was sealed. What senses he had were knocked out that day. The turkey was plucked, stuffed and roasted.

In exchange for his silence, the scout was invited to eat while the hunters boasted and embellished the story about the day's hunt.

They truthfully said, "We didn't fire a shot."

Those early-day hunters had no need for ammunition. That's why today turkeys are raised on farms — to shoot them would break with tradition.

On a more historical note, Thanksgiving, or Thanksgiving Day, is a traditional North American holiday which is a form of harvest festival. Although that early feast is considered by many to be the very first Thanksgiving celebration, it was actually in keeping with a long tradition of celebrating the harvest and giving thanks for a successful bounty of crops.

The date and location of the first Thanksgiving celebration is a topic of discussion, though the earliest attested Thanksgiving was on Sept.

8, 1565, in what is now St. Augustine, Fla. The traditional "first Thanksgiving" is venerated as having occurred at the site of Plymouth Plantation in 1621.

What foods topped the table at the first harvest feast?

Historians aren't completely certain about the full bounty, but it's safe to say the pilgrims weren't gobbling up pumpkin pie or playing with their mashed potatoes. It's a relatively safe bet the only two items on the menu for sure were venison and wild fowl.

Today, Thanksgiving is celebrated on the fourth Thursday of November in the United States. Thanksgiving is usually a gathering of friends and/or family. At this time, you say all your thanks and wishes.

In our country, certain food are traditionally served at Thanksgiving meals. First and foremost, baked or roasted turkey is usually the featured item on any Thanksgiving table (so much so that Thanksgiving is sometimes referred to as "Turkey Day"). Stuffing, mashed potatoes with gravy, sweet potatoes, cranberry sauce, other fall vegetables and pumpkin pie are commonly associated with Thanksgiving dinner.

All of these dishes are actually native to the Americas or were introduced as a new food source to the Europeans when they arrived.

Have a Happy Thanksgiving and don't forget to count your blessings.

## Thankful for voters' support

To the Editor:

To supporters and fellow citizens of the 40th and 36th Districts:

My wife Ellen and I would like to thank you for your support to our campaign efforts. This was a steep uphill battle from the very beginning, having lost 9 of the 10 counties I represented the last two years and then gaining 12 new counties.

I count it a great privilege and an opportunity of a lifetime to have served in the Kansas Senate for two years to further our rural and Western Kansas interests. In the end we gave the people a choice and that is important to a democracy. I will continue my service in other ways.

Of the things we accomplished, the most important by far was saving the 36th District Senate seat until the next census in 2020. That



### from our readers

• to the editor

vote remains in rural Kansas, where it belongs! Hopefully we will be able to retain that seat after 2020, but only if we have a group of rural legislators who can work together alongside our community leaders in a nonpartisan way to grow our rural economy, keep our schools open and strong and build affordable housing for economic expansion.

The challenges in our rural future are great. It takes more than simply voting on legislation. It takes vision and "targeted engagement" toward our rural interests to impact our future

and stop the population loss. My 32 years of leadership in the Army prepared me well for this and taught me the importance of living the values of duty, honor, integrity and selfless service as I listened, analyzed and then exercised leadership. I was prepared to continue, but I will pursue other forms of service now. Sen. (Ralph) Ostmeyer will continue to carry the torch for us in Topeka. I congratulate him on his victory.

My deep-hearted appreciation goes out to the great people and communities of northwest and north central Kansas. May we always acknowledge God being with us on this journey. That mind-set will keep us humble, genuine and faithful to our rural core values.

Sen. Allen and Ellen Schmidt and family  
Hays

## Forgot the time change



### steve haynes

• along the sappa

I woke up last Sunday the same time I had been. About 7:30, I thought. Maybe 8.

Everyone else was up, but that's not unusual.

Cynthia almost always gets up before I do, no matter when that is. I can count on my fingers the number of times in 42 years I've been up before her, made the coffee and gotten the papers.

It's even more rare for her to go to bed after I do. And if I do get there first, I can't get to sleep, no matter how tired I am.

And I have to be pretty tired to crawl in bed ahead of her.

Anyway, we were staying with Merle and Mary, and they get up before either of us. Mary sometimes goes to work at 5:30, and Merle, while he might sleep a little later, likes to go for a long bike ride before he goes to work. Ten, 20 miles uphill, something just to get his day started.

What surprised me — I'm sure you've figured this out by now — is that for the first time I can remember, I'd forgotten the switch from Daylight Saving Time, the annual "fall back" day.

Not the first time I'd forgotten the time

change, mind you. I remember I was in Kansas City one Saturday in April. The next morning, I got up on Standard Time — and missed my flight back to Colorado.

There'd have been heck to pay, but in those days, the airlines were cutthroat competitive between a lot of city pairs, Kansas City-Denver included. United employees had been known to search the computer, then page Continental passengers and try to get them to switch to an earlier flight — on their airline. And a lot of other tricks.

So, I took my United ticket over to the Continental gates and, sure, they'd take me to Denver on an earlier flight, by hours, than the competition. The company wouldn't get paid, but they'd had empty seats anyway.

And in those days, you even got lunch. Just try that today.

Competition today means trying to figure

out who can charge the most for an overweight bag (\$90 on Delta) or overbook flights the most, leaving more people behind. Or have the highest fee for changing flights. Customers are just something to cram into the back of the coach cabin.

But don't let me get on an airline rant. This column is about time changes.

Generally, and unlike everyone else at the breakfast table last Sunday, I don't like to get up in the dark, so I like Daylight Time. The longer the better. Nothing I like more than a good excuse to sleep in.

But still, I couldn't believe I'd forgotten the time change. I blamed it on being away from home, and not having to set all the clocks before going to bed. But I hadn't even set my own watch.

Not like I hadn't read about it. Usually, I'm the one who remembers.

Anyway, we had lots of time to talk about things that morning. Lots of time. And still got to dawdle over eggs and toast before we went home.

Maybe by March, I'll be ready to spring back.

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