

Postal system shooting itself in foot again

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.

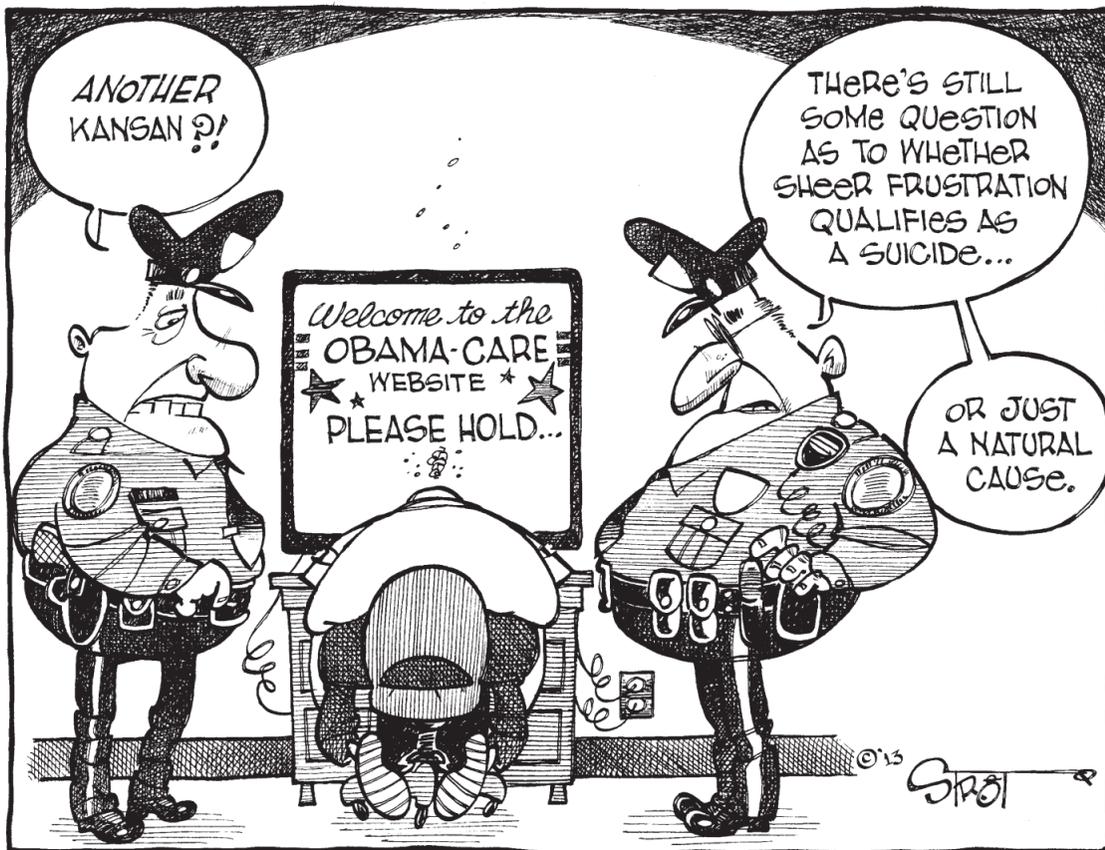
Officials say many of the service’s problems would go away if Congress could just pass a new “comprehensive postal reform” law and let it change its business plan to meet market challenges. But the two houses have quite different bills, and there’s been little movement on a compromise. The effort could 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



Giant companies should pay a livable salary

College and McDonald’s entered my life at just about the same time. It may have been the 10th anniversary for McDonald’s, but for this Kansas girl it was newly born in 1965. I am not sure when they launched their Ft. Collins site, but I do know it was a favorite spot for Jack and me. Back then, the average adult meal was the small hamburger, small French fries and a small Coke. The only thing super sized was our appetite. No one makes French fries like McDonald’s, but as the face of fast food, there have been revelations which make me believe the fast food employee deserves a break today. Recently, McDonald’s designed a “budget” for their employees. The budget assumes a full time McDonald’s job and a second one (for the same person), no amount for groceries, transportation and \$20 per month for health care. The very fact that the company “budgets”

Phase II Mary Kay Woodyard



American taxpayer \$7 billion dollars annually with \$1.2 billion of this on McDonald’s shoulders.

The food industry (including fast food) employs roughly 4.1 million people in the U.S. It is an excellent way to enter the workforce providing part-time employment with flexible scheduling for youth. However, and this is big, there are people whose life career is fast food. Some have not had the opportunities to find other employment; some don’t have the skills to navigate a change; and for others this employment is what their talents and skills allow. Those individuals should not have to rely on assistance to survive because a giant company will not pay a livable salary. Kind of explains unions, minimum wage laws and mandated healthcare, doesn’t it? mkwoodyard@ruraltel.net

in two jobs reflects their own attitude about their employees’ value. Some franchise owners pay extra for their employees to have access to McResources. “The McResource line is available to help McDonald’s workers who need help navigating the process of getting public assistance.”

UC, Berkley Labor Center and the University of Illinois reported last week that 52 percent of fast food workers receive government assistance in the form of food stamps, Medicaid and housing, etc. This assistance costs the

So many are now losing their insurance

As I have said repeatedly, it is way past time we did something to address the delivery of health care. People with pre-existing conditions should not have riders. The cost of services should be uniform no matter your insurance plan. No one should have to depend on a benefit meal to help with health related expenses. No one should face bankruptcy because they got sick! And everyone should have the security of having health insurance.

At the same time I may have misjudged the Right in thinking their predictions of the apocalypse in relation to the Affordable Health Care Act made them callous, uncaring people. As I have now learned it is not just the broken parts of Health Care that are being corrected.

All politics are local and personal. There is nothing like a letter saying “...effective Jan 1, 2014, your current group health benefit package will no longer be available at renewal” to make a person question their fervently held beliefs.

The press tried to hold the White House accountable for the cancellations. Press secretary Jay Carney’s answer suggested only less than adequate plans were cancelled.

All I know is adequacy is not the reason given for our cancellation

One of the Right’s criticisms of the Law is no one read it. President Obama said, repeatedly: “If you like your plan you can keep it.” It makes me wonder: did he read his signature piece of legislation? If so; did he understand it? Luckily I, or anyone who is losing

This Too Shall Pass Nancy Hagman



the insurance they wanted to keep, can relax with the knowledge they will be able to get replacement insurance. No worries!

The new policies have to include mental health treatment. That’s great because I can see myself developing Stockholm Syndrome. It’s pretty conflicting to be indebted to the people who canceled my insurance (which I liked) after they provide me with new insurance!

A fundamental difference I see between Conservatives and Liberals is conservatives attempt to work things out for themselves. Liberals attempt to figure things out for everybody. Neither is a bad thing. But it creates a divide.

Is it geographic: Red State, Blue State? Are people in less populated areas conservative because they must rely on themselves? Or do those predisposed to individualism seek out areas where there are few other people to consider?

I imagine a whole lot of people who live in rural America are losing their insurance. According to a report by NBC news 50-75 percent of individual policy holders will lose their insurance. Did those who wrote the Law not re-

alize we are individual policy holders because we are individuals? We do not work for huge corporations (exploiting us by not providing health insurance). Were they helping out the exchanges by forcing millions of people on to them? Or do they just think they know better; the average person is not capable of choosing insurance on their own?

Do they realize the Kansas farmer and the main street merchant exist?

It is not just Liberals who misunderstand. A survey by Ron Paul concluded farmers ought to support each other by buying their “groceries” at farmers markets. Ron Paul obviously has no idea what goes on at a modern production agricultural farm in Kansas

If the combine breaks during wheat harvest we don’t fix the grain drill. You don’t change the oil in your car, if the battery is dead. It makes no sense.

Why take insurance away from those who are insured?

It is not easy to negotiate price or get reasonable insurance coverage on your own, as small businesses and farmers do. Those who are struggling with the process should benefit greatly from the Affordable Care Act.

I’m willing to do my part (pay more, even get less) for the greater good. What I don’t understand is how losing my insurance helps anyone else.

One friend told me she looks forward to a reduction in the constant changes of coverage and deductibles with her insurance. I pray she gets what she hopes for.

I hoped to keep my insurance.

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